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Oral history interview with Harmony Hammond, 2008 September 14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Harmony Hammond on September 14, 2008. The interview took place at the Artist's studio in Galisteo, New Mexico, and was conducted by Julia Bryan-Wilson for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Brown Foundation, Inc.

Harmony Hammond and Julia Bryan-Wilson have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON: This is Julia Bryan-Wilson interviewing Harmony Hammond at Harmony Hammond's studio in Galisteo, New Mexico, on September 15, 2008.

HARMONY HAMMOND: September 14.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: September 14, 2008, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number one.

Hi, Harmony.

MS. HAMMOND: Hi, Julia.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: So as you know, the purpose of this is to establish an oral history of your life, your work, your processes, your influences.

MS. HAMMOND: In three hours.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Exactly.

MS. HAMMOND: I don't know. [They laugh.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I thought we would start by establishing a basic timeline, talking about where you were born – I know it was in Illinois, but let's flesh out a little bit about your family situation and your early education.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I was born in 1944 in Chicago, Illinois. When I was five or six, my family moved to Hometown, Illinois, a lower-middle-class, postwar housing project on the South Side of Chicago. There was the edge of Chicago, then Hometown and other developments, then countryside. Hometown was affordable housing for GIs and their families.

I lived on Main Street. All the houses were duplexes, one of two models - two or three bedrooms - and one of three color schemes. Everything was the same, the same, the same, down to the type and placement of front yard plantings. Thankfully, my mother named me Harmony - that's her first name as well—at least there was something a little distinctive about that. I remember Hometown very well because it recurs in my dreams. I'm endlessly walking those streets. I'm lost and can't find my way. We'll leave the dream interpretation to someone else.

I went through grade school in Hometown and then was bussed to Oak Lawn Community High School.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And this is in the '50s?

MS. HAMMOND: This is definitely the '50s. I lived in Hometown through my senior year in high school, until I went off to college. It was all white. There were no people of color, although our high school team would play black teams from the city. It was mostly Protestant and Catholic. I had one Jewish girlfriend.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: When you say "girlfriend," you mean friend, not lover.

MS. HAMMOND: No, not at that point.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Okay.

MS. HAMMOND: We were just good friends, girls who were friends. I say that because it shows how insular and

WASP Hometown was, even though I lived on the edge of Chicago. One of the wonderful things that changed my life happened at the end of my junior year in high school. Berta Caul, my art teacher at Oak Lawn Community High School–well, she was the only art teacher — also taught - I think I have this right - in the Junior School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Probably the Saturday classes.

Because of that connection, she took us on field trips to the Art Institute and the James Goodman Theater, both in downtown Chicago. We would all get on the bus with our bag lunches to see real art and theater. I loved it; I loved it. There was nothing like that in Hometown or Oak Lawn. The Arts Club, of which Berta Caul was the advisor, had a contest where you submitted a portfolio of your artwork, and whoever won was awarded a scholarship to take a Saturday class at the Junior School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

So I won, and in my senior year, I got to take a class. I took dress design and fashion illustration, because I thought it would make me sophisticated and classy. It was probably the most wonderful thing that could have happened to little Harmony Hammond from Hometown at that particular point in time.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Can you remember any specific artworks that you would see in those early years at the Art Institute?

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, yes. Of course. It's still quite vivid.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What were the ones that made the biggest impact?

MS. HAMMOND: Well, first let me just say that in those days the school was right under the museum. It's not like it is today, across the river. If you did a cross section of the building, you would have seen the museum, the cafeteria in the basement, and the school below that. So you would literally descend into the bowels of the museum, and there I took my class. After my fashion illustration class, I would wander around all the painting and drawing studios. It was another world - rotting still lifes, nude models, beatniks dressed in black; the world of art being made, and people who looked and acted differently than I was used to. I mean, this was very different from anything I'd ever seen in Hometown, where I felt that I never fit in. I felt very comfortable here. So I decided I'd be one of them.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What year was this, about?

MS. HAMMOND: It must have been '60 or '61, I think. But to go back to your question, I would go to my fashion illustration class — there may be one or two remaining drawings from that period - skinny stick figures of women with no feet and hands, and bubble hairdos, very embarrassing! [Bryan-Wilson laughs.]

Then I would wander around all the studios, and, of course, the museum. What I remember - anyone who grew up around a museum with major collections feels a closeness to the work in that collection unlike anything else, even though you go to many other museums around the world. So I have a special relationship to many pieces in the Art Institute collections. I primarily looked at and loved everything from late 19th century on, especially European and American painting, drawing, and graphics. In particular, I loved German Expressionist painting and Post-Impressionist painting - [Pierre] Bonnard, [Edouard] Vuillard, [Henri] Matisse - and Abstract Expressionist painting. I was not into Cubism, except as collage, and later [Pablo] Picasso's sculptures.

I didn't realize it at the time, but there were a lot of works by Berthe Morisot, Paula Modersohn Becker, Kathe Kollowitz, and Mary Cassatt included in the Institute's collections. And Joan Mitchell, Lee Krasner, Grace Hartigan, Lee Bontecou, Louise Nevelson, Barbara Hepworth, Georgia O'Keeffe, and at some point Agnes Martin, Mary Bauermeister, Marisol [Escobar], Chryssa, and early [Yayoi] Kusama, but maybe that was a bit later. Anyway, I saw a fair amount of work by women artists, but didn't realize how unusual that was. I just took it for granted. I loved Lee Bontecou's work – the materials, physicality, and aggressiveness.

I would go back and look at those collections over and over again. I still go back and look at them. I loved Post-Impressionism, for instance. I'm emphasizing this because I think it sets a tone for what I do today, which participates in the Euro-Western tradition of painting, especially that which is direct wet-into-wet painting. Clearly I was interested in the materiality of paint, bold abstract compositions in representational works, as well as abstraction and the hand of the artist.

I remember how I would sit there in the galleries, looking at the work week after week, and I just always felt I could do it. I just -- it all seemed quite possible. In other words, it never felt "other" to me. I always felt very connected to the work. I don't know why, except that that's the way it was. Of course, what I didn't realize is that nobody cared whether I could do it or whether I thought I could do it. I didn't have a clue of how the world viewed women artists. So I just sat there and felt very excited, turned-on, and empowered. That is all thanks to Berta Caul.

Going to the Art Institute for the class was just for one semester, but I still love going back and revisiting many

of those same works. I was also interested in [Edvard] Munch, [Paul] Klee, and [Odilon] Redon - you know, more symbolist kinds of work - major angst. But it was Western art definitely.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: So from there, after this kind of life-changing semester [Hammond laughs], did you plunge further in art making and art education or --

MS. HAMMOND: I was the oldest of – well, I still am the oldest of five children. My brothers would get a four-year college education. The message my two sisters and I got from my parents was that they would provide one year of college for each of us, and then we were on our own.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Let me quickly interrupt and ask a question: your father was the mayor briefly?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, briefly. He was elected Mayor of Hometown on an Independent ticket. I don't think it was a paying job – I'll have to ask him.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And what did your mother do?

MS. HAMMOND: My father was an electrical engineer, but never went to college. Apparently though, he took a few night school classes, including life drawing. I remember some rolled-up figure drawings of his that we kept up on the shelf in a closet. I thought they were wonderful and would bring them in to grade school for show and tell. They were very Norman Rockwell-type illustrations. There was also one framed watercolor that usually hung in my parents' bedroom. A stereotypical Montmartre- or Venice-type scene, places my father had never been. Eventually Claude S. Gordon Co., the pneumodynamics company that he worked for, was bought out by a larger company. My dad, a middle management person with years of experience but no college education, was laid off. But that was years after I left home.

My mother, who had been a telephone operator when she and my dad were courting, was a full-time mom. She never worked while we were growing up. Eventually, I went off to Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, the soybean capital of the United States.

We had looked at many different schools, but they were all small church schools. My parents didn't want me going off to a big university. I didn't push it. I mean, I don't think I knew what I wanted other than to study art. I ended up going to Millikin, where I received a scholarship. It was a very, very small, church-based school with what I remember being a three-man art department - four professors at most. That included art ed, art history and one or two people in the studio. But those art teachers were important – Marvin Klaven, who taught painting and drawing, and Frank C. Eckmair, who taught woodcuts and ceramics. I liked their bohemian lifestyle.

I majored in studio art. Whatever foundations I have in drawing and painting I got from Klaven, who had studied at the University of Iowa [Iowa City]. So my way of drawing and painting, with an emphasis on contour and mark-making versus realistic three-dimensional rendering, came very much out of [Leonard] Baskin and [Mauricio] Lazansky, and artists associated with the University of Iowa - or was it Iowa State [Ames]? It was a type of drawing influenced by [Arshile] Gorky and John Graham. I never had training in traditional academic rendering or drawing from cadavers. I couldn't do that well if my life depended on it.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What did your training consist of exactly? What were your courses like?

MS. HAMMOND: I didn't do a lot of 2-D or 3-D foundations work or color theory. It was basically painting and drawing. Learning by doing. I also took ceramics and printmaking, which I liked. But that was it. It wasn't a big school. But I did fall in love with painting at that time.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Were your paintings at the time figurative or abstract? Or something in between?

MS. HAMMOND: I'm smiling because they were loosely representational — primarily earth tones and umbers with a lot of glazing, coming out of the Iowa school of drawing and painting. Figures or still lifes from studio setups – fruits and vegetables arranged along the horizontal line of the table's edge, dividing the painting in two. They were not realistically rendered, but were recognizable as figures and still lifes. You could see in the way they were painted that I was interested in the expressionist possibilities of the paint and the layering of pigment and glazes. In a review of one of my early shows, the writer referred to my "drippy [Henri] Toulouse-Lautrec style" – but that was a bit later, after I moved to Minnesota.

[They laugh.]

But at this point, we are talking about my pre-drippy Toulouse-Lautrec style. So they were representational, but not realistic. That said - oh, I just remembered something. If we think of it later, I will show you a real treat - my first oil painting, that I just got from my mother. This goes back to high school. I made it in my bedroom in Hometown, amidst the walls hung with American Bandstand and movie star magazine photographs and travel

posters.

It’s an abstract painting – rectangles of thick blue, white, and green paint, so '50s modernist, like a shag rug—not too far from what I do now. [Laughs.] But I did it then. There was no context. It wasn't for Berta Caul at school. It wasn't for anybody. Somehow I bought a stretched canvas, oil paints, and brushes and made this one oil painting, totally on my own.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Wow. I'm desperate to see it. [Laughs.]

MS. HAMMOND: So anyway, that's what I --

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: No more fashion illustration. You'd let that go?

MS. HAMMOND: No, but I was more interested in painting. I just painted and never thought about teaching or making a living. It wasn't in my parents' or my vocabulary to be thinking about projecting a career. I just painted. I guess I always thought I would paint. I thought of myself as a painter, as an artist. But in terms of how I would support myself, I didn't have a clue.

I attended Millikin University for two years, and then married a man there named Stephen - with a P-H-E-N, Clover - who was a year ahead of me and also a studio art major —a good person. But we were very young. I was 19, and a very young 19, and he was only a year older. We got married and moved to Minnesota, where he was from. We lived very briefly, like a month or two, in St. Paul then moved to Minneapolis. Once there, as a young student-artist couple, we went to enroll at the University of Minnesota, only to learn that I wasn't considered a resident by marriage. I had to live there for a year in order to get in-state tuition. So I worked full-time in an office and took classes at night, while Steve went to school full-time during the day.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: As a secretary?

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, no. I didn't have any secretarial skills. I had to learn - I worked as a receptionist for a place called Red Wagon, Inc. No, that’s wrong, my first job in Minnesota was counting toilet paper for army survival kits. Believe it or not, you had to try out for this job! You had to hold your wrists and hands in a certain position —it was the interlocking kind of toilet paper, so you would flip a wad of it open, fanlike, and separate six pieces at a time, and put them on a conveyor belt. If you had the wrong number of sheets, the conveyor belt would jam, slowing you and everyone else down. We got paid by the piece or bundle of paper counted, so we didn’t want the belt to jam, nor did we have time to stop and go to the bathroom. Your wrists and arms got sore from resting on the table edge. I only lasted several days. Mostly pregnant women who couldn’t get other jobs worked there. They had been counting toilet paper a long time, were really fast, didn’t have to look at what they were doing, and could talk while they were counting.

After that, I got this office job at Red Wagon, Inc., which supplied soft drinks and popcorn to restaurants and theaters. There was an accountant, but I was basically a one-woman office. I was the receptionist, answered the phone, and learned to use the posting machine. I did invoicing and bills of lading. The accountant and salesmen were amazed because I got the work all done in the first few hours. Since I still had to sit there and answer the phone, I would read - my minor was in English Literature. That’s how I took a lot of the classes at night – reading and studying on the job.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Can you remember some of the influential texts that you might have been coming across or novels or authors that struck you?

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I can't say that [William] Shakespeare or [Geoffrey] Chaucer or [laughs] Beowulf influenced me. But I read a lot of plays by [Henrik] Ibsen, [Anton] Chekhov, and others that probably did – more Russian and Scandinavian angst – and contemporary plays by people like Edward Albee. I can talk a little bit about the work that did speak to me at that time, because those years in Minneapolis, until I moved to New York in the fall of '69, were very difficult for myself and my husband. He was gay, but had not accepted or embraced that fact - he thought he was ill and was trying to deal with it. He went to an analyst who told him he was sick.

I didn't know he was gay when we got married or that he had had relationships with men. He told me about a year into our marriage. But we stayed married for seven years. We were in Minneapolis; not in New York or San Francisco [CA]. There was no help, no support system. Steve really thought that he was sick and could get over it. I thought if I could be a better wife, if I tailored his shirts and learned to cook Indonesian or something, you know, if I could be perfect, then maybe he wouldn’t be gay, and this would all work out. I mean, we just didn't have a clue. We separated for part of that time and came back together, but struggled. It was really, really hard. Steve drank.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What year did you get married?

MS. HAMMOND: We got married in '63 and lived in Minneapolis until we moved to New York in fall '69. It was just about seven years that we were in Minneapolis. In those days, I was almost like a fag hag. I hung out with Steve and his boyfriends, and all the gay male hairdressers and decorators. I went to their bars and parties. I shopped in their clothing stores. I wore faux leather pants and Jimmy Dean T-shirts with sleeves rolled up. I just moved in that world. I identified entirely as heterosexual but socialized primarily with gay men, one of whom was my husband. It was both fun and painful. I now look back and can see it was also safe. I mean, I didn't have to deal with men coming on to me, nor did I examine my own sexuality -- neither one of us had a vocabulary or, like I said, a support system to examine this any further.

Steve was an alcoholic. While I have good memories from my married years, it was also extremely lonely. I have many painful memories from that time.

I participated in the Minneapolis art world. The Walker Art Center and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts had juried biennial exhibitions. That's where I began showing - in the biennials. My first solo shows were also in Minneapolis.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And your first one was in '64, is that right?

MS. HAMMOND: Probably at -- very good, my dear! - the Student Union at the University of Minnesota, and then the Bottega Gallery.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Paintings?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, they were almost always paintings on canvas, although that first show at the Student Union included some woodcuts from Millikin days, I think. Occasionally, I included works on paper. By this time I had moved to my "drippy Toulouse-Lautrec style." I believe that review was of the Bottega exhibition, or maybe a group show around that time.

What the reviewer said was fine with me. The reason I kind of smile now is that when I think back to those early paintings, I think the world is better for the fact that they do not exist. Just a few are documented. They were so full of personal angst, existential loneliness, and emotion. At the time, I was interested in an expressionist figurative style of painting - the California figurative painters like [Elmer] Bischoff, David Park, Nathan Oliveira, and people like that. I don't think I knew of Joan Brown's work. But it was mostly Park – he's the one who used paint the most.

So I had that interest in expressionist use of paint, along with an almost John Graham contour sensibility. Like Graham, I was interested in masks, masquerading, and carnivals. My paintings were large and full of emotion. Typically, they would have one or two figures against a monochrome background. They were loosely worked from a model—sometimes I would project my own distorted shadow onto the canvases and trace the contour—with titles like Lover and I, but there would be just one person. [Laughs.] Or Mother and Daughter on Carnival Day. I was also vertically stacking paintings or putting them next to each other as diptychs. Some were of hermaphrodites.

I find it interesting that here I was, painting larger-than-life-sized hermaphrodites in an expressionist manner in junior or senior undergraduate painting classes - I never went to graduate school - but nobody ever asked me why or what these paintings were about. In those days nobody talked about content.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What you mean is they would have both breasts and a penis?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. Some of them.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Very visibly?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, yes.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Quite evidently?

MS. HAMMOND: Quite evidently, very evidently, prominently. [Bryan-Wilson laughs.] Prominent. I say this because this was very typical of how art was talked about - technique and formal issues - and not talked about - content - in those days.

The main painting instructor was Peter Busa, a second-generation Abstract Expressionist painter, who had been in New York, you know, had had his drinks with Bill [Willem de Kooning] and Jackson [Pollock] in the Cedar Bar, and that was his claim to fame. His work was somewhat known and respected, but he hadn't "made it big." At this point, teaching in Minneapolis, he was embittered. And he was a letch. He was known to have female grad students as lovers.

That was not me, so I felt like I really had nobody when I was in school. No teacher-mentors. No women teachers. I was, however, part of a small group of student artists that hung out together and took themselves seriously as artists. I was the only woman in the group. I know the guys all felt Peter Busa was there for them as a role model and mentor, but I never felt he was there for me.

Many years later, when there was a sexual harassment case against Peter Busa, a male painter who had been one Busa's students - I'm not sure who - perhaps Brad Davis, Stuart Nielsen, or even Bill Jensen, who, I think, was a little younger than the rest of us - called me up out of the blue, wanting me to sign some letter of support for Busa, who was just about ready to retire. Whomever it was that called me was totally shocked when I said I wouldn't sign the letter -- I said I wasn't there; I don't know about the sexual harassment, except that I don't believe a woman makes this charge unless something did happen. I said, "He, Busa, was never there for me. I don't feel the allegiance to him that you do." Clearly my experience in painting class had been very different than that of my male friends.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And Stephen was also in this scene?

MS. HAMMOND: Well, yes and no. By that time, he had stopped making art. He went into art history and art education and was working in the art museum at the University of Minnesota, and at some point actually dropped out of classes. I went to school, and I was the artist. But we all hung out together. Everyone in this group of artists was heterosexual, except Steve, who was struggling with his sexuality at that time. And I'm making these paintings of hermaphrodites.

Like I was saying, no one, including myself, talked about content. Nobody ever said, like, what's this hermaphrodite thing you've got going on? Or, what is this, Harmony? What could this mean? I mean, I didn't address it, and nobody asked me to address it ever, ever, ever.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Did you have self-knowledge about what you were doing—did it seem motivated to you? Did you have a --

MS. HAMMOND: Absolutely not that I can remember.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: It was just very intuitive?

MS. HAMMOND: I don't know. There are a lot of things we do without fully understanding why we do them, or possibly we do them to gain understanding. For example, a lot of feminist visual strategies from the '70s anticipated postmodern discourses, but those strategies weren't theorized at the time. I mean, we didn't even use the word "theory" back then in the '70s, much less the pre-liberation '60s, you know. Regarding my painting, in the mid-'60s I realized that my art got me through hard times in life, and that it didn't take me anywhere I couldn't handle.

Oh, I know what I was thinking, because you also asked me before about reading and texts. So in this period, my husband and I were struggling, trying to figure it all out. He briefly moved to San Francisco, and I had an affair while he was gone. Then he came back, and we were together again – sort of. Living together, but he was seeing men. I mean, Steve's boyfriends were in our apartment, in the bedroom and the bathroom. I would go with him or them to gay parties and bars. It was this crazy sexual scene. At the same time, I'm reading Jacques Prevert's Paroles [Paris: Gallimard, 1949] and [Jean] Genêt's, Our Lady of the Flowers [Paris: Morihien, 1949].

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I recently read that when I was in India! [Hammond laughs.] It's incredible.

MS. HAMMOND: Of course, I read other Genêt, and I read other authors, but I would reread Our Lady of the Flowers. There was something there that I strongly identified with - Genet's sense of being a sexual outlaw, a martyr – but I couldn't have talked about it. Something I just felt about the poetics and erotics of an outlaw sensibility.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Did you read it in English or in French?

