

NYFAI

Interview: Faith Ringgold interviewed by Dena Muller

Date: Sunday, Nov. 25th, 2007

D.M. O.k. it's November 25<sup>th</sup> of 2007, we're at Faith Ringgold's studio in New Jersey, and conducting the oral history interview for the New York Feminist Art Institute. My name is Dena Muller interviewing Faith Ringgold. So, we're going to start just talking about the earliest history of the New York Feminist Art Institute. The gala to raise money to open the New York Feminist Art Institute was in March of 1979 and it was at the World Trade Center and the piece there by Louise Nevelson was being featured as part of the gala celebration and Louise was there.

F.R. An outdoor piece.

D.M. No, the indoor piece that was there (in lobby).

F.R. The indoor piece. Now I'm completely foggy on that one.

D.M. I raised it just to say do you remember the gala at all? You were involved in the New York Feminist Art Institute later, but do you remember the gala happening or do you remember hearing anything about it.

F.R. Well, I'll tell you, I've been in so many galas (laughter).

D.M. We just want to . . .

F.R. I remember there were lots of exciting things that happened. Most every week there was something, something to remember, something really historically moving that had to do with the feminist movement. And I know now that there is nothing. There is nothing.

D.M. (hesitate) Right.

F.R. I noticed you didn't say right, right away.

D.M. I didn't because The Feminist Art Project is trying so hard to address . . .

F.R. Feminist Art Project . . .

D.M. 30 years, 35 years later, address these questions and reevaluate what has changed from then to now, what new direction we should be going in.

F.R. Well, what's changed from then to now, that's a very interesting question. Why is it so different? Because there was something very exciting in the air and there were a lot of things going on. And we would just up and travel to something. It wasn't just what was going on in New York, I mean, we would just go.

D.M. Right.

F.R. Or take something somewhere else.

D.M. Right.

F.R. And now there just isn't that excitement and that movement in the air that used to be. Well, personally, I have come on a long journey since then. A long, long journey. And part of that journey had to do with the fact that I couldn't sell my art in New York. So I had to really get away from here. I had to go.

D.M. Well you had a retrospective at the Studio Museum in 1984 . . .

F.R. 1984. That was the first time since the 60s that I had shown in New York.

D.M. So what I'm seeing in the archival information about the New York Feminist Art Institute is that your involvement there was started in the early 80s. I brought up the gala just to see if you remembered it.

F.R. My involvement started in the early 80s.

D.M. Yeah, the school itself opened in the Fall of 1979, but the first record we have of your involvement is in the Fall of 1983. You saw the flyer before, that it was with support of the national endowment for the arts there was a visual artists exchange for emerging artists and it was a collaborative project. Do you recall . . . I interviewed recently an artist named Janet Goldner who was involved in this project. It was 24 artists broken into 4 groups of 6 who were given the duration of the workshop . . . several weeks . . . to work together to create an installation that resulted in an exhibition in the NYFAI space.

F.R. And I participated in that?

D.M. Right. As a resource person, not as an artist.

F.R. Oh, as a resource person, o.k.

D.M. Resource people we'll include in here as a list. Linda Bryant.

F.R. I wonder what happened to her? She had a lot of artists and was a kind of gallery person I think. Laura Ewing, Harmony Hammond . . . I just saw her recently.

D.M. Here or . . .

F.R. Harmony Hammond . . . just saw her . . .

D.M. Was it at the "Claiming Space" show?

F.R. No. Someplace where we had dinner and something. It will come to me later. I know where it was, GIA. It's an organization that helps artists to organize their legacies.

D.M. Hmm.

F.R. They've given 4 artists – I don't know how much money. That's a good question but we never asked that – x amount of money to hire an assistant. They also have devised a database and they're going to send me the database. But used to be at A.I.R.

D.M. That's true. I was there for seven years.

F.R. So you had a database right?

D.M. Mmhmm.

F.R. That you used. A lot of artists don't have those and they don't keep up with their art.

D.M. Track their own work.

F.R. . . . In the way that they should. So they have a database and the big thing is the artist's assistant that they pay for to really help them get it together. So there was this big conference in New Mexico, she lives there and she came. It was a 3 day conference, that's why I said that we had dinner.

D.M. GIA?

F.R. Yeah, GIA. You might want to get in touch with them. Or I might have them get in touch with you. They are doing some very interesting things with the artists. A number of people there are very much interested in older artists I guess for two reasons . . . 1 because they're not as much in line to get help and another one because they have a lot of work because they've done it over these long periods of time and so they are helping them put their legacies together, keep their work and find out what the hell you're going to do with it when you're not around anymore and all that. I would like to put together some salons in Harlem for some artists that I know who I'm sure need help.

