

CLASS NOTES

HARMONY HAMMOND

Class hierarchies and heterosexuality are patriarchal institutions which divide women, give some women power over others, and destroy our strength. As a lesbian feminist artist, I am interested in examining the assumptions of class and heterosexuality in art, and the role of lesbian art as a potential catalyst for social change. This article will focus on the myth of art as classless, and how this myth functions to separate us from the reality of our lives and affects the way in which we see ourselves. Specifically, I want to discuss how we as lesbian artists need to defy this myth by developing class consciousness, and incorporating it in the development of lesbian art and culture.

THE MYTH

Fine art is a reflection of upper class interests, values,

romanticized as a chosen struggle of economic hardship necessary to produce art rather than as a product of the alienation of artists from society.

If art provides a way for us to perceive ourselves and the world around us, it seems necessary that we examine what is validated as art. An excellent example of an attempt to write social history through art was the exhibition "American Art," a collection belonging to John D. Rockefeller III, which was shown last fall at the Whitney Museum as our Bicentennial survey exhibition of American art. This collection contains one work by a woman artist, one work by a Black artist, and no work by Hispanic or Native American artists. The absence of work by women and Third World artists in this and most other collections and exhibitions, denies the experiences of most Americans. Not to see their experiences

Harmony Hammond: Who gets to be an Artist?

22 February 2017

Harmony Hammond first saw art as an escape from the pain that came with everyday life in lower middle class America. She found art as a place to confront her own feelings; she came out as a lesbian to herself through her art. As she tried to escape within the art community, she faced the way that her identity affected her art's perception. Her class, her gender, her sexuality, all affected her position in the art world differently.

Questions of who consumes art, and who is allowed to create it were issues that Hammond grappled with as a leader in the development of the feminist art movement. She cofounded A.I.R., the first women's cooperative art gallery and *Heresies: A Feminist Publication of Art and Politics*.

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Harmony Hammond's "Class Notes," published in *Heresies 3: Lesbian Art and Artists* in Fall, 1977

Hammond's feminist politics were a part of her writing, her communities and her art. Hammond had a "desire to break down the distinctions between painting and sculpture, between art and women's work, and between art in craft and craft in art." Her art, featured in over thirty solo shows, has always been abstract. In 1976, the LeMagna Gallery in New York City featured her woven paintings, which placed the narrative of women's creativity into the field of fine arts and painting.



Tenchinage. 1975, Oil and Dorlan's Wax on canvas, 11" x 24"

In the late 70s and early 80s, Harmony Hammond worked with wooden sculpture. She would create a wooden armature, wrap it tightly in cloth, and then paint it, and layer other materials. Her method was critical, tying together the classically undervalued weaving and knitting processes with fine art. The materials were also important. The cloth itself was a mix of gifts from friends and remnants from Manhattan's garment district sweat shops. By combining these fabrics in her art, Hammond tied together the experiences of her friends and female artists she never met. At still another level, these sculptures represented bodies. The wooden base as the muscle and latex rubber, or paint, surfaces as skin. The arrangement of the pieces themselves suggested their bodily nature. The piece below, *The Meeting of Passion and Intellect*, is both about lesbian identity and about relationships between entities (bodies or ideas).



The Meeting of Passion and Intellect, 1981

Harmony Hammond's commitment to meeting sculpture and painting has remained a staple of her work. In more recent years, she featured canvasses with holes, or orifices. In creating the pieces, Hammond layers paint, fabric, straps and grommets in a monochromatic work. The final piece represents layers and history that exist beneath the bodily orifices. Hammond tells us that ""It's about what's hidden, muffled, covered up or over, pushing up from underneath, asserting itself, suggesting agency and voice."



Harmony Hammond, Installation View, Alexander Gray Associates (2016)

Through the many years that Harmony Hammond has remained relevant, her method has remained at the core of her work. The issues of feminism, the body, and identity have run through much of the work that Hammond has done, and the lasting appeal of her work represents the chord that she has struck by concentrating on those topics.