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, in English. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I read a copy I found in this used bookstore, and it was an early American edition, published in May of 1968 by a porn press, or what seemed to be a kind of porn press -- with a blank cover. It might have been one of the first American editions, but I could be wrong.

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, interesting. In '68?

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Yes, in '68.

MS. HAMMOND: So I was reading Genet when things were really bad in my marriage. I really wouldn't have

thought it was as late as ‘68 -- because I'm thinking back. I can remember certain places that I lived in Minneapolis. I would have thought it was a little earlier than that. Interesting. It was definitely English.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I could double-check. [The first American edition was published in 1964.]

MS. HAMMOND: And I'll look, too. I think I still have my tattered copy. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: That would be great. We could compare notes, yes.

MS. HAMMOND: Our Lady of the Flowers spoke to me. It somehow seemed to be about me or in some way reflected my life. Also, like I said, through Steve, I was very involved in this kind of gay, campy world. In those days - this was all pre-liberation, of course - there was a sense of this outsider social scene, class, whatever you want to call it, and it had a kind of an excitement about it. I mean, it was great fun.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: With Genet, there's also a darkly humorous aspect, along with the scatology and all the corporeal investments.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, the corporeal part - but frankly, I don't remember humor. I don't think I had humor in my life. But, yes, to the corporeal, scatological, and outlaw sense – the erotics of the forbidden. Of course, when I was hanging out in these spaces and places, there were old-school diesel dykes around and women who could pass as men. I was very interested in them. They would come on to me, because they figured, if he was, she was. And she was, but I didn't know it. I really didn't have a clue. That I might have lesbian feelings or be a lesbian never entered my mind. It just wasn't an issue, but I was definitely fascinated, perhaps even titillated, by it and enjoyed it all.

So I was very used to drag and the performance of gender. That was just there in my life. At a certain point Steve and I felt that we outgrew Minneapolis and wanted to move to New York City. We had some artist friends. Brad Davis, who was probably our closest friend, one of the painters in the group that I'd mentioned before, had already moved to New York. So Steve and I planned to move there after we returned from a trip to Europe and North Africa the summer of 1969. Interestingly, as chance would have it, we went to Europe in '67 and in '69, not in '68, when students were rioting in Paris. Both summers we traveled as students, hitchhiking around Europe, spending a lot of time in Paris, Ibiza [Spain], and other places. In ’69 we traveled, in buses or by hitchhiking, across North Africa from Tunis [Tunisia] to Tangiers [Morocco].

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: This is the summer of the Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village, then [New York City, June 28, 1969].

MS. HAMMOND: Yeah. So before coming to New York in the fall of '69, we had been in Europe and North Africa all summer, trying to pull this marriage together. But the sex was just not happening. I mean, here I was on this incredibly beautiful Mediterranean beach, and I couldn’t intimately or physically relate to the person next to me. It was terrible. It was painful. I now look back and realize -- Steve Clover was a very nice guy. I mean, you would have liked him. We just never should have been married. Like I said, this was all pre-liberation.

So Steve and I arrived in New York and entered into the downtown New York art scene, which was very small at the time. We first lived in a sixth-floor walkup on West Third [Street] or West Fourth [Street], across from the La Mama Theater [La Mama Experimental Theatre Club, 74A East Fourth Street]. number. 67, I believe. So we're there, in New York City, trying to make this marriage work, but clearly splitting up. Steve went into therapy; then we went into therapy together; and then finally I went into therapy on my own and into group therapy. He was the man. He was more important. He went into therapy first. I never thought that I deserved help.

It was the times and social climate. Of course, in the meantime, Stonewall had happened in June, and so things were rapidly changing. The art world in New York, certainly the downtown art world, was very politicized at that point, by anti-American Vietnam War activism, Stonewall, and the beginnings of the gay and the women's liberation movements. So things changed in my life because of time and place. As I've said many times, I feel eternally grateful to have arrived in New York at the right time, the perfect time. It was a period of tremendous energy, activism, and art experimentation. I fed off of it, and I think I fed into it.

So to finish with Stephen Clover, we soon separated. However, within the first few months of being in New York, I found out I was pregnant, and it was his child. Frankly, I never seriously considered an abortion. Nobody said, "Harmony, have you thought about this -- do you really want to have a child at this point in your life?" Even if someone had, I don't think that I would have chosen to have an abortion, and I’m glad I didn’t, but it’s interesting that no one raised the question. So we were separated, and I pretty much went through my pregnancy and the birth of my daughter, Tanya, on my own, and have always been a single mom.

Steve kept the apartment across from La Mama, and helped me get set up in my first loft, a 900-square-foot space on the corner of West Broadway and Spring Street. Eventually the Spring Street Bar moved into the

ground floor of the building. I moved in, probably, very early 1970, like in January, because Tanya was born in July of 1970. I remember that we had to fix the place up. Nobody had lived in it.

It was on the third floor. I remember how I used to look out the windows into loft spaces across the street that were empty. There were some artists living in SoHo, but very few. Only one or two galleries. At night, SoHo was boarded up. There was no place to eat. There were only bodegas and a few small restaurants open during the day for rice and beans. It was still a working-class neighborhood. If we wanted to go out for dinner, we would have to go to Chinatown, Greenwich Village, the East Village, or Little Italy.

Anyway, from my windows, baby in my arms, I would look into those large empty loft spaces and think that they would be perfect living and studio spaces for artists like myself. But in those days, the landlords were not savvy about renting lofts for studios, much less living spaces. They couldn't imagine that anyone would want to live in those conditions. In order to rent lofts, artists would pretend they wanted the loft only for studio space, fix it up minimally with running water and electricity, and then secretly live there as well. That's what it was like in those days. Tanya was born at New York Hospital while I was living there at 401 West Broadway.

An interesting little side story is that I had decided to have my baby au natural in the woods using the Lamaze technique - not in a hospital, but literally in nature. Brad Davis and his wife, Deborah, had had a son, Jed, a year or so before, using Lamaze. And I was close friends with choreographer/dancer Trisha Brown and her husband, Joe Schlichter, who had been my therapist and Steve's. They had land up in the Catskills [Catskill Mountains, NY], where they would go on weekends, and friends would often join them. So I went up, pitched my tent, camped out, and waited for my baby.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And you're nine months pregnant?

MS. HAMMOND: I was nine months pregnant — very healthy and into my body. I'd been upstate before, but I now came with my tent, which I pitched, some distance from their encampment. They gave me this big bicycle horn so if I start having contractions in the middle of the night, I could go "honk, honk," and I wouldn't have to wander and get lost while having contractions. I planned the whole birthing and tried to come prepared with everything I might need. Joe, a former dancer and chiropractor, had been my therapist. So I totally trusted him. He'd been at births and had some medical knowledge, but was not a doctor, and my friend Brad, the painter, who, other than being there for the birth of his son, had no medical background at all. Both were going to assist the birth. What was I thinking? I had full confidence I/they/we could do this.

I think it was some kind of a test of friendship or something like that. I mean, I'm -- now it's sort of horrifying when I think about the risks and what I was asking. But they agreed to do it. So I was hiking and camping at my tent, but this baby wasn't coming. I remember Brad finally came up from Manhattan. He and Joe must have had talks, as somehow they convinced me to abandon my tent and go back to the city with Brad. That turned out to be a good decision, as Tanya was born in New York Hospital with some complications on July 11, 1970. [They laugh.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: To get back to this fertile time of experimentation and political activism around '69-'70, was that the moment at which you met people like Lucy Lippard? Were you active in or did you know about the Art Workers' Coalition and that group of folks?

MS. HAMMOND: Not at first. When I came to New York, I knew Brad and some other younger artists; Brad was working as an assistant to George Sugarman, who I also knew, because when I had been in Minneapolis, I had been the assistant director of Dayton's Gallery 12, and the gallery had done a Sugarman show, also Charles Ross, Robert Indiana, and Tom Wesselman exhibitions, among many. So I knew George and some other artists a little bit.

The downtown scene in those days was experimental and fluid. No one cared about artistic identities and categories. I went to a weekly Alexander-based exercise class led by June Eckman. Jo Baer, Elke Solomon, Jane Kaufman, and other women in the art world were in the class, along with maybe Pat Steir and Kasha Linfield, who later became the first director of A.I.R. [A.I.R. (Artists in Residence) Gallery, New York, NY, founded 1972, the first artist-run gallery for women in the U.S.] – I'm not sure. Dance was very much a part of the downtown art scene. Yvonne Rainer, Joan Jonas, Deborah Hayes, Trisha Brown, and Meredith Monk were interested in non-Western dance, working with non-dancer bodies and untrained movement - how regular bodies move through space.

Many of them would have evening workshops or movement sessions in their lofts one night a week that were open to whomever wanted to come. It was all word of mouth. Mostly I went to Deborah Hayes's loft. There'd be a little basket or a hat by the door, and if you had some money, you'd throw it in, and if not, you'd just came. We did whatever movements Deborah told us to do. We were her bodies to experiment with. I remember that Alex Hays, Brad, Joe, and others were there regularly.

When she or the others choreographed a performance, frequently in some public space in Manhattan, we were the bodies that performed. It wasn't exactly contact-improv work, but related - sort of pre-contact-improv work, that Steve Paxton and other dancer/choreographers developed.

Patsy Norvell, an artist who lived in the same building as Joe and Trisha, told me about a women's art group that was forming. I began to meet with the group, and little by little, I began to hear about protests, events, and shows by and for women artists.

Word was out that there was this art historian/critic named Lucy Lippard who was going up and down stairs in loft buildings, making studio visits. She was the only one who was looking at art made by women. She eventually came to my studio, but I was not part of the Art Workers' Coalition or the famous Whitney [Museum of American Art] protest ["Guerilla Girls Review the Whitney." The Clocktower, New York, NY, April 16-May 17, 1987], as she was. I went to some activist meetings around that time, but I wasn't formally a member of anything. I was, however, being politicized rather rapidly through feminism and the women's liberation movement.

So Patsy and I and some other women who I'll name [HH: originally, the group consisted of myself, Patsy, Louise Fishman, Jenny Snider, Sarah Draney, writer and sports announcer Shirley Walton, and anthropologists Esther Newton and Elizabeth Weatherford] formed what we eventually called a "CR," or consciousness-raising, art work group, even though we weren't all artists. We were interested in the interface between feminist politics, art, and culture. We did consciousness-raising, but primarily focused on our individual work, which might be writing, organizing, or making art - we were art workers" - a support group of sorts. This group is where I learned to talk.

When my marriage was breaking up, and I was in therapy, I could not talk. I would sit there for an hour and say nothing. It wasn't because my husband told me I couldn't talk; I just didn't think I had anything of value to say. I learned to talk in CR, that process, going around the circle, where every woman had the same amount of time to speak, to address the subject, whatever it was, without interruption. What each woman said was taken as total truth, because it was her experience, her point of view.

So for women like myself, who were not naturally articulate or lacked self-confidence, consciousness-raising provided a space to talk, voice my feelings, and validate what I was saying. I also, of course, heard the other women speaking. And when I heard the other women - in this case artists - speaking, I realized that the problems in their lives were very similar to the problems I was having in my life. That led to political analysis, to understanding that women as a class were oppressed by patriarchy, and it wasn't about me as an individual. That recognition and understanding of sexual politics was a huge paradigm shift.

Having writers and anthropologists in the group was great -- Elizabeth Weatherford, who now curates the American Indian film series for the Smithsonian, and Esther Newton, who -

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: - who wrote Mother Camp[: Female Impersonators in America. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972].

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. Who wrote Mother Camp, way back then, and was lovers with Louise at that time. We were all heterosexual, except for Louise and Esther, who were a couple. Also Esther and Shirley co-authored an early feminist book called Womanfriends [New York: Friends Press, 1976]. It was a tiny little book, published by Daughters, or one of those early feminist presses, about this very intimate friendship between two women, one who is straight and married and the other who is lesbian, and the closeness and frictions in that relationship.

Slowly the group became more and more focused on visual art. Soon Shirley and Esther dropped out. We never added new members but met almost weekly for about four years, until 1974. We didn't have a name, and we were not a political action group, although we sometimes joined with other women protesting discrimination in the art world. Mostly we focused on "the work," meaning our work, and being there for each other as serious working artists or, in Elizabeth's case, a writer and curator.
We would take turns going to a different woman's studio every week, and would focus on that woman's work. Occasionally we would talk about other feminist issues or all present our work together to identify shared concerns and visual strategies.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: You focused on group critiques?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, they were group critiques. We would use a CR format to quickly go around the room and say where we were at. It was kind of checking in each week. It might have to do with jobs, relationships, or family, but since we were all emerging professionals at this time, our "reporting" would often be like, "so-and-so was coming to make a studio visit," or something was happening that had to do with our work. We were dealing with our fears, the rejections, the successes, you know, how we were freaking out or how we felt excluded from something. Whatever, the stuff around the profession of being an artist or curator as well as the

making of art, content, or what the work was really about, and people's responses to our work.

So we'd go around in a very limited time format, and then out of that pick a subject to talk about or move on to the group critique for whoever's studio we were at. What that showed us - it was -- well, a couple of things were really crucial. First of all, I think I learned to look at and talk about art in a new way in this group. Instead of just talking about work formally, the way I had done back when I was in college, we talked about what the work reminded us of, what it made us feel like, what were the references to women's lives. We started with what was physically going on in and around the work, and that led us to content, intentionality, audience. Formal and technical concerns were addressed in relation to content.

We were all white, middle class, college educated, and except for Louise, heterosexually identified.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Were you the only mother?

MS. HAMMOND: I was the only mother. That was an important difference, because I used time very differently than the other women. Time to focus on my art was precious. In those days, there weren't a lot of women artists with young children, much less single women with young children.

So what would happen when we would do our critiques is that we would go around the circle, letting everyone respond uninterrupted to the work -- usually before the artist talked about it at all. That then led into a discussion; however, the discussion was never about saying, well, the work isn't about what you think it is about. It was primarily about content. Any formal or technical discussion was about helping each other say what it is we wanted to say in the best possible way -- what I call constructive criticism. So that's how we talked about formal issues and material issues. We found that making work based on our experiences as women, and saying that our experiences as women in the world were valid sources for making, viewing, and critiquing art, opened up a whole world. Art was never the same.

You realize very quickly that if four or five women can sit there and talk with you about your work for three hours, there must be something there. That was very different than experiences I had when I showed the work to male friends. As a rite of passage as an emerging artist when you had a body of work, you would invite older, more mature, established artists to your studio. So I remember having a group with Brad and George Sugarman and one or two other male artists that I knew at the time over to my studio to look at my work – it was disastrous.

I was very excited about the new work I was making with fabric dipped in acrylic paint, excited about its references to women's traditional needle arts. I was making the Blankets and Bags at that point. I felt connected to my work for the first time in my life. I was no longer making work consciously influenced by male artists like I was the year or two before I left Minneapolis, with those large, hard-edged, geometrically shaped canvasses.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Sort of like Frank Stella.

MS. HAMMOND: Out of Stella and those artists. Large shaped canvasses, acrylic surfaces, you know, taped, hard-edged paintings. That's what you saw in Artforum. If you were a woman and an artist, and you wanted to be taken seriously, you had to do what the boys in Artforum did, and you had to do it bigger and better. So that's what I did--some of them were damn good paintings, but they were outside of me.

Those earlier expressionist paintings, which really had come from me, but nobody talked about it... all that got pushed back as I did geometric, hard-edged paintings, because that was "serious painting" -- that's what you had to do to be taken seriously. The "personal" was also in transitional abstract works that were very influenced by [Robert] Rauschenberg's combine paintings – these preceded the hard-edged paintings. At first my hard-edged paintings were still with oil paint, so the surface recorded the hand of the artist, and I would use a color like pink, along with the standard primary colors of the day. But soon I switched to acrylic, and my palette changed to dark colors. I literally painted myself out of my work.

In New York, in the early '70s, at the beginning of the feminist art movement, I and other women artists were talking about the content of our lives and how that could be reflected in or be source material for our work. So the personal started coming back into my work, but in a very different way.

When I had these guys over, I was excited about this new work, but I couldn't talk about it very well. I wasn't able to clearly articulate what was going on, to put it into words. They promptly told me -- I remember this quite vividly, it was on Spring Street -- that if I thought it might be important, for example, that I was using fabric from women friends instead of buying it, or that the "bag" form was significant, they would tell me that it had nothing to do with the work, that it was irrelevant. Everything I thought brought meaning to the piece, they would tell me didn't. By the time they left, I had this huge knot in my stomach, because I'd just been told that everything I thought about my work wasn't true. They didn't see anything there that I thought was there, and I didn't have

the language in which to protest or raise questions for discussion.

That experience stood in bold contrast to having this group of women artists in my studio who could talk about my work for three or four hours. You'd have to be an idiot not to notice the difference. The way that my women's group talked about work is primarily the way I approach art-making to this day, even as a teacher. When I lead group critiques, I do it in a spirit of constructive criticism. I'm interested in intentionality and content -- what's the work about? That brings me to issues of criticality as everything, such as technical and formal issues, are in relation to content: how are they working to make the statement that the artist want to make?

So that way of critiquing, and therefore making, work was a major shift for me. But I think not just for me. In other words, if we want to talk about what was the radical thing that feminism brought to art, or what did feminist art do that was radical, it was that it insisted upon content and meaning, and it validated the life experiences of women as subject matter and sources for the making, viewing, and critiquing of art. In the early 70's this was radical -- a tremendous breakthrough. Western art hasn't been the same since.

And in insisting on the importance of women's lives and experiences as subject, feminism validated the lives and experiences of others who have been marginalized in the past, or other cultural frameworks, and that, of course, disrupted any notion of mythic universality, which until then had always been white, Western, and male. So you get this kind of pluralist aesthetic discourse that comes out of feminism. Everything just gets wide open. Once it's wide open, it remains wide open.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: This openness occurred to you in terms of materials as well, right, to get back to the use of fabric and the domestic arts?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. Well, like I said, in Minneapolis I had been painting on stretched canvasses. When I first arrived in New York, I was looking at a lot of art from non-Western cultures – so-called primitive and decorative arts - and began to make geometric pattern paintings, at first on paper and then on large canvasses. But I struggled with scale. Should the repeated pattern unit or motif remain small, constituting a field of pattern, or should it be scaled up – in proportion to the painting's dimensions? Also there was something I didn't like, something confining, about the sharp edge of the square or rectangular stretched canvasses, so I began to paint on unstretched canvas and then any kind of fabric, like old bed sheets, blankets, and curtains. Sometimes the pattern as well as the texture of the fabric showed, but most often it didn't; it got buried in the paint. In any case, I abandoned thinking about "pattern" per se – this was before the Pattern and Decoration movement.

I also was very broke. When I lived on the corner of Spring and West Broadway, it was still part of the garment district, a neighborhood with a lot of sweatshops. Fabric scraps, especially the end cuts of bolts of knit fabric, would be out on the street and thrown into dumpsters. My gathering and recycling of the fabric is very much within a history of artists who worked with materials and objects found in the streets. Initially, it's often for financial reasons, plus the fact that we artists just like to pick up stuff. We like the way it looks. Then there's the physical properties and politics of the materials or objects.

But even before I was finding the fabric on the streets, I used fabric -- rags, really -- worn-out clothing and linens given to me by women friends, literally putting my life into my art. Material as a carrier of meaning was one of the things that we talked about in my group. Coming out of post-Minimal concerns with materials and process, the artists in my group brought a gendered understanding of materials and process to that way of working.

We began looking at fabric as one material that referenced the lives of women and a tradition of women's creativity. We began to look at the techniques of how you manipulate fabric. What's the difference between cutting, ripping, crocheting, stitching, tying, knotting, weaving, quilting, ruffling, pleating, wrapping, patching -- working with fragments, working with wholes, et cetera? I mean, in addition to a material's history, all those ways of manipulating materials -- in this case fabric, fiber, and thread -- carry meaning, as well as the form or symbol. To this day, my way of looking at meaning in abstract work includes the history, associations, and references of a particular material as well as the way that material is manipulated.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Was someone like Eva Hesse important to you?