D.M. Yeah. It's a very big question.

F.R. It's a huge issue.

D.M. Without the work being inventoried and without a plan for how it will be taken care of.

F.R. So this is what I was doing. So she's out there and May Stevens too. It's Harmony Hammond, May Stevens and me. We were all out there. Isn't that interesting. And May's husband, Rudolph Baranik died and she is trying to hook up something with her and him. Which is going to be a problem. I imagine a lot of women who have husbands who are artists . . .

D.M. Feel like they could somehow be collected together.

F.R. Feel like it could be a joint thing. Like Miriam Schapiro for instance.

D.M. And Paul just died.

F.R. Paul just died?

D.M. Yeah, I'm sorry to put that on tape. He just died two weeks ago, last Friday.

F.R. Oh, stop it. How could he have died two weeks ago when I just went somewhere with . . . she also had been. Maybe she thought I knew that he had died.

D.M. It was very recently, within the last week and a half.

F.R. Oh, well maybe.

D.M. I saw her at the "Claiming Space" show in Washington.

F.R. O.k. was he dead then?

D.M. No

F.R. Oh, o.k. I didn't go to the opening. I went the next day to the panel "Claiming Spaces."

D.M. With Carey Lovelace.

F.R. Yes, Carey Lovelace.

D.M. You were on the panel right?

F.R. I was on the panel.

D.M. I couldn't stay one more day, I'm sorry.

F.R. You couldn't?

D.M. I really wanted to.

F.R. Oh. Well you know the thrill was gone.

D.M. It was recorded right? Could I hear the content? I haven't talked to Carey about it yet.

F.R. I have CD with all the images from the show but, no, I don't know whether it was taped . . . but I'm afraid the thrill is gone. You know that song (starts singing). I mean, the thrill is gone.

D.M. Well, it is an interesting question. Like you just said to Nancy on the telephone, the need to do projects like this are important because it documents the history and makes sure that at least it is know that these things happened . . . and to catch the tone of it and the energy of it and the content of it as much as possible . . .

F.R. And . . .

D.M. It's true that they're all historicization projects right?

F.R. And that the young people that come along get the feeling that nothing has ever happened. And they also feel like . . . "Oh my god. Look what happened 30 years ago. Let's see if we can make our more exciting or even . . ."

D.M. At a time when the world was burning in a similar way.

F.R. That's right. All hell was breakin loose everywhere.

D.M. And it is again.

F.R. And it is again!

D.M. If we actually looked at it that way. If we weren't so blinded by . . .

F.R. If we were interested enough. I guess it's hard because at some point, you just can't keep going over these things and over these things for your whole life.

D.M. Mhmm. So Janet Goldner who was one of the artists in that project remembered that the artists who were listed here as the resource people came on occasion to their sessions to hear what they were working on, to give advice, to the shaping of the project. The goal was – I think 6 weeks or so workshop – that ended in an exhibition where each of the four groups installed an area of the gallery space with something that they had made together in this collaborative process. She said that her group made a boat. And she said that one of the other groups all made a lot of individual drawings that were then installed throughout the entire space that they had.

D.M. For what it was worth, it was extremely impactful on the people who did it.

F.R. You worked with Howardena Pindell.

D.M. Well I know her.

F.R. A.I.R. But you weren't even around in those days.

D.M. She was no longer a member by the time I was there but I've worked with her on A.I.R. projects about trying to connect the founding ideas of A.I.R. with the gallery today.

F.R. She's no longer with A.I.R.

D.M. No, just as an advisor on occasion when we ask for it. So the next listing I have is from a course that you taught called hand painting and decorating on cloth. So according

to the documentation from The Feminist Art Institute, you were a teacher in several different workshops. Do you remember the workshops that we see . . .

F.R. You're testing my memory.

D.M. I'm so sorry! That's the project. Hand painting and decorating on cloth. The school was in a couple different places downtown right? The location that you might remember is where Nancy's studio is now on Franklin Street.

F.R. How many people have you done this with so far?

D.M. Oh 15 or so.

F.R. Really? And who are they? (laughter)

D.M. Hold on I have my folder here. Miriam Schapiro was one.

F.R. Did she remember any of these things?

D.M. Actually not much at all that's true.

F.R. Ahh, I know she don't remember anything.

D.M. What's interesting about the project is that we are talking to people who were involved at all different levels . . . people who planned, who worked in the establishment of The New York Feminist Art Institute, raised money for it, developed the original administrative framing of it. It was Miriam Schapiro's idea.

F.R. Really?

D.M. . . . relocating from the West Coast to New York.

F.R. Oh right. Oh yes.

D.M. And enlisting Nancy as a young artist and a young administrator.

F.R. Oh I'm so sorry to hear her husband died!

D.M. I know I'm so sorry to tell you that in the interview.

F.R. She went home right away because when we got there, the next day, what's her name said . . . she's not here because she went home.

D.M. I saw her at the opening and I couldn't stay through to the next day. I went home the next morning.

F.R. Well she didn't either. She didn't either. So he died right after that?

D.M. I think within the next week. I heard in the last 2 days that he had died the Friday before.

F.R. And is she really very upset?

D.M. I don't know I haven't spoken to her but that she did want people to know. She wanted us to tell everyone that it came up with. So we've interviewed students, we've interviewed Judy Chiti who is a woman who was involved in fundraising for NYFAI and was involved administratively in the beginning; Nancy of course who was the administrator for the 10 years of the school; a couple students; a couple teachers; Melissa Meyer is an artist who was also a teacher; Joan Arbeiter was a student and a writer; Rhonda Schaller who is a student and was one of the founders of Ceres Gallery. She has another gallery project now. I haven't talked to May Stevens yet and . .

F.R. You haven't. Well she was at this GIA thing.

D.M. Right. It might be a similar process to remember . . . and I understand that. So many of you were so involved in so many different aspects.

F.R. Oh my god. So many and it's been a long time. You're saying it was an 80s thing, huh.

D.M. The gala was at the World Trade Center in 1979 and the school opened that Fall. It ended up in the space that is Nancy's current studio on Franklin Street, 91 Franklin, but there was . . .

F.R. Is she still there? Well what I remember about that time . . . (reading pamphlet) Mass reading and slide showing and being my own woman, an autobiography of a life of ideas and the artists they resemble . . .

D.M. The first address that's listed is 325 Spring Street and I think that that was a location that was all the way on the river. But that was right away in 80.

F.R. You know something? Irene Peslikas, I don't think she's around anymore.

D.M. So I heard you telling Nancy on the phone about the Over 100 Pound Weight Loss story.

F.R. Yes.

D.M. You performed that at an open house. Can you describe that project and that performance?

F.R. Oh, I've done it many times. I just didn't know I did it there because I've done it all over the country. Oh, I've done it a lot.

D.M. Well you did. On September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1986.

F.R. September 27<sup>th</sup> of 1986 I did that?

D.M. Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1986 from 2:30 to 6:00 you were the guest of honor performing the Over 100 Pound Weight Loss story at NYFAI.

F.R. O.k. 1986 was when it started. I did that performance until 1990.

D.M. O.k.

F.R. . . . until I went to Europe in 1990. I wrote my first children's book "Tar Beach." I mean I didn't write it, I had . . . I had written the story but I had illustrated it and published my first children's book in 1990. I gave the illustrations to the publisher, went to Europe to do the French collection, stayed there for four or five months doing that. I mean I came home some but I was over there mostly and that's what stopped me from doing this performance because I wasn't here. I came home one time to fulfill an engagement in some part of Texas and then I couldn't keep doing that.

D.M. So what was the performance?

F.R. The performance was . . . I had a drummer and I told the story of my weight loss. I can show you pictures of it. I showed the images . . . I showed myself from when I was born in 1930, the 30s, the 40s, I made collages you know? The 30s, the 40s, the 50s, the 60s, the 70s, the 80s, and then to 86 and I showed pictures of myself and what I was doing. I had this little thing I would be reading and half singing, half reading, half chanting and I'd get the audience to get up and they would also chant this song with me.

Because I think you are so very nice,  
I want to offer you some good advice.  
Now you may be rich, you may be poor,  
living high on the hog, stretched out on the floor,  
You may be a professor with knowledge to burn or  
Just a young kid with a lot to learn,  
You may be black, white, red, yellow or in between  
You may be nice or a little mean,  
But if you follow this simple phrase, you'll be a win for the rest of your days,  
I can change, I can do it, I can change, I can do it, I can change, I can do it now!

And I'd have the whole audience.

D.M. Did you have the whole audience chant that with you?

F.R. Yes.

D.M. I heard you do that just recently at that fundraiser for . . . the event for that foundation.

F.R. The fundraiser . . . Yes, I'm still doing it!

D.M. How do you like that.

F.R. Funny, funny.