MS. HAMMOND: Absolutely. She was hugely important to me and to the women in my group. I never knew her, but I did see the early show of hers that I believe was at SVA ["Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art." School of Visual Arts, New York, NY, 1966] - or was it the New School? - and identified with her work immediately. Eva's work and the work by the women in my group, including myself, presenced "the body." The notion of "the body" did not appear in the late '80s and early '90s. It was around in the '70s; it just wasn't theorized back then. So those of us who worked with content coming from materials and process were either unconsciously - in Eva's case - or consciously - artists in my group, or a lot of New York feminist artists, for that matter - referencing the gendered body.

Eva Hesse was not a feminist, but we were doing feminist readings on her work. In our group, we would have long discussions about the meaning of the grid or notions of repetition -- elements that you would find in Hesse's work. The grid was a visual device or strategy for organizing time and space. How might it relate to women's experiences or issues of "likeness," "sameness," and "difference"?

When people go back and talk about '70s feminist art only through a postmodernist lens of representation, they totally miss what most of us were doing. I mean, there were a few figurative painters who were doing revisionist historical paintings - painting the artist in "her" studio, depicting men as odalisques, et cetera -- but in New York, they were the minority. That's not where the art buzz was. For example, the founding artist-members of A.I.R., for the most part, worked conceptually and/or abstractly. We understood that issues of representation, like subject, object, gaze, et cetera, were important, but that's not what interested us. We were engaged with materials and process.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Right, right. But I want to get back to the Bags – and your actual work.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, yes. Direct me. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I also want to talk about how you utilized your time as a mother. But I have to take a quick break. So let's do that, and then we can pick up on those topics.

[END MD01 TR01.]

I wanted to ask you a little bit about the Bags and the Presences, and how you structured your time as a mother. You mentioned that this was a significant difference between you and others in your group. Then maybe you can talk about 1972 and the formation of Artists in Residence.

MS. HAMMOND: Okay. That's a lot. Time in relation to my work then the formation of the gallery, which is referred to as A.I.R., not Artists in Residence, even though that's what the initials stand for. That may take another hour to get up to 1972, when the gallery opened. [They laugh.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Yes, yes.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I guess one thing I should say to preface the Bags and the Presences, this notion of using materials and techniques to bring gendered content into the work, may seem like no big deal today, but it was then. You have to remember that this was at a time when to be a woman and to be an artist, were mutually exclusive. These were contradictory identities.

Just taking ourselves seriously as artists was radical, and then to not just make work that was like that of successful male artists, but to do work that was something other, something based on or referencing women's lives and experiences, was groundbreaking and risky.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Inventing your own vocabulary.

MS. HAMMOND: It was totally other and inventive, and this is what was really radical, which is why A.I.R. was so important when it opened in 1972. But before we get to A.I.R., in my group, most of us experimented with fabric in different ways, or ripped up old paintings and stitched or wove the pieces back together. Weaving, of course, implies the grid, and the grid can suggest weaving. If you think of stitching as marking, and marking in gridded space, then before you know it, you are into pattern and decoration. I mean, all these concepts are connected.

But going back to the grid or the stitch, I was always very interested in the notion of the stitching as a repetitive gesture - reflecting the repetition in women's lives - and a connective gesture - a means of piecing together or building "wholes" out of fragments. Often I used strips, or, in the case of the Blankets, large pieces of fabric that came from women friends. Many were recycled curtains and blankets that I painted with acrylic paint, but did not stretch. So I began to work off the stretcher and slowly out of the painting rectangle. In some cases, the fabric remained soft and flexible. In other cases, the paint so saturated the pores that it became tough and leathery.

The rectangular shape was altered from the sheer weight of the paint -- remember, I'm coming out of the way of working with materials and process -- so when you have a blanket that has been dipped in acrylic paint or painted over with a lot of paint, and you hang it up to dry, the weight of the paint stretches the fabric. So in this way, I slowly moved out of that painting rectangle, and eventually abandoned it. I also began moving away from a flat surface into relief – adding layers of cloth previously dipped in acrylic paint, then painting, then adding more cloth, then more painting, et cetera.

The way I was working with fabric was affected by my training as a painter. I was working with an additive process, a layering process. So while the Bags are three-dimensional objects that hang on the wall, I was

beginning to explore the place between painting and sculpture, between art and craft, and but I came to that place as a painter versus a sculptor.

And even that had, in those days, a certain kind of radicality to it, as well. I mean, traditionally, sculpture was something that you walked around, out in the middle of space. It was supposed to be different from every point of view. But this was a period of a lot of experimentation and pushing boundaries between dance and painting or painting and sculpture. Everybody was doing everything, and nobody cared what you called it.

With the Bags, there are actual bags underneath, functioning as structural and conceptual armatures. Sometimes they were old purses or bags of mine, and sometimes I made a new bag for this purpose. The bag then was covered over with strips of fabric, making it dysfunctional as a bag, engaging the idea of making something out of nothing, of using whatever materials were at hand, a craft notion. Remember, I'm a single mom. I'm working part-time at the Brooklyn Public Library and existing on very little money. So my choice of materials was partially financial.

Recycled materials are cheap. I knew it was important that this was not new fabric, that it came from my women friends, and that it was a way of literally putting my life in my work. That, in turn, taught me that the histories and previous uses of any recycled materials or objects brought meaning to the work of art. In fact, I went on to make a set of little Hair Bags, one for each of the members in my group, including myself. While each Hair Bag includes the hair of a specific woman, the bags are meant to stay together and be exhibited as a group.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: How are you managing to make time for your work, if you're a single mom working at the library?

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I always made the choice to have a part-time job so I would have time for my own work, and I usually sublet part of my loft -- I remember when I moved from Spring Street and got a bigger loft at 87 Bowery, just off of Canal Street. In order to reduce my expenses, I rented out part of it. I think I paid $300 a month, or something like that, plus utilities – can you imagine? I was scared of taking on such a big financial responsibility. If I didn’t have someone subletting, I had to cover the full rent. I divided off a quarter or a third of the space and rented it to another women artist. I remember Rosemary Mayer, a member of A.I.R., was there for a long time, and later the painter Buffy Johnson. Offhand, I can't remember the names of the other artists. At one point, a women’s karate school rented the space. [HH: there was a major fire in this loft in December 1973, which most likely started in the sublet studio area].

Then the rest was mostly my studio, with a very small kitchen/living area and a loft bed. Tanya, my daughter, had her own room. She grew up in and remembers this loft. Aside from renting out part of the loft, I worked half-time as a storyteller for the Brooklyn Public Library, which was a great job. The library in those days hired actors, writers, musicians, and artists to bring books to three-, four-, and five-year-old kids in daycare centers in Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and other depressed areas of Brooklyn. I mean, I worked out of Williamsburg. No artists were living in Williamsburg in those days. [Laughs.]

So I did that part-time for quite a few years. That was always my choice, and it's still my choice today -- to not work a straight job full-time. I have enough middle-class privilege or chutzpah or whatever that I have always been able to get by. I always made time for my art, is what I'm saying. I would usually work for the library in the morning. I would take Tanya in a stroller over to a woman in the projects, on the lower, lower East Side, Alphabet City, for daycare. This would be a single mom who babysat other kids in her apartment to earn a living.

From there, I'd get on the subway, and I'd go to Brooklyn. I worked a half a day for the library. I'd come home, and I'd have the afternoon hours until I had to go pick up Tanya. She was allowed in the studio if I was there. Certain work I could do with her around, but there was also work where I really needed to be uninterrupted and focused. I got that kind of time in the afternoon or after she fell asleep at night.

One fond memory that I have is that Tanya had a bedroom that I had built for her at one end of my studio. It actually was in between and joined my studio and the living space. I used the outside of her bedroom as a work wall where I could tack things up. At night, I would put her to bed and then try to work in the studio. There would be stories and drinks and hugs and trips to the bathroom, followed by more hugs, drinks, bathroom trips, et cetera. At a certain point, I'd say "Tanya, enough. Be quiet, I'm working." So when Tanya went off to school, she used to talk about her art as her “work.” [Laughs.] She got it – she understood.

While the women in my group were similar in age, places in their careers, things like that, the one thing that was really different was that I was the only one who had a child. I had to learn to multitask, to do three or four things simultaneously. I had to use every little bit of time, and I think one of the reasons I'm such a workaholic today is for that reason, because if I waited until I had, you know, all day Saturday, or if I waited for the perfect time, it never would have come. I wouldn't have done anything. I'm very structured about time, and I think it

came from being a single mother and having to juggle parenting, earning a living, and making time for my art.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: So let's talk about the founding of A.I.R.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, it opened in the fall of '72, but it started earlier, the organizing and planning. It grew out of a conversation Susan Williams and Barbara Zucker had in 1971, or at least that is when we started meeting. Barbara and Susan were looking for galleries and couldn't get gallery representation. At that point, things were already starting to change as feminist artists, writers, and curators protested the male-dominated museum system, where work by women rarely was included in exhibitions or purchased for the permanent collection, and women curators didn't get the best positions and weren't paid equal to male curators. Protests and feminist actions like the Whitney protest and the Women's Ad Hoc Committee [1970 protests against the Whitney Museum] forced consciousness of these inequities and made some change in museum practices.

But the gallery world was different. Women did not have access to the gallery system. Galleries, the place where emerging artists showcased their work, were still male-dominated. Very few women were in gallery exhibitions or had their own shows. Even fewer were represented by galleries, and those that were had to do work similar to whatever male artists were doing at that time, or nobody would even look at it.

Work by women artists was not taken seriously. There was this myth that women didn't make good art, or that curators, collectors, and dealers were not interested in work by women. That's when Barbara and Susan decided to start their own gallery. They invited several other artists - Dottie Attie and Nancy Spero, I believe - and then there were four. Originally, they planned to form an artists' co-op, similar to 55 Mercer Street, that would include men, but soon decided not to in favor of a women's cooperative art gallery. So this nucleus of four women - maybe they numbered six by this time - made a list of the artists they knew, and went to Lucy [Lippard] for suggestions of good women artists they might invite to join. She turned them on to the Women's Slide Registry, which had been started in 1970 by the Women's Ad Hoc Committee, and which she housed at her loft at Prince [Street] and West Broadway. [HH: It was kept at her place for a long time, like maybe six years.]

By then, the registry already had slides of work by over 600 women artists. Initially, the registry was put together to counter museums that were not including women in their exhibitions. When challenged about the disproportionate number of women in their exhibitions and collections, museums would respond by saying, say, "Oh, we're not sexist. We would have included women artists, but we didn't know their work." So now, with the registry, we could say, "Well, here's the work of 600 women artists for starters. It will give you a sense of what is out there. Don't tell us you don't know about them."

So that was the reason that the registry was started. But here, it proved very helpful to the women forming a women's cooperative art gallery - the gallery didn't have a name yet. The core group went through the slides in the registry, noted work they were interested in and then made over 55 studio visits. They came to my studio. I mean, I was one of those artists.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Besides Susan and Barbara, who were the other two?

MS. HAMMOND: I'd have to go back and check, but I'm pretty sure that Susan Williams, Barbara Zucker, Dottie Attie, and Nancy Spero were the original four.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Okay, very good.

MS. HAMMOND: But there were other artists involved very early on as well – like Mary Grigoriadis. I have to go back and check my notes. When this small group made studio visits, they brought examples of their work and talked about the concept of what they were trying to put together, a cooperative gallery of women artists. They said that they had no curatorial agenda, were not looking for a certain kind of work, and were not even looking for work that was overtly feminist. What they wanted was just really, really good art made by women. So we were all in a selection process. They were choosing artists, and artists were choosing to be part of a women's cooperative art gallery, a feminist statement in and of itself.

A.I.R. was formed out of this process. Some of the women who were invited chose not to join because they were afraid that their work would be ghettoized. But eventually, 20 women joined, developed a mission, a structure, and a schedule, and renovated the space. The gallery was structured as a collective. Everything was to be shared equally in terms of money - an initial fee and monthly dues - and time (gallery-sitting, meetings, and renovating the space. Physically renovating the space brought all of us together. Until then, most women artists were very isolated from each other, so just physically renovating the space together became a kind of a bonding thing and empowered everyone. The gallery opened its doors in the fall of 1972.

That said, what's interesting looking back is that we were all just becoming feminists at that time. The majority of the artists, including myself, totally identified as a "feminist artist." But that wasn't true of everyone. There were a number of artists who were not as political and felt more comfortable identifying as "women" rather than

“feminists.” So, interestingly, A.I.R., the inspirational mother of all the women's or feminist cooperative galleries that formed across the United States, originally identified as a women's gallery, not a feminist gallery. In later years, it changed, self-identifying as feminist, as it does to this day.

I think this distinction was an accurate reflection of the times, because the members joined for different reasons, some because they were very interested in the fact that it was a separatist space, although they probably wouldn't have used that word, or that it was an alternative, artist-run space. If you saw it in terms of separatist or noncommercial terms, then you also would have thought about it in terms of possibilities of change, revolution, utopian ideals, and so forth. Other women merely considered it as a way to get their work shown -- a steppingstone to a commercial gallery.

So this all coexisted. The word “feminism” didn't even mean the same thing to all 20 women, much less what feminist art might be. In New York, unlike Southern California, there was never one didactic, stylistic, or formal kind of definition of what constituted feminist art. It was much more anarchistic, messy, and all over the place, and I would say -- rich, like New York - very different than what happened on West Coast.

The women who founded A.I.R. were beginning to or trying to exhibit, but did not have galleries. Already identified as artists, they were coming out as feminists -- unlike Southern California, where you had a couple of more established women artists, like Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago, who were mentors or teachers to a group of very young women who were discovering art and feminism simultaneously - coming out as artists as well as feminists. It was different in New York. Everybody already identified as a professional artist.

A.I.R. didn't attempt to define feminist art in any kind of narrow, stylistic way. Some of the work exhibited was overtly feminist, and some of it wasn't. If you look back at that first gallery season at A.I.R., you’ll note that there was very little painting. Out of 20 artists, only three were painters in the traditional sense, Howardina Pindell, Mary Grigoriadis, and Daria Dorosh. Nancy Spero’s paintings on paper were more drawing. And there were no photographers. It would be unthinkable to form a gallery today that didn’t include photography, but the status of photography back then was different. I don’t know if it was a conscious decision to exclude photography or if the women going around just didn’t find interesting work. A lot of early feminist photography was documentary in nature, documenting the women’s liberation movement. So I don’t know how that came to be.

There were no video artists, although Howardena Pindell and Nancy Kitchell soon began to do some conceptual video and photo-based work. And there was very little figuration. The figuration that existed was not traditional -- Nancy Spero, Dottie Attie, and Judith Bernstein, for example. That's what I’m calling figurative or representational. So the body was physically present more than depicted. While everyone drew, there was also an emphasis on drawing as one’s main visual practice – I’m thinking of Agnes Denes and Blythe Bohnan in addition to Dottie, Judith, and Nancy. Or sculpture as a kind of drawing in space.

Years later, the artist May Stevens, who lived in the same building but was not a member of A.I.R. - she was briefly a member of SoHo 20, a second women’s co-op that featured figurative work - dismissively commented to me that there was “no color in the work at A.I.R.” I thought that was the oddest statement, but when I thought about it, in a way, she was right. Of course, there was color, but most of the work exhibited at A.I.R. was abstract, material-based, and/or conceptual. The emphasis was on materials and their natural color. Women were working three-dimensionally a lot, and with installation, exploring those areas in between art and craft, painting and drawing, sculpture and drawing, and so forth. I’m thinking of people like Laurace James, Patsy Norvell, Rachel bas-Cohain, Rosemay Mayer, Barbara Zucker, Louise Kramer, Ann Healy, and myself.

As you know, A.I.R. was an immediate success. The work shown was really good - it couldn’t be simply dismissed because “it was made by a woman” or being shown in a co-op - and participated in current cutting-edge art dialogues at the same time it introduced gender into those dialogues. A.I.R. was a player. If you were keeping up with the downtown New York art scene you had to see every show. I mean, it was part of the conversation of what was happening.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Let's talk about the fire in your studio.

MS. HAMMOND: Ah, yes. [They laugh.] The fire was in December '73, in my loft at 87 Bowery. I remember it all too well. Louise Fishman, Patsy Norvell, and myself were teaching a class or workshop for women artists -- basically sharing our group's consciousness-raising technique as a means of feminist critique. I think we only had three or four students. We met on Saturday mornings for a set period of time, say three or four hours, for maybe eight Saturdays in a row. Something like that. It was out of our lofts. We weren't associated with any institution.

I remember we were meeting at Louise's studio that particular morning in December. We were finished and leaving. I'll never forget Louise coming up really close to me, looking right in my eyes, and saying, "Harmony, there's been a fire at your studio. They put it out. We'll go over there with you." There had been a phone call

earlier during the class. Somebody had answered it. But I never knew what it was about. I thought it was a call for Louise. Apparently, it was about the fire. We finished the class, then Louise and Patsy told me and took me over there. It had been a big fire that started on my floor. Because it was cold, water from the fire hoses had frozen. There were huge icicles and ice waterfalls coming out of the building.

Apparently, the fire had started with or near the big old space heater in the front area that I sublet. No one was there. I wasn't there, and luckily, my daughter wasn't there. Tanya was at the Catholic Worker, where I often used to leave her with a babysitter. The two women who sublet the studio space weren't there either. I guess the heater was on a lot because it was winter and quite cold outside. We don't know if the heater itself caught on fire because it was so old, or if it ignited flammable substances left near the heater.

In any case, the fire spread into my space and the loft on the floor below. I had to call one of the artists who sublet from me, who was in Rome or someplace like that, and tell her that her work – she had close to 100 paintings off stretcher bars, rolled up -- was entirely gone. In my part of the loft, it was mostly heat, smoke, and water damage. Everything plastic melted. My bird and plants were dead.

At this time I was working on the Floorpieces for an upcoming exhibition of my women's group at the Nancy Hoffman Gallery in January of 1974. I was sure that work was lost. I mean the Floorpieces were just out there, totally vulnerable on the floor. In my mind, I'm thinking that if they didn't burn, the firefighters won't know it's art and will walk all over them. However, when we got to the loft, the Floorpieces were miraculously untouched. I mean, there was smoke, blackness, water, soot - that kind of damage all over the place, but the Floorpieces were unmarred.

Louise and Patsy instinctively took care of me by taking care of the work. We folded, rolled, or wrapped the Floorpieces. I don't even know how we did it. We're in New York. We don't have vehicles and cars. But somehow we got my work out of there, and they took my pieces over to Louise's studio in Little Italy. I don't think they were quite finished yet for the show, so I finished them there at Louise's. I couldn't live at the loft with the windows boarded up and all the smoke damage and smell, so I moved around, staying at Louise's loft, then briefly at Jenny Snider's loft in Tribeca, Elizabeth Murray's old studio at Cooper Union Square, and then finally a storefront down the street from McSorley's [tavern] on the lower East Side, before returning months later to my place on the Bowery.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I want to get back to the Floorpieces, but I'm suddenly having a paranoia that this is not recording. I want to do a taping test, because that would be so nightmarish.

[END MD01 TR02.]

Okay, we're going to return to an important studio visit that Lucy Lippard did with you in the early '70s.

MS. HAMMOND: Her visit was very early, probably about '71 or something like that. Maybe earlier. Lucy was curating an exhibition -- the Larry Aldridge Museum? Or that show in Europe? I'm not sure. But it was one of the earliest feminist exhibitions, and word was out that critic and art historian Lucy Lippard was looking at art by women.

It was probably through my group that I heard about Lucy and the exhibition she was curating. I called and invited her to my studio. Unfortunately, she had already curated the exhibit, so I was too late for that, but she came anyway to see the work. This was when I was still on Spring and West Broadway. I showed her the Blankets and the Bags. That's what I was making at the time. She came with her son, Ethan, in tow, and I had my daughter, Tanya, in a crib. We were both there as mothers and art professionals – thanks to feminism, one did not eliminate the other. She was there as a writer and curator making a studio visit, and I was an artist, showing her my work.

We didn't have to pretend. We didn't have to hide the kids, you know, in order to be taken seriously as professionals. So for me, Lucy's studio visit encapsulates the time. Lucy bought a piece. She always tells everyone that she never buys art, but she did buy a piece. If I remember correctly, she had just received payment for something that she had written.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Do you remember what she bought?