D.M. Because everyone was wanting to celebrate your birthday and you had us do that chant with you.

F.R. Yeah, so it's part of having performances, I made masks. This was my first performance without a mask.

D.M. And what were you wearing something else?

F.R. Yes, I wore this coat that was made of the images that are also in the quilt. We have to get images of all of this, there's talking but you need something you can see.

D.M. You were wearing the coat. . .

F.R. Yeah.

D.M. With the images of yourself throughout your life.

F.R. Right.

D.M. Was there a piece of it that was actually demonstrating the loss of weight?

F.R. No. No, you're just seeing me as I looked. I was never fat when I was a kid. I was a little skinny kid. I was a skinny kid and then as a teenager I gained a little weight but, I mean, my big weight was gained when I married my second husband. And I talk about that. Yeah, it was the second one. I just never had a real big weight problem when I was a kid so . . . I definitely was not fat. But I said if you put all your pictures together from each decade you can tell a lot about your life . . . who you were with, what you were doing, what you looked like, the whole thing. I used to model for my mother in her fashion shows. So then I just talk about how you just have to keep at it. You can't stop. You just do it till it works for you. Any kind of thing that you have like drugs or alcohol or any of that . . . just keep trying. The next year I did "change II" and then I made up some songs that went with that and I did up to "change III." And "change III" was, oh I

can show you “change III.” “Change III,” I showed at various stages of weight loss and gain.

D.M. I thought I overheard you just saying to Nancy though that there was a part of the performance where you had weights of some sort that you would drop off during the performance.

F.R. Yeah. I had two liter bottles of water and because I would travel to do these performances, I couldn’t take weights with me. So everybody has two liter bottles, empty bottles, so they were supplying these two liter bottles . . . this has . . . .

D.M. What are you showing me?

F.R. I’m showing you . . . . Here, here I am pulling the bottles.

D.M. And what’s the book that you’re showing me? I’m just getting you to say it on tape.

F.R. “We Flew Over the Bridge, The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold.” And here is the “Change” song 1930s “Mama Made Me Do It,” (starts singing)

D.M. For the “Change” song

F.R. And all this, look, see, here I am. See what I’m wearing . . . see, look at that. This is all change. The worst thing about being fat was squeezing through the subway turnstile sideways, hobbling down the stairs panting and blowing while some bewildered passenger holds the door open for me and then to have two people get up to give me one seat. “I just got to change, I just got to change, I just got to change, I can’t stand the pain, it’s like a fire in my brain, everyday it’s the same, never mind who’s to blame. It’s me that’s got to change, eatin all that food is so insane. I just got to change, I just got to change, I just got to change.” I did all that stuff. There’s more, “Change III”

D.M. So the performance that you did at NYFAI used the two liter bottles. I found this that was written in August of 2005. It’s the history that I already said to you . . . [reading from pamphlet] The New York Feminist Art Institute was founded in 1979 after more than 2 years of discussion with the art community . . .

D.M. O.k. so this says . . . [reading from pamphlet] The New York Feminist Art Institute was founded in 1979 and after more that 2 years of discussion with the art community with a grant from the joint foundation and matching funds, NYFAI was inaugurated at a large benefit at the World Trade Center in March of 1979. Louise Nevelson was the guest of honor celebrating her commissioned wall sculpture that had been installed in the lobby

of the World Trade Center 1. The founding members were Nancy Azara, Lucille Lessane, Miriam Schapiro, Carol Stronghilos, Irene Peslikas and Selena Whitefeather.” Later it says . . . instructors at NYFAI over the years were: Harmony Hammond, Louise Fishman, Miriam Schapiro, Elke Solomon, Judy Chicago, etc., etc., down to Faith Ringgold.

F.R. Have you talked to Judy Chicago?

D.M. Not for this project, No. So when you performed the 100 pound weight loss, at NYFAI in 1986, it was early in the life of that project. And you’re saying . . .

F.R. Of course because the first one was ’86.

D.M. By the time that you . . .

F.R. The first one was ’86. I think this is . . . maybe this is the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> in this book. And then this is the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

D.M. In 1991.

F.R. Right.

D.M. So is there something generally that you can say. I know it’s hard to remember specifically the performances that happened at NYFAI but what did you get out of having multiple audiences in different settings for that performance? How did it help you to develop the project?

F.R. Everybody loved it. Everybody loved it, the people loved getting up in the audience and singing and chanting that chant with me. They liked the idea that I had a drummer with me. I had a drummer, a woman drummer . . . Joan . . . I can’t remember her last name. It was very big but it was the kind of thing that I had to keep going with. And I just couldn’t because I wasn’t here. I was abroad.

D.M. Did you usually perform it in feminist contexts or did you perform it in a lot of different contexts. Were they usually audiences of women or were they mixed audiences.

F.R. You know, that’s an interesting question because I’m beginning to think that most of the audiences that I’ve performed with have been . . . they may have been feminists but they were not involved in feminist programming.

D.M. O.k.

F.R. Yes, because that would probably be the interest in having me. But I don’t think it has been feminist programming or whatever that has invited me to come in different places. I think it’s been women and men . . . it’s always somebody who beats the drum

for you. When you get there, you find out who that person was. You gotta have Faith Ringgold here . . . bada . . . dada . . . da. It's that one person. I have not had that kind of support from the feminist art world. Not that they have that support to give. Because it's claiming spaces, it's probably the most . . .

D.M. I know they struggled for resources for that.

F.R. It's probably the most correct kind of art exhibit of all these different groups . . . would you say that?

D.M. Yes.

F.R. And then they don't have the money.

D.M. It should have been on all 3 floors. It should have been massive on all 3 floors and I'm sure that's what they wanted. I know that's what they wanted.

F.R. Of course that's what they wanted but . . .

D.M. The resources are so . . .

F.R. At least they were truthful to the times.

D.M. Yeah.

F.R. I think it's just awful that so many of those women were not included in some of the other feminist shows in an attempt to bring back the times. You know, to bring the history back. It's very difficult for oppressed people to understand that the history is important and it has to be preserved. If it isn't you're going to end up repeating it.

D.M. Right.

F.R. And that's what's happening with the women. I can see this.

D.M. So that's why I'm going to keep pulling you back to the New York Feminist Art Institute.

F.R. Yes! You go . . . bringing me back to the Feminist Art Institute.

D.M. That's what we're trying to do . . . remember as much as we possibly can about it. All right. So that's probably all we can say about "The 100 pound weight loss" story huh?

F.R. Yes.

D.M. What I was trying to get at in that earlier question is if you remember there being a difference between presenting it to an all woman audience or an audience of other artists and other women, because likely the audience at NYFAI, at an open house at NYFAI was

women who were coming to take the courses, women who were interested in participating in the school. Do you remember over the years of doing that performance if there was a different energy around doing that performance with a group of women in a feminist context than in other places that you performed it?

F.R. You see, I never had the option to say I'm only going to perform for a feminist audience. I never had that.

D.M. It's what would have come to you at NYFAI though.

F.R. Well at NYFAI I would get it, but I can't just do NYFAI. I've got to do some other people. And like I told you, I had to get out of New York because I couldn't show my work here. I had no gallery. I was told by somebody at A.I.R. - that's your place right? -

D.M. I wasn't there.

F.R. I knew you weren't. But somebody who was something over there said to me . . . this is what they said . . . "oh, you should do work like Howardena Pindell.

D.M. Uh, oh.

F.R. She is so wonderful and you

D.M. Because she's the other black woman we know?

F.R. Yes. She's the other black woman and she does, you know, work like us.

D.M. Mmm, like us.

F.R. And, if you did work like that, then you could belong to A.I.R.

D.M. This is somehow in conversation with modernism and abstraction.

F.R..Yeah, if you would stop doing all that political art . . . .

D.M. But Howardena was doing a lot of political art in the beginning it seemed. She did that one video piece that was "Free, White and 21"

F.R. When did she do that?

D.M. Early at A.I.R.

F.R. When did she come into A.I.R.?

D.M. She was a founder so '71, she was there in the beginning. And there was a performance that she did that in some ways - - - like in conversation with some of the work that Adrian Piper was doing - - - sort of analyzing race in a video performance. But I know what you mean about her later work.

F.R. Well, the point is . . . you don't know what I was doing. I was doing highly political work and she was not doing that at all. No, no, no, no, no.

D.M. And it's just so frustrating that everyone sees it in such limited terms. There are so few artists of color getting recognition that you're supposed to be doing mimicry of the ones that are known already.

F.R. Oh, well I didn't pay any attention to that.

D.M. That happens to people of color, that happens to women all the time.

F.R. Yeah but I don't let people tell me what to do. I never did . . .

D.M. Well, and that's why you're where you are today, right?

F.R. . . . no, no, no, no, no. But I'll never forget hearing that. You should be doing this and this and this and this. But what I did . . . .

D.M. Don't you think so many artists can tell that story of being told to make work in a certain way to fit into a niche?