MS. HAMMOND: She bought Bag IX. It's now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe [NM], because Lucy gave most of her collection to the museum when she moved from New York to Galisteo. For her to buy a piece of mine was a total shock and a surprise - it was the first piece that I sold in New York.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: That's amazing. Well, we wanted to get back to what we were talking about when we took our little disc break. So let's return to 1973, post-fire. The Floorpieces have been miraculously saved, and --

MS. HAMMOND: They're in the exhibition “A Women's Group” at Nancy Hoffman Gallery. That’s January 1974.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Right, and you've talked about them, to quote you, as your most radical works at the time.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, because they dealt with notions of expanded painting. As I said earlier, the fact that I come from a painting background informs all the work that I make, regardless of whether it’s called painting or sculpture. In this case, having utilized fabric and various techniques related to the needle arts for several years, I was beginning to bring them into the painting field. While you can think of the Floorpieces as very flat sculpture, say, in conversation with Carl Andre’s work, you can also think about them as paintings off the stretcher bar and off the wall, with the coils of braided fabric functioning literally and conceptually as the painting ground.

First, I braided strips of knit fabric according to traditional braided rug techniques, although my braids were thicker than what would normally be used for a rug. Then I would sit in the middle of each Floorpiece as I coiled and sewed the braids together and to a fabric backing. Then the surface was partially painted. The other thing I haven’t talked about, and it really should be in this interview as well because it is crucial to this period of my work and my development as an artist, is my study of the martial arts.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Yes, that’s on my list of topics to discuss.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. I just want to say here that I started studying the Chinese martial art of Tai Chi Chu’an with Cheng Man-Ch’ing, referred to as “the professor,” in 1970. By '73, I had also started studying the Japanese martial art of Aikido at Sensei Yoshimitsu Yamada’s dojo on West 18th Street. The principles of Tai Chi and Aikido are similar -- you move in circles, redirecting your opponent’s energy back at them. Many days I would sit in the center of the circular Floorpieces and work on them, then take an Aikido class in the early afternoon. I’d work on the Floorpieces, then go do Aikido -- literally rolling around and moving in circles -- then come back and work on the Floorpieces some more.

Life, the work, the martial arts practice - all were woven together. I didn't think of them as different practices. It's just what I did. Just as feminism talked about women “taking and filling space” -- those were the words that we used -- the martial arts gave me a genderless form with which to physically occupy that space.

My martial arts practice was reflected in the Floorpieces, but also earlier in the layering of the Bags and Presences -- a kind of building from the center out, making something out of itself.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And the Presences, just to clarify, actually do literally hang in the center of the room?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. They hang out in space like larger-than-life-size figures, ritual garments, or robes. Like the figure or the body, they are primarily two-sided and hang suspended from the ceiling by a visible rope or string, but touching the floor. It was important that they were grounded and, like martial arts movements, occupy a space larger than their physical space.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: So '73's a bit of a watershed year. You start Aikido. You're working on the Floorpieces. You also come out as a lesbian--let's talk about that.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, coming out was a slow process. I was definitely very influenced by Louise and other lesbians that I met through her and Esther: the author Bertha Harris, the architect Phyllis Birkby, Carol Calhoun, Bianca Lanza, Jane O’Leary, Jill Johnston, Judith Friedlander, Alex Dobkin, the women from “It’s All Right To Be A Woman Theater,” and others.

The Firehouse, where the Gay Liberation Front met, was right down from A.I.R. Gallery on Wooster Street. I mean, this is where the meetings were at. I used to go there once in a while, or to Bonnie and Clyde’s, a lesbian bar in the Village, but I first acknowledged my lesbian feelings in my work. In terms of publicly coming out – well, I was very lucky to come out through the women's movement. It was never really an anti-male kind of decision. It was just that I was more and more involved with the lives and work of women, and they were so wonderfully interesting and fascinating, that it was almost a logical extension to be physically attracted. How could you not be turned on to and in love with all these dynamite women?

They were models, healthy models. So it was, you know, easy - and, I might add, quite pleasurable! Slowly I began to identify myself as lesbian and would even address it in some of my art.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Such as?

MS. HAMMOND: Well, [laughs] there were some rather obscure drawings -- personal, diaristic-type drawings and forms that I would use – the braid or the image of a braid as I would draw it, or the braided sandals.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Spirals?

MS. HAMMOND: Well, yes, but I didn't think so much about spirals. That was sort of a goddessy thing, and I wasn't really into the goddess. I did, however, design a spiral logo for Spinster's Ink, a lesbian feminist press founded by my friends Judith McDaniels and Maureen Brady, and occasionally I quoted a definition of the word "spinster" that was by Audre Lord, Mary Daly, or Judy Grahn - I don't remember who.

While I was interested in spirals as something that came around on themselves at another level and their depiction, say, in Tantric art and art of other cultures, I was more into braids as personal metaphor. It had something to do with strands of like kind touching and being woven together for strength. There's the sandals and this other little strange body of work that's sort of tucked in there right before I began doing the Weave paintings -- which we haven't talk about yet. I would cover fabric braids with acrylic paint and press them on paper in grid patterns – they became imprints, as it were.

Also I made baskets, which I exhibited at A.I.R. in my first show, in January of '73. That show included Bags, Presences, personage or kachina-like drawings on brown paper bags, drawings of basket-weaving diagrams sourced from how-to-do-it books, and a little shelf on which I put my baskets, the sandals I wove and wore on Fire Island the summer of 1972, along with the Hair Bags. I wanted to acknowledge the importance of women in my life and work – be they female ancestors or the women in my art group. I thought of the items on the shelf as a giant footnote to my main work, the Bags and the Presences.

The Hair Bags, displayed with my baskets and sandals, were about placing myself within a history of women's traditional arts. At the same time, I had this consciousness that I was in this really cool women's gallery because I was a painter and a sculptor. If I had been a woman artist who only made baskets or only worked in fibers, I would not have been invited to be in the gallery.

I was well aware that my work overlapped with work by fiber artists. While we shared certain materials and forms, we came to these forms from different places. Fiber artists tended to spin their own fibers and then weave those fibers into cloth or use them to construct forms, while I simply used rags people gave me, or found discarded fabric on the streets of SoHo that I recycled. Thus, it was much easier for me to be less precious - to just cover the cloth with paint.

So that's what I exhibited at A.I.R. What were we talking about? Oh, coming out. You asked me -- so yes, there were some drawings back then. Also I imprinted braids and baskets into clay. For some reason, imprinting, like braiding, has always been very lesbian to me – do you know what I mean? [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I do.

MS. HAMMOND: It's a kind of hard thing to articulate, but that's how I thought about it. In other words, I could have done it a different way. I could have formed clay into baskets. I could have done many different things. But there was something about the imprint, the impression that feels lesbian. The braid is that way, too. I've often thought of three-strand braiding as very lesbian.

Some of the drawings had text. I remember one phrase "You know it can't be.... because...." - but it was affirmative. Giving a realization visual form. Like I said, it was just a very natural extension of being around a lot of lesbians, and then slowly identifying that way before I actually was physically involved with another woman.

My first women lover, Judith Friedlander, and I came out together. Judith was and is a feminist anthropologist, a close friend of Esther Newton and Louise Fishman. As an artist, it was easy for me to come out, as I already led an alternative lifestyle. Being gay or lesbian didn't affect my job or parenting. My husband was gay, so there wasn't a threat of somebody trying to say I was an unfit mother. I was not in danger of losing my child or my job or anything like that. Unlike many women before me, it was pretty easy.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, let's flash forward maybe to talk more about this issue. [Hammond laughs.] We could jump ahead a little bit to '77, to the founding of Heresies[: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics] and to the landmark lesbian artists issue, because I know from what you've said before that there were many artists who did not want to be affiliated with the term "lesbian" in that issue. There was still a kind of cloud of shame, or there were issues about risks to employment, as you've mentioned. I mean, there was still stigma about being gay. The stakes were still very high.

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, yes. Being a lesbian did not help you in the art world, I can assure you. And yet when people ask me if I felt discrimination as a lesbian, I have to say that I'm sure I did, but I never focused on it. It wasn't helpful. I'm sure I didn't get many things because I wasn't a woman who was sucking up to men in different ways. I think the greatest threat to men at that time, who were fearful of losing what power that they had, was that lesbians really didn't care about them. I mean, that was the reality. It wasn't even a thing against men. We could have cared less. They just weren't important.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Instead, you were making your own gallery --

MS. HAMMOND: I'm sure I didn't get things. I'm sure there were shows I wasn't in. I'm sure there was discrimination, but you know, I only dealt with it if I needed to. Otherwise, what's the point? I'm just not invested in being a victim. So where were we?

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Heresies, the lesbian artist issue.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I have to backtrack a little bit to get to Heresies. The summer of '75 was a very important summer in the women's movement. There were a number of national conferences and events: the Socialist Feminist Conference; I forget what year the Women's Music Festival started, but around then or a little bit earlier; and Sagaris, an educational institute and think tank for radical feminist thought. These were intense and passionate times. You had to have an opinion on everything happening in the women's liberation movement in the United States -- feminist credit unions, Jane Alpert, Susan Saxe, the Weather Underground, Gloria Steinam, MS. magazine, et cetera. To form an opinion, you read local and regional feminist newspapers from around the country. Political correctness reigned.

It was in this environment of political intensity that Sagaris brought together a faculty of well-known lesbian, radical, cultural, and socialist feminist leaders with a similarly politically diverse student body of grassroots activists and organizers from across the United States, many of them leaders in their communities, for two five-week sessions on leadership, power, and feminist organizing strategies.

I was invited to teach Tai Chi Chu'an the first session, the idea being that everyone needed physical exercise and self-defense training -- one woman taught karate and I taught Tai Chi. While I was there as a martial arts teacher, I got to participate in all the classes. The faculty that session included Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, Bertha Harris, Mary Daly, and I'm not sure who else [HH: The other session included Ti-Grace Atkinson, Susan Sherman, Margo Jefferson, Alix Kate Shulman, and others.]

I was heavily influenced by the D.C. Furies and Quest-style lesbian feminism of Rita Mae Brown and Charlotte Bunch. We talked about class, power, leadership and the tyranny of structurelessness -- by that time rampant in the women's movement. Generally speaking, the political analysis attempted to blend socialist feminism with lesbian separatism. We were given problems to solve about community organizing and leadership issues. I came back from that summer politicized and with organizing skills.

Back home in the New York art world, a kind of cultural feminist apathy was setting in, with many women just interested in getting their little piece of the pie, rather than questioning the whole pie. Some of the more political or activist women were grumbling about how apathetic the feminist art movement had become and talked about getting together to "do something." I was probably was at the second of those early meetings. I think it was at Joyce Kozloff, Michelle Stuart, or Mary Beth Edelson's loft -- I'm not sure whose, but a bunch of women turned up. The questions originally asked and discussed were: What's missing? What's not happening? What would you like to see happening?

Again, women were there for different reasons, but two things came out of these early meetings: the need for a voice and the need for a space. Remember, we didn't have a space like Womanhouse in [Los Angeles] California. But then we never would have had a woman "house." We didn't have houses! New York was different. So out of these first meetings we identified the need for a voice and a space. Many women dropped out, but the rest of us formed committees and began to talk about what "a space and a voice" might mean.

The idea for a "space" evolved into the idea of a feminist art school -- what would it be like? How would it be structured? Our ideas were utopian and imaginative. I eventually dropped out of these conversations, but some of the women continued, and after many struggles and reinventions, opened the Feminist Art Institute, very different than our original vision.

The "voice" became Heresies magazine. This was early winter of '76. We--a collective of 20, including writers, artists, historians, architects, performance artists, with a range of feminist politics, like socialist feminist, Marxist, lesbian feminist, cultural feminist, and anarchist--decided that we wanted to publish a feminist art magazine that was political, not commercial.

I and my partner, performance artist Marty Pottenger, were the only lesbians in the original collective, although we were soon joined by Su Friedrich and Amy Sillman, who were also a couple. The magazine evolved from these meetings.

Heresies had a radical structure. There was the main or mother collective, which would determine the focus of the issues and run the business and distribution. Structured as a quarterly, each issue of Heresies had a different theme, as well as new editorial and design collectives for that issue. While some members of the mother collective worked as editors, the editorial collectives were mostly comprised of women interested in a

particular theme. Anyone could work as an editor who wanted to. This meant that different feminist perspectives were reflected from issue to issue – it was truly a space of multiple voices, of multiple feminisms. We didn't take advertising; however, we did exchange ads with other alternative publications, because we didn't wish to market one kind of feminism or feminist art.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: How were you funded?

MS. HAMMOND: We were ambitious and naïve. In the beginning, we thought that we could pay for the journal just by subscriptions and sales. We didn't want to be limited by advertisers or accountable to funding institutions. And we had a few private donations. That wasn't enough, so we did fund-raisers, such as art auctions, and eventually applied for and received grants – NEA and New York State Council funding, that kind of thing.

From the beginning, we wanted the visual and the textual to be equal. We had a different editorial collective for each issue because we believed in discourse. This meant that you could be a member of the mother or the main collective, which believed in feminist dialogue and yet disagree with the politics of a particular article or even a particular issue. So it really tested how much you believed politically in conversation or dialogue, and not just furthering your point of view.

One of the things you can see as a thread from issue to issue of Heresies is the editorial statement or statements by the women who edited that particular issue, most of whom were not part of the mother collective. In true feminist style, the editors talk about their individual and collective personal and political process -- the struggles of putting together that issue -- determining editorial parameters, finding, developing, and editing material, personal interaction between editors, plus the demands of printing a magazine. One could do an historical analysis of just these editorial statements – it would be a very interesting history.

Certain issues were very radical at the time they were published, such as the lesbian issue, which I'll talk about, but also the sexuality issue. It was highly controversial because it slightly predated the '80s sex wars. Regarding the lesbian issue, I can assure you that if Marty and I had not been in the founding collective, issue Number 3 [Vol. 1, Fall 1977], "Lesbian Art and Artists," wouldn't have happened. The mother collective might have gotten around to it in year three, but not issue Number 3 in the first year! Marty and I had met at Sagaris, so we shared a certain consciousness of group process, ways of raising issues and organizing. For example, we would insist that, at the end of the meeting, the whole Heresies collective do criticism/self-criticism.

If we had not been present, calling attention to the political importance of acknowledging/presencing lesbians, it would have been very easy for the other women to continue operating out of heterosexual assumptions. When we had a collective retreat at Joan Snyder's farm, several women revealed that they had had sexual relationships with women in the past, but did not identify as lesbian, though they do now. When you don't publicly or openly identify as lesbian, then it's never politicized.

In fact, lesbianism itself probably would never have been brought up except that Marty and I were there. I emphasize this because we were all white women, and if there had been women of color on the founding collective -- hopefully more than two, but at least two -- a consciousness of race would have been there also, because it has to start at the ground level that way. Eventually Heresies published several different issues that specifically addressed feminism, art, and race; however, despite the best intentions to include women of color, it was very hard finding women to work on issues or contribute material. Why should they, if they were being treated as an afterthought? Had women of color been in the founding mother collective, race and racism would have been addressed from the beginning. That's a learning lesson, as far as I'm concerned.

Every issue of Heresies had to have some members from the mother collective on the editorial collective, but there was an open call for others to join in. So anybody, any women in the art world who wanted to participate and commit to the editorial collective, could. This meant meeting for at least half a year – usually more -- to put together an issue of the magazine; so you had to make a commitment. There were many women who chose to work on one issue of Heresies in this way, but did not wish to be part of the whole magazine year in and year out.

By the time we were actually working editorially on the lesbian issue, there were four of us from the mother collective -- I think I have that right. In addition to Marty and myself, Amy Sillman and Su Friedrich, from the Chicago Women's Graphic Collective, were now members of Heresies. At first they helped do design and paste-up on earlier issues, then became collective members, and now worked editorially on the lesbian issue and did much of the design.
One of the things that happened right away when we were forming the editorial committee for the lesbian issue was that we decided that only self-identified lesbians could be editors. It wasn't like we had straight women breaking down the doors, I can assure you [Bryan-Wilson laughs], but when we reported this back to the main collective, there were some women who were very upset, and disagreed with this decision. They felt, and were

being, excluded because they were straight. Luckily, other straight-identified women on the collective understood the importance and power of our decision and totally supported us.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Say more about the process of gathering the artwork and the writing.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, "gathering" was very hard, because there was next to nothing out there to gather. Maybe a little writing on Rosa Bonheur or Romaine Brooks, but that was it! I mean, there was no history; it was missing. Just not there. In terms of contemporary work, we did all kinds of outreach: personal networking as well as ads, flyers, and cards that we mailed to individuals and organizations inviting lesbians to submit written and visual material. We didn't get a whole lot of visual material, and what we got, well, none of it was overtly sexual, because at that particular time in the mid-'70s, lesbians didn't represent themselves sexually. We were conscious that images of lesbians were something that the men got off on. Because we wished to avoid the male gaze, any kind of visual representation of sex or sexualized acts between women by women was rare.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: But, of course, your call was much more open. You didn't just want overtly sexual imagery --

MS. HAMMOND: No, we didn't. The work did not have to be sexual; we were very open. Our only criteria was, anybody who submitted material had to self-identify as a lesbian. It's not that we were going to check them out – it just had to be how they identified. It was difficult getting material. Consequently, many of the articles were reprints or historical in nature. Even the beautiful aquamarine cover refers to the historical island of Lesbos. We had work in the issue from well-known poets like Adrienne Rich and work by lesser-known writers and artists. Generally speaking, lesbian writers were out there in a way that lesbian visual artists were not.

Another problem was that many of the lesbian separatist visual artists that we knew of, were anti-art world. Art was seen as bourgeois. They were closet artists, because art was considered elitist. Or they were hesitant because Heresies was not a "lesbian journal," and they feared that this issue of the magazine would be a token lesbian presence. So it was strange. As an editorial collective, we were not all unified either. The politics among us were very different. Louise was the only one who had been out as a lesbian pre-liberation. There was quite an age span, and age did not correspond in any way with the number of years someone had been out or the radicality of their politics.

Some of us wanted the issue to be very political. Others wanted a sexual presence, or wanted it to be beautiful and not fit into sexual stereotypes. We didn't agree. In fact, probably some of the most difficult or painful arguments I had during the years I worked on Heresies happened while working on the lesbian issue. It all mattered so much, so the arguments were really painful. I would come back from meetings in tears. We found that the personal experiences of women, based on their age, was quite different -- I think the oldest of us at that point was maybe in her late 40s or early 50s, and the youngest were in their 20s -- so we split into two age-based groups to talk about personal experiences and issues but worked together editorially and on the design. You've got to do that process stuff while you're editing a magazine.

That structure worked for us. But it was hard. It was really hard, but we knew it was important. There were all these questions circulating around what this magazine could be, should be, would be, and so forth. Despite our efforts, we received very few submissions from women of color. If it was hard for white women artists to be out as lesbian, it was even harder for women of color. And for some reason, harder for visual artists than writers. As the first magazine devoted to lesbian art and artists, there was such a weight, such a burden of representation on this issue. We all felt it.

Eventually "Lesbian Art and Artists," usually referred to as "the lesbian issue," was published and well received. To this day, I meet lesbians who tell me that the lesbian issue of Heresies was so important to them, because until then, there was nothing out there. Now there was "something." They had a history, and they were not alone.

Three issues of Heresies far outsold the others upon publication -- the goddess issue ["The Great Goddess." Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1978], the sexuality issue ["Sex Issue." Vol. 3, No. 4, Winter 1981] -- I forget which sold the most - and the third-best seller was "Lesbian Art and Artists."

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: You knew at the time it was historic?

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, absolutely. With "Lesbian Art and Artists," we knew there was nothing else out there on the subject. We knew it was a beginning.

As to the whole magazine, we knew it, too, was historic. As important as sales and subscriptions to individuals were, subscription to libraries were equally important. While the design was different, we intentionally kept the size of each issue constant, so that they could be easily bound and shelved in libraries. We definitely wanted Heresies in libraries. Unfortunately, over the years, many copies have been stolen out of libraries. [All issues of

Heresies are available for download at heresiesfilmproject.org/archive/.]

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Coming out of working on the lesbian issue, it was painfully clear that there was such an absence of both historical and contemporary material on lesbian art and artists. Because Heresies did come out of the New York art world, albeit the margins of the art world, many lesbian artists would not publicly come out or place their work in a context they felt was narrow, limiting, and ghettoizing. They were afraid of professional repercussions - and there was reason to be fearful. Some artists were told that if they placed their work in a lesbian context, they would be dropped from their gallery, or that no one would be interested in their work. So while most lesbian-feminists understood the politics of claiming or creating identity, within the art world, they just didn't do it. Even today, as you know, there are many lesbians in the art world who still don't do it, for those very same reasons.

[Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: How did that Heresies editorial experience feed into your curatorial work with the first lesbian art show?

MS. HAMMOND: That's what I was getting to. I decided to curate a show of lesbian art, because what I'd come across, as one of the co-editors of the Heresies lesbian issue, was that there were lesbians who were artists and artists who were lesbian out there, but most were working out of this poverty mentality. Also, many political lesbians on the Left believed that art was bourgeois and so were uncomfortable with their desire to make art or to identify [as] artists. That was more of the issue than being lesbian. They weren't supported as artists by their political communities.

So I wrote a letter and proposed a show of work by lesbian artists to the 112 Workshop at 112 Greene Street, which was one of the earlier not-for-profit, artist-run spaces in New York. They gave me the whole space. It was a very rough, ground-floor storefront in a typical SoHo loft building, totally unfixed up -- and I began to curate the show.

From working on Heresies, there was kind of a network. I had a lot of names and addresses of artists. I also sought out and talked to new people. I made studio visits -- it was like the initial studio visits that Lucy had done years earlier, but I now did it with lesbian artists. And again, what I was struck with was this sense of poverty, of having nothing. I found that without a history, without a context, or a supportive community, it was difficult for lesbian artists to take themselves and their work seriously. They would bring things they made out of the closets or out from underneath the bed, you know, in shoeboxes, and apologetically say things like: "I'm not an artist," or "I'm not a photographer, but here's some pictures I made," or "photographs I took." I mean, it was on that level. Only a few artists like myself, who identified as lesbian, connected the two words: "lesbian" and "artist." This is why I called the exhibition "A Lesbian Show" [1987].

Now that there is interest in revisiting this exhibition, I think that the actual work has to be very carefully addressed in relation to the times. A lot of the work was created outside the art world. If you're going to talk about the history of lesbian art, it's important to acknowledge that it didn't all happen in the art world – in fact, very little of it did. You have to look elsewhere.

At the same time, the exhibition did happen in SoHo, albeit on the margins, and there were artists included, like myself, who did also participate in that art world. Frankly, a lot of the art in "A Lesbian Show" wasn't that strong. Most people won't admit that because they want to talk positively about the work, but it was a transitional show, and the work in it reflected the times. The fact of the exhibition, the importance of the exhibition happening when and where it did - in a cutting-edge, artist-run gallery space that also early on exhibited work by Gordon Matta-Clark, Louise Bourgeois, and Susan Rothenberg, to name just a few - was hugely important and groundbreaking -- not the individual works of art.

Of course, there were some good pieces, but generally speaking, the work was dwarfed by this big cavernous space. We were there, we occupied the space, but we didn't fill it. The poster for the show, designed by Amy Sillman, didn't look stereotypically lesbian, but was still controversial. It was a linear white-on-black drawing - we couldn't afford color - like Amy's early New York work. I think it was a feminist line interpretation of a Giotto or something. I don't know what. But white line on black. When that poster was pasted on doors and buildings in SoHo, it was ripped down by truckers in the neighborhood. Or at least we think it was the truckers, but it could have been anyone.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Because it said the word "lesbian."

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, the posters had the L word -- in thin, little spindly letters, I might add. Like I said, there was no visual imaging of any lesbian intimacy or sex. Just the word "lesbian" occupying public space was

threatening. The show opened in January. Despite a snowstorm, a blizzard, there was a huge turnout for the opening, mostly lesbians. I mean a huge, huge turnout, and that was exciting. Many of the artists in the show have written or have been quoted in the press saying that even at the time, they knew the exhibit was important – lesbian artists were taking space in SoHo. And that was a big deal.

For once the women didn't feel isolated as artists and lesbians, and there was a kind of way they all supported each other. The gallery space was used for a lot of programming around lesbian art and artists -- readings, presentations, and different kinds of events and workshops. The exhibition which I curated, along with its programming, organized by Betsy Damon, an artist in the exhibition, was critiqued -- and rightly so -- because there were no women of color in the show. It was an issue that needed to be raised, because there were women of color who had been invited to participate, but who did not feel that they could be in a show of lesbian art at that time.

For an African-American feminist visual artist to be out as a lesbian was asking too much. It was just too much. I remember talking with Lula Mae Blocton. I visited her studio and invited her to put work in the exhibit. She just didn't feel she could do it. She did, however, have work in “GALAS” [“The Great American Lesbian Art Show.” Woman’s Building, Los Angeles, CA, 1979] a few years later in Los Angeles.

”A Lesbian Show” became a lightning rod for everything that was going on in the movement. The critique of racism had a basis; however, this was also a period where there was tremendous trashing of feminist leaders within the women's movement, which was generally antileadership. Some lesbian-feminists felt that "No one woman should ever curate an exhibition as an individual." This belief would then flip over to something else, like the very premise or theme of the show was wrong - politically incorrect - because it was curated by one woman.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: In other words, it should have been open submissions or curated by a collective process.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, collectivity ruled. In reality, however, the 112 Greene Street space had a totally open exhibition every year, where any self-described artist could come in and hang any work they wanted on the walls. In fact, this open exhibition was right before “A Lesbian Show,” but most critics of the exhibition didn’t know about it because they were totally outside the downtown art scene. What I'm trying to talk about is this intensity that came from being marginalized.

“A Lesbian Show” was written about in the gay press and the art press. When you go back and read early articles and reviews by James Saslow, John Perrault, and even Roberta Smith, you realize how generous they were in their criticism. They sensed that the exhibition was important and historically significant, and tried to address that the best that they could.

Interestingly, one of the pieces that was most reproduced in the reviews was a painting by Fran Winant, an early dyke poet, known for her book Dyke Jacket: Songs and Poems [New York: Violet Press, 1976]. Fran was also a painter, and she used to paint these portraits of her dog, Cindy.

So you had a painting of Cindy, standing in for Fran, which engaged both histories of portraiture and paintings of animals by lesbians, surrounded by some kind of secret, unreadable hieroglyphic-looking language. Fran explained that as a young girl she had made up this secret language to write love poems to women while riding on the school bus. Like the secret love poems to Cindy, the painting was coded so that people wouldn't guess what it was about if it wasn’t positioned in an exhibition of lesbian art. In its coding, it reflected the experience of being a lesbian at that particular point in time.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: The codes and the indecipherability.

MS. HAMMOND: Exactly. The Cindy portraits are a wonderful series of paintings, and I think, very specific to the times.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, I'm thinking that we should try to get to '84, and then take a break, like a long break. We could take one now, but how do you feel about that?

MS. HAMMOND: I'm fine, okay. Eighty-four.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: When you moved to New Mexico.

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, all right. [Laughs.] Where was I in ’84?

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: We can keep talking then about the late '70s and early '80s, including the aftermath of the lesbian show, the continuation of Heresies, et cetera. I also want to hear a little bit more about your work at that time.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, by that time, you know, I've gone back and forth between painting and sculpture, or what most people would call painting and sculpture. I seem go back and forth. To me, it's all connected. But by the '80s, or in the late '70 - well, the winter of '78 was "A Lesbian Show." In the fall of '78, I came to New Mexico as a visiting artist, as a sabbatical replacement for somebody at UNM [University of New Mexico, Albuquerque].

Like many people do, I fell in love with New Mexico. I was primarily down in Albuquerque, but through Ann Nihlen, the chair of women's studies, I met and became involved with Alesia Kunz, who lived in Santa Fe – a writer who had taught in women studies at UNM. Alesia was my introduction to New Mexico. I bought a used VW Beetle, must have been like a '65, and used to drive around everywhere -- I mean, I just went out and about. After one semester I returned to New York. Alesia eventually moved there and even worked in the Heresies office for a while, and was briefly part of the group of women that met annually after Sagaris. [They laugh.] Marty had left.

Later in the '80s, my then-partner, Judith Daner, wanted to sell her tropical plant store and leave New York for a year. I didn't really want her to go without me, and she didn't care where she went -- she was a born-and-raised New Yorker. She just wanted to get out of the city. Also my daughter was a teenager, and I wanted to get her off the streets of New York. She was dripping hormones every place and coming onto everything male, no matter if they were relatives, teachers, somebody in the building, whatever. [Laughs.] I was seriously worried about her. So when Judy wanted to go away, I said, "I would love to go to Santa Fe or Paris," because they were both places I liked and that I wanted to spend a kind of living time there versus just being a tourist. [Laughs.] So Tanya, Judy, and I loaded up and drove to Santa Fe, which was probably good. We came here in the fall of '84.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: To ask about a slightly different topic, does Heresies also mark the time when you start writing criticism about art and book reviews?

MS. HAMMOND: Actually, my writing started as assignments at Sagaris. I began writing nonfiction, some horrible poetry, and letters to editors of art magazines. I think I wrote something in response to Donald Kuspit or someone like that. I can't remember who. Afterwards Heresies did provide a place for me, and I'm glad you mentioned that, where I began to write as an artist, in other words, to find a voice, which is pretty remarkable considering that 15 years before that, I couldn't speak. I didn't think I had anything to say – now try to shut me up!

So now I'm writing, and I'm thinking, "People should damn well read what I write!" [Laughs.] But I had been lecturing a lot before then. I need to say that one of the things that came out of A.I.R. was visibility. I mean, A.I.R. made feminist work visible. You didn't find it in commercial galleries at the time. Because it was good, once it was visible, I and some of the other women got invited to lecture -- I'm backtracking a little bit, because A.I.R. was crucial that way, in that it set a certain standard and opened up possibilities of lecturing, teaching, and exhibiting.

I began to lecture around the country. There was a beginning consciousness that women were underrepresented not only in museum exhibitions and collections but as faculty in art departments. We began pushing art colleges and art departments to hire more women. In response, they started to bring people like Lucy, myself, and others in as visiting artists and lecturers, but we were just a notch in their belt. When called on their sexism, the men in the art departments would say, "Well, we had two women here last semester." But of course they weren't hiring us as permanent faculty – they were just bringing us in - and out.

Typically, the art department would pay to bring me in, but I would connect with other departments such as women's studies and groups of women in the local community who might be starting a feminist art organization or gallery. I would meet with them for free. So I already was talking and getting my ideas out there. I would talk about my work at the university, but whether they wanted it or not, they also got my slide presentation on lesbian artists, and another presentation on work by feminist artists using fabric and referencing women's traditional arts, or in the late '70s, my lecture about WAVAW [Women Against Violence Against Women], examining the visual representation of violence against women in fashion magazines, advertisements, billboards, and record album covers, et cetera.

But the writing, I began to do that seriously in Heresies, and to write about feminist art in and from the voice of an artist activist. I tried to write about what I knew. It usually wasn't historical. My first article was in the inaugural issue of Heresies. It was about content in feminist abstract art, an aspect of feminist art that until recently few historians or curators have addressed. I was also one of the editors of that issue.

In 1984, Time and Space Ltd [TSL] published my first book, Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art, and the Martial Arts - not the marital arts, as it often gets said when men are introducing me before a lecture! TSL was a small press run by Linda Mussman and her partner, Claudia Bruce, that was an offshoot of their TSL theater. Linda and Claudia were close friends of mine who also lived and worked on West 22nd Street between Sixth and

Seventh Avenues [HH: I lived at 129 W. 22nd St for about seven years before moving to New Mexico]. Linda was doing very interesting off-off Broadway theater, language-based restagings of Gertrude Stein and Virginia Wolfe, Japanese and German translations in collaboration with other artists, and her own plays. Claudia was the main actor.

So TSL published Wrappings, which was a collection of my writings, including those published in Heresies. By then I had written a number additional articles: “Class Notes” for the lesbian issue, and “A Sense of Touch” and “Horseblinders” for later issues.

Wrappings is a little embarrassing to me now when I go back and look at it -- quintessential '70s feminist art. A kind of recap. It’s a compilation of the articles that I wrote for Heresies and other journals, presentations, and introductions that were like catalogue essays.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: There’s artist statements.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, artist statements, and also a talk that I gave at one of the annual Barnard Women's Conferences [Barnard College, New York, NY]. We put the texts together with reproductions of my work and other women's works -- the whole point was to weave it together conceptually and contextually -- feminist artwork and the other focus in my life, the martial arts.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And, in fact, the For Tanya, the Shoe, the Sandal is reproduced in there.

MS. HAMMOND: Right. The etching called For My Tanya is reproduced almost life-sized in Wrappings. The image is of a sole of a sandal that I had braided and worn. Upright, it becomes both female figure and footprint, in my mind, a gift, a way of passing a tradition of women’s creativity on to my daughter and younger women. I'd forgotten that. You know, it's very interesting, Julia, because Wrappings was only printed in an edition of 1,000 copies - TSL Press had no distribution to speak of - but it sold out. Now occasionally you can get used copies on Amazon. When I travel out of the country, I am blown away that people come up to me with copies of Wrappings, wanting me to sign it. Or young feminist artists, here in the United States. It has a life of its own. While I think of Wrappings as reflective of the time and period in which it was written, it clearly continues to speak to women artists at some point in their careers. I am constantly amazed, after I give a talk, that there's always somebody who comes up and says, “That book changed my life.”

At that time, 1984, I was finishing up with the big wrapped-cloth sculptures, which I had been doing since the late ‘70s, and was beginning to paint again. So I was showing wrapped sculptures such as Hunkertime and Radiant Affection and beginning to paint the Fan Lady series. When I came to New Mexico later that year, there was a real shift in my work, in the sense that I continued painting and stopped doing the wrapped sculptures.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, let's go back first and talk about the wrapped sculptures, and then get into that a little bit, and then we'll stop. We'll bring it to '84, and then we'll take our break.

MS. HAMMOND: Okay. So, the wrapped sculptures, ah, yes. How did they start? [Laughs.] Ah, yes, once upon a time, a long time ago in a small remote village, we see a woman -- no. I have to backtrack to the woven, or “weave,” paintings, which had started as squares and rectangles. I mean, these --

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: This is in about '75.

MS. HAMMOND: These were done in '75, '76, '77. I did a lot of them. They were layers of oil paint and Dorland’s wax mixed together. I would take the opposite end of my paintbrush and incise braid or weaving patterns into the surface.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: They almost look like imprints.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, at first glance, they look woven, and people asked, "How did you weave the paint?" But they're not woven. They just look like it. When you incise into the paint surface, the undercolors show through. The paint is wet, and you get little points and burrs of paint that stick out from the surface. So, from a distance, the paintings might look monochrome, but up close you see the undercolors, and the little points. They're beautiful, but also a bit menacing and fragile.

Eventually, the weave paintings moved from square and rectangular to lozenge-shaped, like that painting over there on the wall, simply because Pearl Paint, where we all bought our art supplies down on Canal Street, had lozenge-shaped stretcher bars in three sizes. You know artists -- whenever there's a new material or product, we all try it. There had always been tondos and oval-shaped stretcher bars, but lozenge–shaped stretchers were new.

The reason they interested me was because of the curved ends. I've always been interested in fucking around

with painting, or this notion of expanded painting. Even when I was working on square or rectangular stretcher bars during this period, I would take little wads of my rags or sometimes newspaper and tuck it in from behind, underneath, between the stretcher bar and the stretched canvas. That would make subtle little lumps and bumps in the flat pictorial surface near the perimeter. I say "subtle" because it wasn't like a canvas that was stretched over a relief armature or anything that extreme. You would only kind of sense that what was normally a right angle, from the side to the surface of the painting, wasn't a right angle. It was lumpy and bumpy, irregular – presencing the body. When you're incising into the painting surface, you're incising into the body. All of that was there. So what was happening on the painting's surface with its subtly curved edges, was mirrored in the shape.

One day, for some reason, I took a lozenge stretcher bar and - I still had a lot of rags around, because I just like having rags around; it's like a full pantry or something; you never know when you're going to need them -- and started wrapping the stretcher bar with some of the rags. So that was the original armature -- the very first wrapped sculptures were just a stretcher bar wrapped with cloth. Later I used other found armatures such metal backpack frames and wooden ladders or made my own. What you have in all the wrapped sculptures is this body metaphor with the armature functioning as a skeleton.

Since the armature is wrapped, with fabric from the inside out, the sculpture is literally being made out of itself. It's not stuffed. It's not about bandaging or bondage or binding, but just layering out of itself. The fabric literally becomes the muscle and the tissue. I would paint the surfaces mostly with gesso and acrylic paint or later with latex rubber. Sometimes a few other materials were used. The acrylic or latex rubber gave the sculptural form a literal as well as metaphorical skin.

The forms, of course, had body or gendered body references, but there was also an incredible physicality that came from the wrapping activity, from the making of the piece, that I think the viewer would feel as well as see. Like with all my work, meaning was never only dependent on sign, symbol, or form -- that kind of iconography -- but on the physicality of manipulating the materials as well, the indexical. Wrapping both created the form and activated the surface.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And it's about the transparency of the process in some way.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, totally. A sense of giving in to the process. If you compare the earlier wrapped pieces with the later wrapped pieces, the earlier ones are much tighter -- I'm carefully in control of what I'm doing, which is the wrapping. Wrapping is like the repetitive gesture of mark-making, or the ritual gesture of stitching. But it's wrapping.

At first I'm very careful with it. If you look at the later pieces, I work in what I call a state of peripheral control -- I just grab fabric. I don't try to plan what colors you're going to see or not. I just grab it, knowing, however, that certain colors like red will bleed through the paint or latex. I mean, I kind of know it, but I don't think about it. I wrap in a loose way, so that when you look at the surface, the skin of the piece is totally activated by the wrapping process. There's usually no brush strokes – or very rarely so. In other words, I'm not shading the form. The surface is activated by the wrapping process and light hitting both the form and surface ridges caused by the wrapped cloth.

Cloth covered with latex suggests muscle and tissue, or the raw, passionate part of the body -- inside the body -- revealing the inside on the outside. There's a lot of different ways you could look at it. But the sculptures all have this kind of body reference. I thought a lot about the gendered and sometimes sexualized body, but it wasn't theorized. I didn't know anybody else working this way. It did owe a lot to Eva Hesse, for sure, but there wasn't a lot of other work that I really related to at the time. I related the wrapped pieces mostly to Monique Wittig's writings, such as The Lesbian Body [New York: Morrow, 1975], to her writing about this kind of raw, violent sensuality --

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Very visceral.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, very much so.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Literally, as in viscera.

MS. HAMMOND: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I thought about the pieces that way, and that was mostly what I was connecting with. It wasn't really anybody else's work.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Can you remember when you first encountered the writings of Wittig?

MS. HAMMOND: It was in the '70s, but we were reading -- I have terrible French -- [Monique] Wittig's, Le Corps Lesbienne [Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1973; translated from French by David Le Vay. New York: Morrow, 1975], and then her, what is it --

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: The Straight Mind [and other Essays. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992].

MS. HAMMOND: The Straight Mind, yes, and her talk that she gave at NYU [New York University, New York City], where she says that lesbians are not women. I mean those writings and lectures were read and discussed a lot, as was feminist science fiction.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Such as who? Octavia Butler or Ursula K. Le Guin?

MS. HAMMOND: Ursula Le Guin and another one or two. Who -- I'm getting my names mixed up - another person who was even before Ursula.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: We can come back to that.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. So this is what many lesbians were reading. What I always liked about Wittig and a lot of the French feminist writing - Irigaray would be an other - is a kind of poetics of language, an abstraction, and the sensuality of the language as used. It was what they were saying, as well as how it was being said. It could be conceptual and theoretical and sensuous simultaneously. That is how I thought about my work. Conceptual, physical, and sensual. So I felt this connection to their writing. This is the way I think about things and work. I just take what I need from here and there.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, it's interesting thinking about some of the wrapped sculptures and how they're installed, where they actually do become a kind of abstract alphabet. I mean, I do get a sense of a syntax in how they're arranged, one after the other.

MS. HAMMOND: It's true, what you're saying. All of my work, up to the present, engages with a certain kind of frontality and formalism. I would even say that, at its best, it works with that formalism at the same time it interrupts or subverts it. Formalism was a big part of my training as an artist, so that's the visual language that I work out of and with, but then I consciously insist on a certain intervention or disruption within that language.