F.R. I really don't know. I haven't heard anybody say that to me. But that made me understand, I have to go where my audience is. I have an audience, it's just not here. And so that's why I had to travel all over the country. In my mind, it's really on college campuses, colleges and universities who had beautiful galleries and wonderful museums back then. Now that since too has changed. Today, cuz I tell artists all the time, if you can't make it in New York, travel around the country. You can find an audience there. But I think today, they want a packaged show, so they go to a museum. And of the galleries, they get a package show. But in those days, I packaged my own show.

D.M. Right.

F.R. And they like that. And it was easy to ship. All of that was just wonderful. So I got the hell out of here and went there as the women's movement was dying.

D.M. Here.

F.R. Yes here!

D.M. Everywhere maybe.

F.R. Yeah everywhere maybe. So that was interesting but you gotta understand that aspect of me, of what I'm telling you.

D.M. I do understand.

F.R. I had to keep my mind . . .

D.M. On going to where your natural audience was.

F.R. I am SO glad I did that. It kept me working, it kept me involved, and it gave me an audience all over the country. And whoever is in Cedar Falls, Idaho last year is in New York this year. So I mean people move. They don't just stay out there. Things began to open up for me here with the Studio Museum.

D.M. Do you think that in the mid-80s on that you were more in New York than you had been before that? After the Studio Museum show . . . because it looks like for several years in a row you taught workshops pretty much every year.

F.R. Yes. You know why? Because after the Studio Museum show I joined Bernice Steinbaum's gallery.

D.M. Ah huh.

F.R. New York City right?

D.M. Right.

F.R. And what she needed to do was to see me . . .

D.M. Active in New York.

F.R. Active in New York! She's says, I've known about you for years but, you know, where is she? So the Studio Museum in Harlem really opened a door for me and gave me an entree to return to New York. But I'm glad I wasn't just sitting there waiting and that I was able to continue to move. I still travel all over the country. I've been doing it now since then, so I still go but I can also do things here. It just opened up doors for me in a really wonderful way.

D.M. Exactly.

F.R. And I think about that because I wonder what . . . it would have been nice if you would have been at one of the black panels or . . . (?)

D.M. I'm sorry.

F.R. But the day before the opening day I was in Abbington, New York at Penn State University. I did a lecture there and I wanted to leave there and come straight but I couldn't get anybody's cooperation.

D.M. Big. A big triangle to do from New York.

F.R. But the point is, it passed away.

D.M. You were halfway there.

F.R. I was halfway there. I was halfway there, but Grace couldn't get anybody to figure it out. And they sent a car, you see, they sent a limo for me here. They just wanted to do theirs, the hell with all this other stuff. So they send a limo for me and they got me there and then they wanted to bring me back. We were trying to get them to take me there. Instead of bringing me back, take me there. And they just never wanted to get it, so. I figure what the hell, I'll go back home and then get up early and get on a plane and go.

D.M. Can't do everything.

F.R. No, so I said o.k. I can't do everything.

D.M. And I was there for Art Table but had to get back on . . .

F.R. Art Table had something there?

D.M. They have a strong chapter there so I was actually there for – it was actually during an exhibition which was sort of Art Table related the day before in Arlington, VA – And then I had a meeting in the morning with the chapter and had to get back to New York that day.

F.R. Now what was everybody's life here in New York during that period . . . all the other feminist women.

D.M. In the 80s.

F.R. I have no idea.

D.M. One of the reasons that I am so interested in learning more about the New York Feminist Art Institute and trying to get the history documented from all these different angles is that from my mind there is a really interesting convergence of what is grossly simplified as sort of an East Coast, West Coast approach to feminist activity. If you look at Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago on the West Coast and the feminist art program at Cal Arts and Woman House and Woman Space and these kind of projects, it was very much from having that dialogue about feminine aesthetic and feminist process in the studio and craft and art and breaking down all those barriers and all of that conversation going on. Meanwhile, A.I.R. Gallery and Soho20 and projects going on in New York were doing what you just said. Can you make work that speaks to the market in New York? Make work that looks like the work looks here? And women are pooling their resources just to create an approach to the art market or to open up opportunities for

women artists in this context. And they weren't having a very open dialogue about feminine aesthetic or feminist process. Some of the artists were . . .

F.R. Where, where?