Some of the pieces, like Hunkertime, which was in the "WACK!" show ["WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution," curated by Cornelia Butler. Geffen Center, Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles, CA; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, Queens, NY; Vancouver Art Museum, British Columbia], are frontal and formal -- almost theatrical, you know what I mean? I'm always interested in what's the physical approach to a work of art: how do we enter into this encounter, into this engagement, into this meeting? With Hunkertime, most of the ladders are on slight diagonals as they touch and lean on each other, but as with most of my work, the primary approach and viewing point is straight-on frontal. Ladders, of course, are abstract stand-ins for bodies. I also was interested in them as metaphors for states of being or planes of enlightenment, vertical bridges between ground and spirit, as it were. That's another whole aspect of the work.

In Hunkertime, all of these ladders are hanging out together, hunkering down, leaning on each other and against the wall, waiting for their moment of action. Like our bodies, the ladders are hard and soft, and lumpy and bumpy, with all kinds of marks -- some are intentionally feminized. I put ruffles on them, just to mess with the serious minimal ladder form. To feminize it. It reminds me of pinafores. When I was little girl, my great grandmother Emma Hagelauer sewed organdy pinafores with straps and ruffles that stuck up like that for my sisters and me.

So there were multiple associations. I get perverse pleasure from things like putting ruffles on these serious minimal forms. It was pointed out to me afterwards that the ladders were like Hs. A double-ladder piece like Hug could be read to stand for Harmony Hammond.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: A signature?

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, yes. The two ladders of different sizes and colors lean against each other and the wall. Some writers have referred to this as my mother-and-daughter piece. It could be. You could also look at it as a lesbian piece. It could be. I mean, it is called Hug. But it is also like two Hs. All these interpretations are after the fact. I never consciously thought of the ladders in terms of alphabet or language; however, if we go back, we can see that alphabets are often formed in relationship to the representation of figures or bodies. So it makes sense totally.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I think it's a great place to pause for now. I consider this an excellent first session. We'll just burn this disk and then take an extensive break and come back.

[END MD02 TR02.]

This is Julia Bryan-Wilson interviewing Harmony Hammond at her home in Galisteo, New Mexico, on September

14, 2008. This is disc three. I forgot to do this for disc two; I apologize.

This is disc three, and to pick up on some earlier threads, we just remembered the name of the sci-fi writer who wrote a lot about sexuality, Joanna Russ [best known for her novel The Female Man. New York: Bantam Books, 1975]. Before we continue with your move to New Mexico and the repercussions of that, I want to hear about your encounter with Louise Bourgeois and her work that you mentioned to me during our break.

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, right. What I was mentioning, or referring to, was my encounter with her work, not her, although I did know her.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Right.

MS. HAMMOND: This was back some time in the mid-'70s. I don't know if it was before or after the lesbian show that I curated at 112 Green Street workshop space in SoHo, when Louise had an exhibition there. I remember it so well. Like I said, 112 was this very raw, warehouselike space -- not fixed up, brick walls, rough wood floors -- a large space, perhaps two buildings wide, or maybe it just felt like it.

I remember walking in to see the show – 112 was one of these happening, not-for-profit spaces where there was always good experimental work. This time the space was full of, and I mean full of, incredible sculpture by an artist named Louise Bourgeois, and none of us knew who she was. It was early on. I don't know if there was a checklist for the show. What I remember was the experience of seeing that cavernous space full of all these breast or phallic forms - usually they could be read either way - on the floor, on bases, or hanging. They were bronze, marble, and latex rubber. Louise has always done these outrageous things -- like she'll put latex rubber or plaster on bronze, or latex over plaster or marble -- combining really incongruous materials, one being traditional and the other being nontraditional - she'd just outrageously layer one over the other.

The individual pieces were interesting formally and in terms of the use of the materials. But I think the thing that really struck me, and struck so many people, was that this was clearly a huge body of work by a mature artist, a very developed artist who had been working for years, and none of us knew who she was. Of course, now I know that Louise did have a career earlier on but, like so many women artists of her generation, during her marriage shifted her focus to raising a family and her husband's career, barely exhibiting her work at all. That's why artists of my generation didn't know her work.

So, thanks to this exhibition in a not-for-profit, alternative space, Louise Bourgeois and her work were rediscoverd sometime in the mid-'70s. Then it was written about and discussed, becoming very influential for many feminist artists, curators, and historians. Now she is considered one of the greatest sculptors of the late 20th century – as she should! Feminism clearly helped Louise's career, as it brought attention to and generated new discussions around her work, as it did with Frida Kahlo and Alice Neel, although, obviously, she was making fabulous work before then. But why wasn't she already a household name? Why was she exhibiting in this alternative space, and not a museum?

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Fascinating. You know, there was just a show called "Circa 1970" that brought together her work from that year with Lynda Benglis, and showed --

MS. HAMMOND: Very interesting.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What was your relationship with Lynda Benglis?

MS. HAMMOND: We know each other. We knew each other back then in the '70s, but we never really hung out together. Now she has a place near Santa Fe, but doesn't live here full-time. Occasionally we run into each other socially.

There are a number of feminist artists like Lynda -- I think of Carolee Schneemann - who have functioned very much as individuals. As far as I know, neither one of them was ever involved in an ongoing feminist collective endeavor like A.I.R. or Heresies. They would contribute work to an issue of Heresies or donate art to an auction to support feminist projects, but didn't actually work with other women, although I imagine that they were very supportive to younger feminist students or artists when they were in a teaching situation.

To my knowledge, they were not in any feminist groups or collectives. Given the importance of collectivity to feminism, I think that's really interesting. I don't mean to assert a value judgment here, because they are good artists, but when I look back historically and do an analysis of what work, for example, was included in the WACK! exhibition, certain curatorial questions get raised. Lynda and Carolee are artists who, based on the their work, should be included in "WACK!" But it should be noted that they functioned very much as individuals. In contrast you'll note that there's hardly any artists from the A.I.R. collective represented in "WACK!" - and A.I.R.was hugely influential! Of the original 20 founding members, only Howardina, Nancy, and myself are included! Mary Beth and Ana [Mendieta] had work in "WACK!," but they weren't founding artists. They joined

the gallery later on. I think many of the other A.I.R. artists should have been included, as their work was important and influential at that time.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I want to definitely get back to the “WACK!” show. That's absolutely something I want to discuss. But one of the reasons that Lynda Benglis came to mind is not just her overlap with Louise Bourgeois, but also, obviously, because she was doing what she called Fallen Paintings right around the same time as your Floorpieces.

MS. HAMMOND: Right, right.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: So I wanted to know if you had anything to say about the conjunction of her Fallen Paintings and your Floorpieces.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I don't remember seeing her Fallen Paintings back then, so they weren't in my mind as I was making my Floorpieces. The first works that I remember seeing of Lynda’s -- and they were really very powerful -- were the poured polyurethane pieces that cantilevered off the walls. I remember going into the early Paula Cooper Gallery space -- you know, Paula had one of the earliest galleries in SoHo. It was not very wide. In my mind, it was a small rectangular space.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: She had the first gallery there, in fact.

MS. HAMMOND: Right, There were these huge organic polyurethane forms cantilevering off the walls, coming at you. They were so sexy, orgasmic, and juicy but held there, you know, suspended. But in your space, you couldn't back away, because there was no room. You were confronted -- I still love those pieces a lot.

I like the concept of the Fallen Paintings as “expanded painting” or a reference to painting’s fall from its privileged stature, or even in association to “fallen women,” but visually, they're not my favorite pieces of Lynda's. I like that she experiments and works with many materials, but the cantilevered ones -- because they are more active, perhaps even visually sensually and sexually aggressive, as were her videos and the famous exhibition announcements -- are my favorites. And I like many of the early knots and the wax pieces. Also a more recent work, from the last decade I believe, called Three Graces, is top-notch.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Just to come back to New Mexico - we talked a little bit, not during the recording but in our break, about some of what motivated you to come out here. Part of it was a concern about your daughter, and part of it was escaping a certain kind of scene in New York. I was hoping you could elaborate a bit about that, and what kind of community you found out here.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I didn't come here for a community of artists. I came here to get away from a scene, and I had come here, like I said, because I had been here a few years earlier, and I knew that it was a place I wanted to come back to and spend more quality-of-living time. I liked the landscape, the wide-open space. I like the cultural mix. I like the toughness and the outlaw sensibility. But I thought I was just coming for a year.

You know, people often ask me, “How has New Mexico influenced your work?” I'm sure it has. You'd have to work very hard to not have it affect your work. I always felt very at home in this big, expansive space. There’s room to move around, to go places. Like this summer I was at Skowhegan [School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME]. Very green. It's central Maine. It's very enclosed. Looking out the window of my studio, which was nestled in trees, it was solid green. I'm okay in green for a while, but it eventually makes me claustrophobic. I like big, wide-open space. I like space that isn't all filled, so I can move out into it. It feels physically good on my body.

There's something about this big space that gives everybody room to be who they think they are. Historically that's been true for women. If they didn't fit into the social structures on the East Coast, and they didn't have money to go to Europe, they went west. So there's this history of women, especially writers, anthropologists, and photographers who came west. They could smoke cigarettes. They could wear pants. They could swear. They could do whatever. Many were bisexual or lesbian. The west -- it's outlaw territory. I'm just assuming that's one reason I feel quite comfortable.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Do you want to talk a little bit about the other artists or others that are in the area? For instance, Lucy Lippard lives nearby.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, no. I just want to say that I didn't come here for a community of artists at all, although there are quite a few artists from New York who do live here now, even in Galisteo. The other people that most people would know would be Lucy Lippard, Nancy Holt, Bruce Nauman, and Susan Rothenberg. Bruce already lived in New Mexico, up in the Pecos area, when I moved to New Mexico in 1984. He was with a different wife. They split up, and he met Susan, who was still based in New York. Eventually they married, bought land, and moved to Galisteo right around the same time that I did, which was '89.

Lucy, a close friend from early New York days, would come visit me in New Mexico. She eventually bought land here, built a place, gradually moved out of New York, and is now here full-time. Nancy Holt, who I didn't know in New York, sublet my house and also ended up buying land in Galisteo. It's dangerous coming here, Julia. You better be careful! [They laugh.] In the mid-'90s May Stevens and her husband, Rudolph Baranik, moved here – well, actually, to El Dorado. May, Lucy, and I had worked on several issues of Heresies together, and she and Rudolph would come out here and visit myself and Lucy. In fact, before I had this kitchen area fixed up, and I was just living in that part of the house, May and Rudolph stayed at Lucy's one summer while she was in Maine, and May would come over here and use this space that we're sitting in to paint. Her painting Galisteo was painted in this room. So we have that history.

But we don't all hang out together. It isn't like we hang out at all. My life is very work-oriented, as are the lives of my friends. I do see people socially, but - . Unfortunately, there is an art scene in Santa Fe, and some people come here for that scene, but not me. I came here to get away from a scene. So it's a mixed blessing. On the one hand, I'm really grateful that people I really like and respect, people who are close friends, now live nearby. But I don't want to bring, you know, a whole circle of people that I had around me in New York to New Mexico. I like to go to New York. I want to have friends there, too. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Can we talk about your teaching and pedagogy? That's something that you have done partially to support yourself, I'm imagining, but also partially because it has its own psychic rewards.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, you know, I was never on the track to teach. The idea of coming out of an M.F.A. program and then immediately beginning to teach started in the '80s. When I went to the University of Minnesota, it was just undergraduate school. I've never taken a graduate course in my life. I have a B.A., so don't have M.F.A. credentials and wasn't steered towards teaching. But once I started exhibiting, and the work was visible, then was reviewed and written about in art journals, becoming visible to an even larger audience, then I was invited to lecture and teach.

Amazingly, my first exhibition in New York, at A.I.R. in January 1973, was written about in almost every art journal - which says something about A.I.R. and maybe even my work at the time -- because we weren't taking out big ads or anything. There was no reason for A.I.R. exhibitions to be reviewed, but they were. People at the Art Institute of Chicago, or in Colorado or California and other places, saw and read about my work, were interested, and invited me to lecture.

My teaching grew out of lecturing. Often you're doing what I call a one-night-stand lecture and then critiques the next day. I'm very good at doing critiques. I like doing them, and I think I'm helpful. Teaching's a different thing, but I began doing a lot of summer workshops, short-term teaching, or substituting for professors who were on sabbatical. Eventually, I taught at the University of Arizona in Tucson for 17 years, where I was a tenured, full professor.

I came into that accidentally, through the back door. They had a teaching position advertised, and I applied. But I only wanted to teach one semester and have the rest of the year to do my work. At that point in time, they weren't interested.

But then a year or so later, when Bailey Doogan, who had taught painting for many years, wanted to go half-time because her career was starting to take off, the university remembered me, and brought me in for one semester as a visiting artist. Because of the enthusiastic student response to my classes, they invited me to stay on. Moira Geoffrion, the chairperson of the department at that time, hired established, practicing professional artists like myself, Luis Jimenez and Robert Colescott. All of us were target-of-opportunity hires. We all cut different deals to teach part-time so we could continue with our own work -- that just wouldn't happen today!

My deal was that I worked my butt off one semester each year. I was tenure-track, but only there every fall. So there was a regularity, a rhythm to my presence. The students knew when I would be there and when I wouldn't. If they wanted to work with me, they had to sign up for my classes now, as I wouldn't be there next semester. Also I sat on a lot of thesis committees. I forget which came first, but the first year I was hired, I was given tenure, and the next year made full professor, or vice versa.

I never went through the agonizing process of going up for promotion and tenure that most tenure-track faculty do – mostly because I didn't understand the tenure process, and nobody ever explained it to me because they just assumed that everybody who teaches knew how the system worked. But I didn't. Consequently, I never worried. I remember at one point somebody said, "We need some recommendations, some references." I went, "Well, here's a few names, but don't bother them. They're very busy." I liked teaching. I knew I was a good teacher. I knew that from the students. In my mind I thought, "Okay. If I don't get tenure, big deal. I mean, what do you get out of it anyway?" I didn't understand that if you don't get tenure, you're out the door. Nobody told me. I never knew it, so I never got worried. And I got tenure. It's the funniest thing.

I'm sort of the accidental professor, in a way. My value as a teacher is as a practicing artist who brought critical

thinking to the classes that I taught -- primarily, all levels of painting and interdisciplinary graduate seminars. Of course, that was my favorite thing -- working with the graduate students.

That's sort of it. At a certain point it was time to leave, because of departmental politics. I'm too political and too outspoken. I would not be hired today. The university system, and especially University of Arizona, became unbearable as the place became more and more corporatized. You have a classic worker situation of fewer workers, less faculty in the painting area -- teaching more overenrolled classes, advising more students, and everybody's in denial of it because they are afraid they will lose their job. Also certain deans, department heads, and co-faculty made it very difficult for women, especially women who had what they viewed as successful careers. It was competitive. They were jealous. At a certain point I felt that it was time to leave, so I did, and I've never regretted it. I view my teaching years at the University of Arizona as a very long artist residency. Now I am what my friend Jan Brooks calls a "recovering academic." She's one too!

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What year did you stop?

MS. HAMMOND: I stopped in December 2005. So Fall 2005 was my last semester teaching, but I was officially retired Spring 2006. Now I go around and do gigs – lecturing, mentoring, and short-term teaching. It's good.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: You just had a gig in Skowhegan, for example.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, and that was great, because the students were primarily emerging artists just out of the Whitney program or CalArts [California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA] or perhaps were going into those programs in the fall. Most were in their late 20s and early 30s, but there was a range of age. The main thing is that they were serious about being artists, and their work was interesting. Generally speaking, the level of critical thinking and the level of studio practice was much higher than other places. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

When you're teaching full-time, you need to stay up on what's happening and pay attention not just to what you're doing, but what everyone else is doing, as well. What's the current discourse? When you are not teaching, it's easy to fall out of the conversation. So Skowhegan was good for me. Since I hadn't been teaching for several years, I had to pull that engagement forth again.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, speaking of interdisciplinarity, I was hoping that you could say some words about your more figurative work, the sculptures, since we haven't really gotten into that territory.

MS. HAMMOND: It's true. It's very rare that I use the figure. I mean, since those early days. I'm more interested in the body than the figure. The figure is very limited. I'm more interested in the body, because it's a whole social, political, cultural site. The figure is constrained by its perimeter, the skin, the edge of the body, although the figure can be one aspect of the body.

Most figurative work is too limiting for me. Too narrow. Too much about illustration, and I'm really not interested in illustration. Even though I'm a painter, I'm not interested in the pictorial. Most figurative painting, maybe figurative sculpture, too, although the traditions are different, are primarily interested in illustrating things. They're interested in the pictorial, and I'm really not.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: But you do, Harmony, make figurative work.

MS. HAMMOND: Right, occasionally I do. But it's usually body parts representing the whole body -- like the head in Speaking Braids [2002] - or a figurative reference, like windmills in the Farm Ghost paintings I made soon after moving here. To me, the windmill out in space, it doesn't even look like landscape, but in painting space is a stand-in for the vertical figure that's no longer there in the landscape, because the farms are abandoned. It represents the absent figure, the absent body. You know what I'm saying?

So, yes. Bodies are present in their absence. The sculpture Speaking Braids piece is specifically about writing my book, Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History [New York: Rizzoli, 2000], and that's unusual. My visual work and textual work rarely directly relate to or reference each other. Usually, they just coexist, although they probably indirectly influence each other.

Lesbian Art in America was originally intended to be a book about lesbian self-representation in art. However, as I began to write, I realized that there was a book missing, and the book that was missing was the history. The few other books being written about lesbian art at this time, in the '90s, had a lot of stuff wrong. They were missing the history. They didn't know the history, because it wasn't written down anywhere.

I realized I was one of maybe a handful of people who could write it. So then the book switched from being a book about lesbian self-representation to being a contemporary history. That's a real shift. A weight and responsibility comes with writing a history of a marginalized group. Even though we know all histories are fiction and subjective, there's a burden of representation. So how to navigate that, how to negotiate that, weighed

heavily on my shoulders.

Since no other similar history existed, Lesbian Art in America became the only book and, actually, to date, still is. That was the weight, the burden of representation.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: That's the heaviness of the leaden, booklike shape in the sculpture Speaking Braids.

MS. HAMMOND: Right. In this case, I envisioned this piece before starting to make it. I didn't have all the details, but I knew that I would do it. I had done a little bronze casting here and there in the past when opportunities came my way, so I could think in those terms. In this case, I knew I wanted to make a life casting from my head, that it was important that it was from me, taken off of me, but it was not important that it looked like me.

I had Gregory Sale, an artist friend of mine, make a life mold of my head. I was hoping that I could get more than one casting from the mold. We were lucky -- we were able to cast four wax heads from that single mold before it started to fall apart.

Then I took those four waxes, which were entirely my likeness and reworked them. It was weird having my head sitting there on the kitchen counter. At that point the wax heads are “so you” and at the same time, “so not you.” I loved carving and sculpting in wax because it is both an additive and subtractive process, and it is very forgiving. I opened the big barn doors in my studio and sat there with my crock-pot of wax.

I always envisioned the cast head hung high on the wall above my head, and I knew I wanted a braid coming out of the mouth. I didn't picture the book on the floor at that time, although I knew the piece was about writing the book. I knew it was about the burden of representation, of being a voice, of having a voice speak or having a history speak through you. The braid represented that voice -- a braid of lesbianism, feminism, and art woven together. The strands remain discrete, but become stronger when woven together.

I also thought of the braid as life breath coming out through the mouth. Of course, when you make a mold, your mouth is not open, and so I had to open the mouth in the wax sculpture. Likewise the eyes are wide open. This was important because in two of the sculptures made from the other waxes, the eyes and mouth are closed. All the bronze sculptures are very much about orifices as sensory passages -- are they open or are they closed? I didn't think about it that way at the time, but now in hindsight, I see that's what I was doing.

So in Speaking Braids, the mouth and eyes are open. The braid comes out through the mouth. The eyes, staring and wide open, are painted. Because I had worked with human hair many times over the years, I originally envisioned the piece with a braid of blonde hair that would come down out of the mouth. At the time, I couldn’t find enough blonde hair, but I had just happened upon this beautifully carded and very charged hemp braid that I think came from Mexico. I put the hemp braid through the mouth, so it falls down to the floor, on top of a heavy wax slab that suggests a book. It is not carved like a book, nor is it cast in bronze. It's just this slab of unformed material. By itself, the head in Speaking Braids would look elegant, like a Benin bronze. The hemp braid and wax slab turn it into something else. The history is ongoing. It's not finished. It's not complete.