D.M. At A.I.R. for example, that's what I know the best. Some of the artists were making feminist work obviously . . . Harmony Hammond . . . or Nancy Spero's work was so political . . . some of them were making feminist work, but some not and really just about a group of feminists who are artists creating a collective to try to change the art world, to create access to the art world. NYFAI because it was both feminist practice, feminine aesthetic, spirituality and all these things entangled in making art combined with being in New York, in Soho and with a gallery component sort of brought these two pieces together. Ceres Gallery is the outcome of NYFAI. I think it's interesting that it happened at all. It is interesting that it was Miriam Schapiro relocating from the West Coast to the East Coast, and wanting to do a similar project or bring that dialogue here and that a lot of the people who took the courses and participated were people who were building successful commercial careers and putting all the pieces together like that. And it was a relatively short-lived project, 10 yrs. or so.

F.R. We didn't know we were doing that.

D.M. And it happened right at this time that you're asking about . . . as an outcome of this fervent flush of activity in the 70s.

F.R. There was a demand for what I was doing, not here in New York but on college campuses all over the country. Because they were teaching about Feminism, they were teaching about the Civil Right's movement, they were teaching about what was going on in the world politically and I . . .

D.M. And teaching it through biography, right?

F.R. Yes, and they were not interested in the commercial aspect of the art, they were interested in art that could inspire and make points about politics and social . . .

D.M. And be educational.

F.R. So I had all of that. And I could speak, I was also a good speaker. So I could go. I could do a lecture, give them a show and they'd pay me so I quit my job. No, I quit my job earlier. I quit my job in 1973.

D.M. And what job was that?

F.R. Teaching, I was teaching in the New York public schools.

D.M. Oh wow. Boy were they lucky.

F.R. What?

D.M. To have you. Do you know any of those students today? Do they say Faith Ringgold was my teacher?

F.R. Yeah! They come to me. I taught there for 18 and 1/2 years before I left.

D.M. Wow. And taught all subjects . . . or just art?

F.R. No, just art. Oh, I was wonderful. I taught all the age levels from pre-kindergarten to high-school. I had a high-school license. In 1970, my daughter finished high-school and decided - - you know, because the kids then were saying . . . “Oh we don’t know whether we want to go to college. Who wants to go to college. Why don’t we just turn on and turn out . . . or whatever that shit is they were saying. And we’re not sure it matters, whether it’s important and this . . . and there were guys who were traveling around on campuses telling the kids . . . “don’t go, don’t be here . . . you shouldn’t be here” and so on, and so on. So college campuses were hot! I knew what was going on. I knew a lot of those kids had dropped out of school, when I would get there they would say to me . . . “Would you just have a conference with some kids . . . go over to the student building and there’s a group of kids waiting for you over there and they’d like to talk to you. And I would hear all these stories about . . . “I’m, I’m leavin here. I’m wastin my time in school.”

D.M. And that was in . . .

F.R. I started in ’72.

D.M. The mid to late 70s while you were here. Well, yeah.

F.R. And I would see these kids, and some of them were black kids and these other kids had raised hell to open up the doors to get them into these schools. Now they’re talking about . . . they don’t want to be there? I said, well if my kids think they’re going to do that to me, they’ve got another thing coming. Michelle (Faith Ringgold’s daughter) told me she didn’t think she really wanted to go to college at all and if she did, she wanted to go with the ”grassroots.”. Because I had sent them to private school, both of my two daughters . . . public schools were terrible.

D.M. Right. Where’d they go?

F.R. The kids couldn't read. And I knew they were bad because I taught in them, o.k., only I taught art. So I didn't want them there and they weren't there. But I didn't expect them to tell me later that they were going to do what these little rich white kids were doing which was tune off on school. No. No, I didn't send you there for that. So, I thought you wanted to go to an Ivy League School like Harvard or Yale . . . but I find out you don't want to go there. [Said in voice of daughter] Oh, well I wouldn't want to go there anyway I want to go – you know – to the grass roots. [whispering] and I said o.k. When Bertie came home from work and I told him that story he cried.

D.M. He cried?

F.R. The tears came out of his eyes. He was hurt to his soul. He couldn't believe . . . you know it's like when you see a kid doing something that you know they're going to regret . . . you know it, you just know it . . . and you're saying, oh, how can I talk to this kid.

D.M. And it's the human condition to have the miscommunication between the generations. It's like how do you get through that moment?

F.R. How do you get through . . . because they were so powerful. Kids were powerful in those day. They were just powerful! Everybody would say, well let's ask the young people. What are the young people saying? Let's not make a statement until we find out where the young people are coming from. And so she just thought she had all the information. Bobby Seal had told her, this one, that one. And then the other little one (Faith Ringgold's 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter) was coming up right behind her so I said well what about you Barbara, what do you think? She says, I don't know, you know, don't ask me. She didn't want to talk about it. I said, these kids don't get it. They don't understand. The only reason that I am working is so that I can make sure that they go to Harvard, Princeton, Yale, if they want to go there.