Oh, I forgot a very important part. When you get up close, you notice that there is a little red blood dripping out of the corner of the mouth, and that's because, historically, blood is shed in liberation, human rights, and social justice movements, and even when you take on projects like curating an exhibition or writing a history. They do not happen easily, these projects. There is personal violence. So the blood is there. That’s something I often do, subtly represent struggle.

I took the other three heads and used them in two other pieces. In Untitled (head) [2001-02], the bronze head looks like it has been decapitated from the body. It is much more violent in feeling, as the head lays abandoned on its side on a cast-iron dolly. It could be pulled around like a trophy. In this case, the eyes and mouth are frozen open, and a trickle of blood runs out of one corner of the mouth. A lacy L is carved into the forehead, calling up branding and marking on the body. There is a violent sense to this piece that is very different from Speaking Braids.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: This is also coming out of writing the book?

MS. HAMMOND: Indirectly, yes. However, the only piece I originally imagined was Speaking Braids. In casting the head for that piece, I was able to make three more heads to use in two additional pieces. All three pieces are about voice, speaking, or not being able to speak. On another level they are also about intolerance, erasure, and censorship. The tableau Unspoken that incorporates the remaining two bronze heads is about muteness. So we can say they all came out of writing, but it wasn't planned – rather one work grew out of the other.

In Unspoken, two heads lie on their sides diagonally opposite each other on an old wooden table like this one, facing out with their eyes and mouths closed, and there is no indication of hair. The heads are more abstract --

[Constantin] Brancusi-like forms -- without necks. A long braid of dark human hair sits along the center of the table between them. Instead of being about speaking and voice, or about punishment for speaking, this piece is about muteness. It's about not talking or not being able to talk, about being muffled.

I'd have to think about this, but in addition to my abstract painting, I have another body of work that is more overtly political, and if I look back at the last decade of that work, the figure, in some form, is often present. I think that's because with overly political work, you want it to be easily readable. It wasn't a conscious decision -- just something I've noticed after the fact. A lot of this work has had to do with issues of intolerance, censorship, and self-censorship -- so then we're back to the orifices and what's opened, closed, and silenced. My digital prints, A Queer Reader, and the seven Portraits also engage "orifices" to speak of "voice" and "censorship."

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, I want to draw more out from you about censorship, but let's first go back to the writing and publishing and great acclaim surrounding Lesbian Art in America. You've stated that there was this gaping hole of knowledge, and the book has served an incredibly important critical role in filling that hole. I'd love to hear you talk a little bit more about how you gathered the information that appears in the book, how you went about finding this history that has been so erased, including the questionnaires that you sent out and the contacts you made with other artists.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, writing the book took a decade. That needs to be said. Initially, the book was to be on lesbian self-representation. I spoke to an agent in New York who I knew, and who was an agent for many feminist writers. I said, "I think maybe there's a book here, and maybe I could write it. I don't know." She said, "Well, yes. Here's how you write a book proposal." Then she told me the name of this paperback to go buy. So I bought the book and wrote my proposal, which, like I said, was not a history to start with.

At a certain point in my writing, I realized that there was a need for a history of lesbian art and that I could write it. This was around 1990 or 1991. I wrote the history because no one else had. I could write it because I've lived most of that history. It's both contemporary and alternative. Also, I sit on incredible archives, materials that document the history. Many of those projects I was involved with personally, and if not, if I didn't have the materials, I knew who does have them or where to get them.

Research for the book was not done in libraries because, for the most part, the material was not in libraries. It was primary research -- artist statements, correspondence, essays in exhibition catalogues, reviews and articles in alternative journals, and movement papers of different kinds, most of which were not catalogued material. That's why I was writing the book. It was really more about contacting artists, visiting studios, collecting visual and written materials from them, and utilizing my archives. This was pre-Internet, so I wasn't using e-mail or Google. It was all done by snail-mail correspondence.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And you drew from the gay press as well as the art press?

MS. HAMMOND: Sure. I have an incredible network from all those years of traveling to lecture and teach. I've been on the road since 1972, I think. Or '73. Early '73 was my first visiting artist gig, at the Art Institute of Chicago. I was a stand-in for Vito Acconci, who couldn't make it. [They laugh.] Go figure that one.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: That was quite a substitution.

MS. HAMMOND: Every place I would go, I would do more than what was expected of me, in terms of my duties as a visiting lecturer. Like I said before, I would meet with small groups of women artists who were just starting to organize. In addition to seeing their work and sharing work by feminist artists I knew, I would tell them about A.I.R. or Heresies, and other women artists who were initiating and organizing their own exhibitions, galleries, journals, and art organizations. We were all doing that, those of us who traveled – Lucy, Mimi, May, Joyce, and I. We were networking, spreading the word, and inspiring other women to take action on their own behalf.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, you were self-historicizing as you were presenting.

MS. HAMMOND: I was, but I didn't know it. I wouldn't have said it that way; I thought of it more in terms of a kind of activism. I was saying, if we're forming A.I.R. in New York City, you can organize your own women's gallery here in Minneapolis or Chicago, and they did. A.I.R. inspired other women's cooperative art galleries, like W.A.R.M. [Women's Art Resource of Minneapolis, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN, 1973], ARC [Gallery, Chicago, IL, 1973], and Artemisia [Gallery, Chicago, 1973-2003], among others. So it was that kind of thing. I know a lot of artists, both within the art world and in lesbian communities outside the art world. I was privileged in that I could move back and forth between those worlds, in addition to traveling across country. And at a certain point, I moved here to New Mexico.

Even with those networks in place, and my archives, writing the book still took 10 years. I didn't do a lot of questionnaire stuff, because my approach as a writer or curator usually is to start with the work. While I want to

talk to the artist, I'm more interested in the ideas and concepts as articulated in the work. The discussion, the conversation, the narrative, comes out of the art, versus having a predetermined discussion and then finding work to fit it.

So that's how I begin. Unlike some other writers who start with the concept first, I start with the artwork and take it from there. When I began what eventually became Lesbian Art in America, I didn't have a clear outline in mind. Initially, the book intended to encompass pre-liberation lesbian artists, which, of course, was very messy and tricky. We've talked about a few of those women today off-tape. Agnes Martin and Georgia O'Keeffe had intimate and most likely sexual relationships with women, but did not identify as lesbian, and certainly would not have wanted to be in my book. And there are others -- others from that period who even acknowledge their relationships with women. But they were pre-liberation, and so the idea of claiming the word "lesbian" or "lesbian artist," or the political consciousness of what it means to put those two words together, was very different for those women than it is for women like myself.

Initially, the first chapter attempted to address these issues in relationship to time and place. I could do a feminist, lesbian, or queer read on their work even if they didn't identify as such - for example, doing a lesbian read of the grid - now that's really exciting! [Laughs.] As you well know, there's limited space in all books, so you have to edit, hone, and refine. Eventually, that initial chapter needed to go because there was so much work by women who did self-identify as lesbian and who put the terms "lesbian" and "artist" together, albeit in different ways. The book needed to focus on them.

But there's one thing I do want to mention. Very early on, I asked artists if there was a woman artist who had really influenced them, who was a role model in some way, and if so, to please name her.

It was amazing how many artists named "the lesbian artist Agnes Martin." Not Agnes Martin, or the painter Agnes Martin, but "the lesbian artist Agnes Martin." At this point, there was no writing out there anywhere, no way, no how, about any of Agnes's lesbian affairs, involvements, or relationships. There's still not a lot out there, but back then, there was nothing. As someone who does know a little bit about Agnes's life, I knew that these women who were stating that "the lesbian artist Agnes Martin" influenced them didn't know anything specific about her personal or sexual life other than the absence of the usual heterosexual narrative.

What was so fascinating to me was that they sensed this with such surety. When pushed, what they were really talking about was a strong identification with Agnes. Now some of it, of course, was that they liked her work, or that she's a serious artist, and why not claim the best? But what they really were identifying with was this kind of outsiderness, you know, being a loner, an outsider, not fitting in -- one could even say being a little crazy perhaps. That's another role women who didn't fit in chose to play, right?

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Sure. The hysteric, madwoman.

MS. HAMMOND: Agnes has this genderless "spiritual" myth around her that she herself has helped to construct. Lesbian artists relate to this woman who dressed in overalls, went west, did it her way, on her terms, and never had a man standing nearby. You know, physically, Agnes was strong and handsome-looking, although in later years there was this innocence and frailness in her eyes. Lesbian artists just claimed her as one of their own. It was a felt connection. But done with such surety -- that's what was amazing to me, as if they had read Agnes's personal diaries, but no such diaries exist. So it was extremely fascinating to me that quite a number of the artists named "the lesbian painter Agnes Martin," without knowing anything.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: That's astonishing.

MS. HAMMOND: It was to me. You know, and it's not like you can -- I mean, it's not even like Georgia O'Keeffe, when you're looking at the imagery in her work and doing a read on it and coming away with a sexual interpretation of the work. You can't do that easily with Agnes.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Absolutely astonishing. But let's keep talking about the reception of the Lesbian Art in America, because it won a prestigious prize, the Lambda award, in 2000.

MS. HAMMOND: It did. You know, I'm very proud of the book. It sure was a hell of a lot of work, and like I said, it took a decade to write and publish. I don't imagine I'll ever do one again. The next book on lesbian art should be written by someone else.

The reception was interesting: there were people who loved it and people who were critical of it. Those who were critical wanted it to be more theoretical. But I'm not a theoretician, even though it was written during a period when there was a lot of queer theory around)\. Lesbian Art in America is written by an artist who is interested in theory, but it was important that it be written in non-academic English, and at the same time participate in current discourses. I had to give history and facts, but I also had to speak within the queer theoretical discourse happening throughout the '90s, since the late '80s really, and have it contribute to that

discourse, but not have it be in an exclusionary language. I also had the problem of how to write about myself and my work in the book. Normally, the author wouldn't write about herself, but if I am not in the book, it would not be a true history.

Those were probably my two biggest challenges. Some feared that the book would be essentialist and were quite pleased to find that it wasn't. I think most people felt that it gave a ton of information and, at the same time, contributed a lot to discourse. Because the book was published by Rizzoli, a few people tried to dismiss it as a coffee table art book. My response to that was, "Well, if it's a coffee table book, I've sure got a hell of lot of information in it that isn't anywhere else."

I was honored that the book received the Lambda literary award. It's still the primary text. There is nothing else that has taken its place to date, but of course, the publishing world has had a hard time, and art books and things lesbian are no longer commercially viable.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Were you aware of any instances of censorship around the book?

MS. HAMMOND: Not really. I had no issues of censorship with Rizzoli. It's interesting, because at one point early on, when I showed slides of some of the art to Christopher Lyons, who later became my fabulous editor, Chris said something to the effect of, "Well, you know, all this work isn't of equal quality." Gulp. I thought, "Oh, this is a flag about censorship. They're not going to want certain images." I got very defensive and talked to a few friends of mine who write and publish a lot, and they basically said, "Calm down, Harmony. You've got to keep up the conversation. What they really want to see is that you can work with them."

I heard my friends, but to myself I thought, "This is just the old quality issue used as a smokescreen for censorship." But I began a conversation. I was incredibly nervous about it, but I said: "You're right. The work is not all of the same quality. It's not. However, if this is to be a history of lesbian art, it did not all happen in the art world. This is not where the history happened. If I write it that way, then we cannot call it a history, because I will be called on it by people, and rightly so. Given that fact, I will review any image you want me to review and reconsider it if you have a problem with it. However, since I am the authority on the subject, I make the final decision." Then I was so scared [laughs] that I had gone across some line or something. But that was really the clarity that I got. I will revisit; I will consider anything. But I know the history. I'm the authority here, and I will make the final choice, because if it's going to be a history, then it's going to be the history as I know it and I see it, and that's the best that I could do.

In the end, it really never became a problem. The publisher was never an issue. We negotiated about word count, number of pages, and number of reproductions, as I was always trying to get more artists in the book. But there never was an issue about a specific work. Interestingly, the issues that arose came from those artists who censored themselves. Certain artists -- a very small number, but there were a few -- did not want to be in the book. But they were only a handful.

I'm proud that there are artists who initially did not want to be in the book but eventually agreed to be included. Since the book took me so long to write, I didn't give up. I just kept talking with them. Artists like Judith Baca, who was out as a lesbian but had never positioned herself or let her work be contextualized that way. Also Joan Snyder and Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, they trusted me, maybe because I'm also an artist. Or maybe it had to do with our conversations. I don't really know.

That these women are brought into this historical discussion makes the book a valuable resource. That said, there were a handful of women who did not wish to be in the book, and they, of course, will have to remain unnamed. They are some of the most homophobic people I know. You have to remember, the book was being written in the '90s, during the gay renaissance when there was a brief commercial market for those works that looked queer. Certain artists benefited from this market, but when the market moment moved on, they no longer wanted to be identified as lesbian or queer. Or they benefited from a "feeling" that the work is lesbian without naming it – hence no politics.

One woman in particular, who had been on the cover of the Advocate, got hysterical when I asked to include her work. I responded that I really didn't need her and her work for my book, so she could just rest easy if she was having a problem, which she obviously was. I said, "I really don't need you. It's okay. I won't put your work in the book." But she was so homophobic that she didn't believe me and served legal papers on the press [HH: At that time Bay Press; Rizzoli came later] and on me. There were a few other artists as well, who, for various reasons, some more understandable than others, did not want to be mentioned -- but she was the only one that was really hostile.

I made the Small Erasure series in response to this self-censorship. Some of their reasons were more acceptable to me than others. I mean, if you're an African-American woman, and you live in the South, and black churches around you are being burned, there's a reality that's very different than somebody who's worrying about selling her work.

But in the end, whatever the reasons, they all contribute to the problem – self-erasure contributes to cultural erasure. I took their letters, photocopied them, erased their names and any geographical references, and then covered them with a skin of latex rubber -- the first one was covered with a dental dam.

So what you have are these letters from artists of varying ages seen through the skin or the body, telling me why they can't be in the book or don't want to be in the book. Like I said, some of their reasons were more understandable than others. Most wished me luck. One of the Erasures is actually a compilation of two letters by the same woman, written about 10 years apart. In the first letter she's telling me how tough it is to be black and lesbian in the South. No, she can't write about it. She'll have to talk to me in person. By the time I'm writing the book, and I write back to her, she says, "I'm not a lesbian anything. I'm a God-fearing black woman, and I would not say anything that would jeopardize the people around me." It's the same person.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Heartbreaking.

MS. HAMMOND: I thought it would be great to have these Erasure drawings on the inside of the book jacket for Lesbian Art in America, presencing these lesbian artists in their absence, but that didn't happen. Still, it's a series of pieces that I'm rather fond of. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, it goes directly to Richard Meyers's point about censorship, which is that it often generates other works and even more discourse.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What was meant to be a form of silencing often bubbles forth in other ways.

MS. HAMMOND: Those really did. I mean, they really did.

[END MD03 TR01.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: This brings me to another series of questions about censorship, namely in relation to the 1996 exhibit that you co-curated with Catherine Lord, "Gender, Fucked." I know that there was some controversy around that.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. It's hard to, offhand, remember everything about it. Catherine and I co-curated this show for the Center on Contemporary Art in Seattle [WA] back in 1996 [June 28-August 23]. Our first problem was the exhibition announcement, which was a mailer. The local post office had trouble with the word "Fucked," and would not process the mailing. CoCA had to bypass them and have the main post office in San Francisco send out the announcement. Then there was a problem with the shipper who was picking up work in New York, who refused the work not because of content but simply based on titles listed on the bill of lading.

This scenario was similar to trouble we had had years before with Heresies. At one point, shippers that we had used for several years to distribute numerous issues of the journal, that did include nudes and sexual imagery, suddenly refused to distribute "The Sex Issue" [Vol. 3, No. 4, Fall 1981]. We had to scramble and find different shippers at the last minute. The same was true at CoCA.

There were also problems with the guy who was installing the show. He kept complaining about "all the lesbian sex." We responded, "But it's just art. It's not sex." In the end, I believe he quit, and CoCA hired someone else, a woman who was man enough to handle the work. Then there was the critical response to the show, much of which I thought was quite homophobic and sexist. I do remember, however, that David Joselit wrote a very good review for one of the art magazines. He was the only one who wrote anything intelligent about "Gender, Fucked." Local reviews were surprisingly misogynist and homophobic. I thought I was back in the '70s!

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Do you remember anything more specific about that show?

MS. HAMMOND: Oh, it's too long ago. None of the work was that extreme. The piece that most people had trouble with wasn't a representation of two women fucking, body cutting, or body alteration. It was Carrie Moyers's painting Eating Pussy that portrayed the head of a woman, with a bloody mouth, like she's gone down on a woman who's been menstruating.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Speaking of your curatorial work, I was hoping that you could talk about some of the local shows that you've done, especially "Outwest" [Plan B Evolving Arts, Santa Fe, NM, 1999], "¿Y QUE?[:Queer Art Made in Texas." Landmark Arts, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, 2007], or other exhibits about queer artists in the region.

MS. HAMMOND: Mm-hm, mm-hm. [Affirmative.] Well, the first queer show I curated was "Outwest," in 1998. It was a tri-state exhibition of work by queer-identified artists from Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico at the not-for-profit Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Fe [then Plan B Evolving Arts]. There was some new funding in town

through the Santa Fe Community Foundation which was earmarked specifically for gay and lesbian projects. So I wrote a proposal for a regional queer exhibition, and lo and behold, it received funding. “Outwest” took two years to curate. Again, I started with my networks. Each time, there's more outreach -- I learn about more artists and they get folded into the network.

It was a fabulous show; the work was very strong. Different from “A Lesbian Show” at 112 Greene Street in 1977 or ‘78, although both exhibitions took place in big cavernous raw spaces and presented work by artists who had been marginalized.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Seventy-eight.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, Seventy-eight. “Outwest” was in '98. So, 20 years difference. In contrast to “A Lesbian Show,” the work in “Outwest” totally filled the space. It was energetic and lively -- a sleeper of a show. You know, I've often curated exhibitions that turn out to be historically important. I have some sense of timing. I don't know what it is. Even a little show I did in New York in 1997 called “Material Girls: Gender, Process, and Abstraction Since 1970” [Gallery 128, New York, NY] elicited a huge response. But to go back to “Outwest,” the opening was mobbed. More people crossing various communities attended the opening than any other in Plan B’s history. This was the place to be.

The artwork was excellent. I mean, almost every piece was really good. Perhaps I could have curated a little more tightly -- but most of it was superb work, all different kinds of stuff, and very well received in the community for that reason. The overwhelmingly engaged and positive response was totally surprising to me. I feel every time I curate an exhibition, it's like writing. You do the best that you can, but sometimes, for whatever reason -- happenstance, timing, place or some other unpredictable factor -- the writing or the exhibition is right on the mark. “Outwest” was one of those exhibitions.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: And you've had more recent curatorial efforts, such as “¿Y QUE?”

MS. HAMMOND: Well, “¿Y QUE?” was interesting to me because it was a whole different context. First of all, it featured queer artists from Texas and was held in the gallery at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. At the time, I had three different possible opportunities to curate shows - one during Gay Pride in San Francisco, possibly something in New York, and then Lubbock, Texas.

Well, one night I woke up and couldn't sleep, which is very rare for me, and I realized I was worrying about curating these three shows simultaneously, that the curatorial process would overlap, and none were in the town where I lived. I knew how much work it had taken to do “Outwest,” because I not only curated the exhibition, but I installed it, raised the money, wrote and helped design the catalogue, found places for all the artists to stay when they came from out of town for the opening, and hustled all the free food and the entertainment. I did it all. It just about buried me alive! [Laughs.]

But that reflects how I like to do things -- fully. So I woke up worrying about these three shows, because I know what it takes to curate the way I like to curate. This was after I had just stopped teaching at the university and had promised myself that I wouldn't fill all my time and space immediately, that I would leave some open time and space so things could just “happen.”

So here I was filling the space again. I caught myself at it, though, this time and made the decision that I would continue with the Texas show and cancel the others, which were at the very beginning talking stage. Other people could curate them just as well as I could. What interested me was the regional outpost of Lubbock, Texas, a place many consider to be the second-most conservative city in the U.S., a place with three churches on every four corners.

My feeling has always been that we do need these identity-based shows, precisely because we don't all live in San Francisco or New York or L.A., where LGBT peoples comprise a queer community and are a visible constituency within that town. In smaller towns like Lubbock, queers need a physical presence – the Internet doesn’t do it -- and exhibitions create that presence. The day when no one's afraid to be out, well, then maybe we won't have to have these shows, but that’s not the case today.

There’s so much discussion in queer art circles: Do we still need these identity-based exhibitions? Aren’t we post-feminist and aren't we post-queer? I prefer to use the terms "neo-feminist" or "neo-queer" that acknowledge a history behind those words at the same time they suggest that we're moving forward in a different way.

It’s still important to mount queer exhibitions in different locations -- perhaps even more important in places like Lubbock than in New York. At the very least they have a different function. Anyway, that's how I was thinking when I went into “¿Y QUE?” Then I began my usual long, curatorial outreach process.

But “¿Y QUE?” was different than “Outwest.” It was messy. I have mixed and conflicted feelings about it.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: The show itself was messy or your feelings about it?

MS. HAMMOND: No, not the exhibition. The work was excellent, though not outrageously overtly queer as the organizers had hoped. When you are curating, you can only choose art within the curatorial parameters, and outrageous, overtly sexual art is not what queer artists in Texas were making at the time.

Actually, the work that was the most controversial was by a young lesbian artist -- photographic images of children, always a provocative subject.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: What was her name?

MS. HAMMOND: Celesta Danger. They were photographs of two little boys with merkins sewn on their underpants, happily jumping on a bed. The photos raised questions: What constitutes a sexualized image? Should we have images of children in queer exhibitions - even nonsexualized images of children? Celesta’s photographs were the most provocative pieces, in the sense of creating unease, and therefore, conversation.

It's hard to explain my conflicted feelings about the exhibition in a short discussion. It's complex, and has more to do with audience, hidden agendas of the organizers, and issues of organizing than anything else – not the work in the show. I had been invited to curate by two queer artists, a man and a woman, who teach at Texas Tech. One purpose of the exhibition was to create a queer presence and rupture the assumed heteronormativity on campus and around town. However, unbeknownst to me, one of these faculty members, organized a one-night-stand exhibition opening the same night as “¿Y QUE?” featuring work “about queer issues by artists of all sexual identities,” most of them straight students performing queerness, or rather their idea of queerness for a night. This meant, of course, that the work had to “look queer.” Most of the art, based on stereotypes of gender and sexuality -- without any examination of these stereotypes -- was simplistic, embarrassing, and at times, downright offensive. It was bizarre. To many eyes, the art by real queers in “¿Y QUE?” didn’t look queer enough, but work by heterosexuals in the second show did.

Theoretically, a spin-off exhibition with a differing queer position or even in a post-queer spirit could have been interesting, had there been some sort of engaged dialogue between the two shows, but that didn’t happen. One might ask, how did performing queerness for a night give any understanding of non-heteronormative lives, experiences, or cultural production?

I like the notion of “queerness” and queer identity as a fluid continuum of sexualities. But in the last few years, the notion of “queer” has been co-opted. It has become so open that it undermines its radical potential. “¿Y QUE?” is just one example.

A different but related example is Judy Chicago. Judy, who has had lesbian relationships, did not want me to mention them in Lesbian Art in America. I had wanted to write about her sexual relationships, not to make her into a lesbian, because she's not, but simply to say that at that particular period of time, in the feminist movement, a lot of women, Judy being one, were experimenting with lesbian sex and sexuality -- trying it and liking it. Many became lesbians – some remained heterosexual.

The self-censoring of Judy’s sexual relationships with women made them more important in their absence than they really were. In the end, however, it didn’t matter, as I decided to use my precious few pages and word count to write about self-identified lesbian artists.

Recently though, Judy, who has finally acknowledged those past lesbian relationships in her writing, had work included in "Pink and Bent: the Art of Queer Women” [Leslie Lohman Gallery, New York, NY, May 20–June 28, 2008], co-curated by two young curators. It was a very cool show -- a lot of young queers, trans-artists and so forth -- but, I have to ask, why is this artist who bends over backwards to constantly reassert her heterosexuality included in this exhibition?

It’s like straights taking over gay bars and clubs because they are more fun. If queerness has become so open that anyone can be king, queen, or queer for a night, or an exhibition, it means nothing. So, instead of embracing a very large definition of queerness, I find myself pulling back.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Because there's the sense that those people don't understand the stakes, the bodily risks?

MS. HAMMOND: They don't.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: You mentioned terms like neo-queer as well as neo-feminist, and I was hoping that we could use those terms as a segue to talk about “WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution,” which is the important show of 2007 that you were in. I'd like to hear your thoughts about that.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, it's a long overdue show, as we all know [Bryan-Wilson laughs], about 40 years late -- but it's a good beginning. That's how I look at it. However, because this show has been so long in coming and because, to date, it is the only museum exhibition originating in the United States to revisit feminist art of the '70s, it takes on tremendous weight, becoming the historical record, a feminist canon of sorts. Since there haven't been other exhibitions, whose work is included in "WACK!" and whose work is not becomes extremely important. Consequently, the burden of representation on Connie Butler and the exhibition is huge. We need more exhibitions to explore the nuance, the complexities, the work of those artists who are not in the show, but could be or should be.

Connie should be applauded for having the guts to take on an exhibition like this when others wouldn't. She had to make certain choices, and as curator, the choices were hers to make; however, I don't know that I would have made the same ones. While the point that feminist art wasn't just happening in the United States is well taken, I probably wouldn't have made this first museum exhibition international in scope. Instead I would have focused on the United States, gone into more depth, and included work not done on the West or East Coasts. I mean, there were vibrant and active feminist art communities in Minneapolis, Chicago, San Francisco, Boulder [CO], Providence [RI], Atlanta [GA], Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. For example, I'm thinking of work by artists such as Hollis Sigler, Janet Cooling, Ellen Lanyon, who helped start two feminist art galleries in Chicago, but also have national reputations. Nor would I have included pre-feminist work. Although much of this work is very interesting, I think it merits a separate museum exhibition.

My biggest critique, however, is not with what's in the show, but with what's not in the show. Feminist artists like Michelle Stuart, Nina Yankowitz, Jackie Ferrara, and Jackie Winsor, who brought a gendered consciousness to Minimal art should have been included. Surely their work was more relevant to a survey of feminist art of the '70s than most of the pre-feminist work in the exhibition. A case might be made for including Eva Hesse, even though she was not a feminist, because her sculpture was and remains so influential, but that's not true with most of the pre-feminist work.

Also, of the 20 founding members of A.I.R., the gallery that became the inspiration and model for so many feminist art galleries and spaces across the country, only three artists are represented in "WACK!" - Howardena Pindell, Nancy Spero, and myself. Two other artists who joined later - Mary Beth Edelson and Ana Mendieta - are also in the show, but the other artists in the gallery were equally important and influential at the time. It feels inaccurate to not have their work included!

Unfortunately, "WACK!" primarily revisited the period through a postmodern lens of representation, privileging representational or figure-based work, performance, and video, but in reality, at least in New York, some of the most interesting feminist work was conceptual and abstract in nature, dealing with materials and process. Much of it referenced the body, even though "the body" didn't become the subject of discourse until the '80s.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Would you have liked to see in "WACK!" more representation of things like collectives, political posters, activist work, or ephemera related to the women's movement?

MS. HAMMOND: The ephemera included in the exhibition primarily represented what was happening on the West and East Coasts, so what was there was appropriate to the scope of the exhibition. I liked the ephemera because it was part of the creative energy of the times. However, at the first venue, MoCA in Los Angeles, the installation mixed ephemera with the artwork, or felt like it did. One can argue a reason to do this, but it was confusing to people who don't know the work as well as you and I do. It wasn't always clear what was photodocumentation and what was photo or phototext artwork. It was jumbled together without signage, so many viewers didn't know what was what. We know that history, but everyone else doesn't.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: But I guess my question was, would you have liked more contextual information? Would you have liked more explanatory words, you know --

MS. HAMMOND: I would have liked more art. Possibly more ephemera if clearly presented as such. Wall text, yes, but not too much. The National Women's Museum and PS1 both included some wall text, and I think it helped. I liked the cases of ephemera in the cafeteria at PS1. I guess we will see what Vancouver, the last venue, does -- that's opening October 3 [2008].

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, this brings us to another important show of the past few years that is trying to cast a historical eye back on this era and rewrite the traditional canon, which is the exhibit "High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975," curated by Katy Siegel [Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC, August 6-October 15, 2006; American University Museum,, Washington, D.C., November 21, 2006-January 21, 2007; National Academy Museum, New York, NY, February15-April. 22, 2007; Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Internacional Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico; Neue Galerie Graz, Graz, Austria; and ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany].

MS. HAMMOND: The postmodern focus on representation, and therefore figuration, has contributed to an

inaccurate reading of the creative climate in New York in the late ‘60s and ‘70s, a period of post-Minimal interdisciplinary experimentation that resulted in work both conceptual and abstract. “High Times, Hard Times” is about time and place. It looks back at art made in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s in lower Manhattan. The exhibition’s title, “High Times, Hard Times,” refers to drug culture and political times, reflecting the spirit of freedom and the possibility of social change that was in the air. This spirit of “possibility” was reflected in the art.

It was an exciting time. Artists moved back and forth between painting, sculpture, video, dance, and performance - with the body used conceptually as a material versus a narrative tool - ignoring, crossing, and dissolving boundaries between disciplines. “High Times, Hard Times” looks at this work through a painting lens.

Utilizing traditional and nontraditional materials in various configurations, painters interrogated the very components that traditionally comprised a painting – support, ground, and pigment, shape, pictorial space, as well as placement in relationship to architecture and viewer. Painting was taken out of the rectangle and off the wall, unstretched, torn, draped, woven, stitched, collapsed, and reconfigured. Paint was a material to be manipulated like any other at the same time nontraditional materials could be used as pigment. Painting might use an entire room or the body as a canvas, or might occupy a three-dimensional space that could be called “sculpture.”

While “High Times, Hard Times” is not a feminist exhibition, it should be noted that nearly half the artists in the show are women, and interestingly, it includes work by a significant number of African-American artists.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Can you say more about the postmodern emphasis on representation, in terms of the bias that's framing feminist art and excludes other work?

MS. HAMMOND: The postmodern lens of representation is a very helpful lens, but like all lenses, it is limited. If you revisit the ‘70s through that lens, you miss most of what was happening, where the excitement was, at least in New York, although I think similar experiments were happening in L.A. as well. I think it had to do with the times more than geographic location. Until the exhibition “High Times, Hard Times,” abstract painting was being ignored.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: In other words, concepts like appropriation?

MS. HAMMOND: I'm not just talking about appropriation. The postmodern lens of representation limits how one revisits ‘70s feminist art. It privileges figurative or figure-based work like that of like Alice Neel, Sylvia Sleigh, May Stevens, and Joan Semmel – all strong feminist painters; however, their work was not considered cutting edge at the time it was made, precisely because it was figurative, and figurative work, whether made by women or men, was not where the buzz was.

I'm not putting that work down, but the buzz was around material-based abstract work. Feminists brought gender into that discussion. “Feminism and Abstraction in the ‘70s,” curated by Susan Stoops at the Rose Art Museum [Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, April 21-June 30, 1996] is the only exhibition I know of that began to address feminist abstract work. I believe it was in 1996. Then I curated “Material Girls” in 1997, but that wasn’t very large because the space at Gallery 128 was small. Other than that – nada, until very recently.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Well, that was very clarifying. Thank you.

MS. HAMMOND: I'm very opinionated, as you can tell. [Bryan-Wilson laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Yes. I just have a couple more topics. They're big ones [Hammond laughs], but I'm hoping we can get to them. One of them is about your prints. We haven't talked at all about your prints, and I know you've worked on these very large- scale printing presses, the monster prints, et cetera.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I mostly do monotypes. I've done editioned prints - lithographs, etchings, woodcuts, silk screens, and digital prints -- but I'm not skilled, and I have to work with a master printer. One of the reasons I like monotypes is that I can do them myself or with a minimum of assistance. And they work well with my painterly sensibility. I've done them since the mid-'70s and have quite a lot of them. In fact, they constitute a whole body of work separate from, but related to, my paintings, drawings, and editioned prints.

Over time, I have developed a way of working so that my monotypes don’t look like anyone else’s. It's hard to describe, but typically there's a kind of monotype look, a kind of mark-making and surface. My prints aren't like that. But let me say that any kind of printmaking is a challenge for me, because my way of painting is one of building up layers of thick paint, and printing, of course, is for the most part planographic.

I have to find a comparable equivalent. I can’t layer pigment the way I do in painting. It’s always a struggle. Even though I am trying to work thinner than I naturally do, I tend to over-ink the plates, thereby risking that the

paper will tear when pulled off the plate after it has gone through the press. I'm always pushing the limits. For instance, I was interested, and I forget what year it was, but I went to this place in -- where's Mass MoCA [Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art]?

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: It's in North Adams.

MS. HAMMOND: That's right. North Adams, Mass.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: In 2001, I think.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes. Okay. So I went to North Adams and worked not at Mass MoCA but at the Visual Arts Center, a not-for-profit art space that has one of the largest noncommercial presses in the country, or so I've been told. They call it the "monster press." Space queen that I am, I, of course, wanted to work on this press. [Bryan-Wilson laughs.] So I invested a lot of money to do so. I had to have large plates specially grained, then send them and rolls of paper ahead, fly there, rent a car, and pay a press fee.

Unfortunately, when I arrived, there was hardly anything that resembled a print shop to go with the press: trays for soaking water, big tables, straight edge, even light bulbs. And there was no one to assist me when I needed help. I was on my own. I had to wing it. The place did not feel professional, and I was thinking about leaving but hung in there because I'm so cheap, and I had already invested a lot of money. It took a few days, but eventually "it" began to happen.

The monotypes are five by 10 feet – in other words, prints on a painting scale. I made them entirely by myself, without the help of an assistant. Just getting the paper registered and down on the plate was a challenge, as was pulling the print off the inked plate. Because of this very physically challenging situation, I developed a technique, or strategy, that I now use in all my monotypes, even if they are small in scale.

Because they were too large to move, I had to leave the two five-by-five-foot plates in place, butted against each other, on the press the whole time. I never cleaned the plates. After I would pull a print, I would just work back into the ink residue left on the plate. I don't print ghost images like many people do. The residue stays on the plate, and I paint back into it. Gradually, usually by day two or three, I start getting a surface that prints almost velvety, because you have ink that's wet and ink that's dryer - the built-up residue. It actually does become a little dimensional - a little bit like embossing but not really.

Just the sheer physicality required to handle the five-by-10-foot sheets of paper resulted in prints that are kind of rough and crude. Ink got caught and built up in the crack between the two plates, creating wonderful accidents. I was using different kinds of ink that were laying around - some were fine art printing inks, but some were commercial - and getting metallic effects without using metallic inks.

The press itself was built out of railroad tracks, so the press bed didn't move horizontally, as it does on most presses. You just put your paper on your inked plate, place that on the press bed, then jack up eight hydraulic car jacks from underneath to create the pressure. With this incredible pressure, and the mix of inks, and I was getting these metallics effects that would kind of come and go. I liked it, and I encouraged it to happen. It was only afterwards that I found out that what I was doing is a printing no-no." It's an effect that printer's don't want. If they're trying to print a flat of a color, say Prussian or pthalo blue, they don't want it to turn metallic. There's actually a name for the phenomenon – it is called "bronzing." Of course, I didn't know that and liked the effect. Now, I almost always try to encourage some bronzing – even in the paintings.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: So there's an actual dialogue between the paintings and the prints.

MS. HAMMOND: There's definitely a dialogue between the monotypes and the paintings. When I do monotypes, I think of the press as my collaborator. Because of the press, I am not in control. Accidents happen. It's freer; it's looser; I get ideas from the monotypes that I take back into the painting and vice versa. I always hate what I do for the first day. But usually by the end of the second day, I'm on a roll. Then the press and I can do no wrong. It's a great high to be on, you know, when you can do no wrong. I feel like I'm working in a state of peripheral control, consciously setting up to have accidents happen, but I don't know what they're going to be.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: This is an excellent transition [Hammond laughs] to my final two broad topics, the first of which is related to how you've described this process of working on the monster press. It's very, very physically challenging work, and I don't know if you have anything to say about this, but I want to enter it into the historical record that, in fact, you have an active bodily life, and part of that has been being a volunteer firefighter for 10 years –

MS. HAMMOND: [Laughs.] Oh, right. Got to get that in.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: -- in Galisteo. Maybe you have something to say about that; maybe not.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I am a very physical person, and given the scale I usually work on, I move around a lot when I work. Probably because of decades of martial arts practice, I'm very aware of my body and how my body moves through space -- aware of its solidity and strength. In the studio, I use my body as a tool to manipulate materials, nearly always leaving indexical traces on the work of art.

I care very much about giving back to my community. Being a volunteer firefighter in Galisteo for 10 years was my community service

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Let's move on to the final topic then, and unless you have other things to add.

MS. HAMMOND: When I start talking about firefighting, people start rolling their eyes – so I will spare you. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: No, no, no. This last topic is actually pretty serious. You were discussing in that previous anecdote how you're quote, unquote, cheap, and about how you paid for the space and rented the car. There was a tremendous capital investment in your going to North Adams to use this printer. This raises the specter of finances, basically, and your relationship to the market. We're right next to this beautiful huge studio that you have, which is filled with your own work. It's actually quite poignant, and a little bit depressing, how much of your own work you do own. [Laughs.]

MS. HAMMOND: Tell me about it. It's really pretty depressing. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I think this is a really important subject.

MS. HAMMOND: I've never made work for the market. The business of art is always lurking near one's studio practice. I try to keep them as separate as possible, but sometimes it's a little insidious, and not easy. Obviously, I like to sell work -- most artists do - but I've never depended on it. I've never been in the right place at the right time for that to happen. When I came of age as an artist in the downtown New York arts scene, there wasn't a market. I mean, that was not the way people thought or talked about art. It was just about making the work. I care more that there is a good critical dialogue around the work than sales. Hopefully the market will follow, although it would be nice to have that happen while I'm still alive and kickin'.

I'm thrilled when artist friends make it big, even if just for a while. That can mean sales or exhibitions. If they are honest artists, when the market moment moves on, as it nearly always does, they will just keep doing their work. The artists who crash are the ones who didn't have an honest relationship to their work in the first place. I know there are artists who make work specifically for a market, but that is very different than what I do. Most of us just go along doing what it is we do. Work grows out of work, and it goes where it goes.

One of the things that's been nice about this revisiting of the '70s is that there is more interest in my work from that period. The work is in exhibitions being written about. Now it needs to be placed in museum collections.

It's crucial that work by women artists be collected by museums. Somebody needs to take care of it, maintain it, show it, document it, write about it. If work is in a museum collection, then chances are it will be shown at some point and written about in a catalogue. If the work does not go into museums, it disappears historically, and unfortunately, sometimes physically as well. We cannot let work by women artists disappear. I think it's criminal that a museum didn't buy every piece in the "WACK!" exhibition for their permanent collection.

You know, I've always believed in what I call the big picture and the long haul. I feel my job is to make art, and the rest will eventually happen.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Things like a monograph or retrospective.

MS. HAMMOND: Yes, those things will happen – hopefully, sooner rather than later.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: On that note perhaps –

MS. HAMMOND: Thank you. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: -- thank you, Harmony. I think this was really --

MS. HAMMOND: I'm exhausted.

[They laugh.]

These were really great questions. I appreciate you being so informed, and when I was not knowing a date, you could fill me in.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: [Laughs.] It was a fantastic, fun time. It's going to be so helpful for the future. It really is.

MS. HAMMOND: Well, I'm sure that we'll both think of things we should have talked about but -

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: I know. But this is great. Again, a good start.

MS. HAMMOND: I want to just say that I'm thrilled that this interview will be available to those doing research, I get so many requests from women students working on papers or dissertations. I want to be there for them, but I don't have time to answer everyone's questions. It's really important to have interviews with and archives of artists, especially women artists, available to the public. [Laughs.]

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: Absolutely, absolutely. [Laughs.]

MS. HAMMOND: It needs to be out there, in the public record.

MS. BRYAN-WILSON: On that note, good-bye.

MS. HAMMOND: Good-bye.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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