D.M. Right.

F.R. . . . If they want to go there. But if they don't want to go there . . . I've been talking to these, Harvard, Princeton, Yale kids who are dropping out. They're not going to drop out on me . . . cuz' I've got something I want to do and I think what I want to do . . . I'm going to quit my job . . . because I don't need to work. I've got a husband that works. I don't need to work. I can do my traveling. That's enough money for me.

D.M. Well, and that is work.

F.R. Well, but you know what I mean. I don't need to go on a job.

D.M. I just meant that you were doing the work that was more pressing, more calling, more about developing your career.

F.R. I do not need to go get a pay check from a steady person because I can make enough money lecturing. It's not sure, but I don't have to have sure money because I have someone who has sure money. So I can quit my job.

D.M. And you did it.

F.R. I love it. I love it.

D.M. So I'm going to do it again. Back to NYFAI, that freed you up to be able to teach . .

F.R. Let me end the story. Let me end the story. The kids were pretty bright. They didn't miss a step. Nobody missed a semester out of school. They immediately got themselves together and enrolled in a public school in New York like City College which is where I went which was fabulous.

D.M. Well there you go.

F.R. So it was wonderful. But today if you ask her, she would say that she wishes that she had gone to Harvard.

D.M. Had pushed herself.

F.R. No, she wishes that she had, had that opportunity because it's different. City College is a good school but it's not what she was set up to do.

D.M. My son started kindergarten this year and they're talking about it already. I mean we are, about what opportunities we're trying to create for him. So I understand what you're saying.

F.R. Yeah, school is big. They had fabulous schools they went to. And that was not what City College was, if you understand, the cultural aspect is missing. Michelle studied African sculpture one year at New Lincoln school and they didn't have anybody there teaching it. They went and hired somebody for one kid. Anyway, she has a PhD. and she's fine and the other one has 4 Masters Degrees so they figured it out. And I didn't have to pay for it! Isn't that fabulous?

D.M. Yes.

F.R. I love it.

D.M. And you not having a full-time job meant that you were free to take on individual teaching commitments and things that you were interested in.

F.R. Right.

D.M. So here's one other thing that there's a lot of documentation about, and that's the sculpture. This looks like a kit for making your family as a doll.

F.R. Yes, a doll kit. I had all these ideas and I would travel around and do them.

D.M. Here's one that says . . . "Familial images, quilted story dolls." It was a workshop that you taught, one session Saturday, November 7<sup>th</sup> – I'm not sure what year because it's not marked on this page. This was when they had moved to the West Street space when it was way over on the river.

F.R. And I did this there with them too?

D.M. Yes. [continues to read from flyer] . . . "bring your family stories and images to share and create a quilted story doll. We will tell stories of people in our lives while creating doll images from characters in our stories in quilted form. You'll go home with a mini quilt of someone you know. So it looks like on several different occasions – and that's related to the hand-painting and decorating on cloth - That was an earlier version of that workshop you taught. . . . from textile, paint, appliqué, stenciling, grommets, nail heads, rhinestones, to make a cloth you can hang or wear . . . that was in 1984.

[continuing to read] Soft sculpture – I don't have the date on that one. Do you remember the framing of that kind of workshop . . . why you chose to teach that kind of workshop?

F.R. I was always very interested in doing things with the community. I've always been very interested in dolls because they are positive images made for children, mostly. And, you may not be aware of this but African American dolls have had a shaky history. As a matter of fact a lot of African Americans - when I was a kid – used to give their kid white dolls as opposed to black because you have to find a doll that is a positive image of yourself. Whereas there are a number of African dolls - - - the development of the African doll is fabulous. But the African American is not. It is probably better now because there are a lot of people who make dolls. So that's why I was so excited about African American dolls.

D.M. Is that what was at the core of it . . . was giving people an opportunity to make a doll that would actually reflect on themselves?

F.R. Yes.

D.M. . . . Their own sense of self and their own sense of family rather than buying these plastic molded faces . . .

F.R. Well, no, I'm not trying to count them out, I'm just simply saying that the doll comes from the need to develop a positive self-image that begins when a child is small. Every group of people has their doll. . . . Every group of people has their doll . . . unless it's a group with a shaky self-image. If it's a shaky self-image than they don't know what it's supposed to be. With the black people, it's supposed to be light, it's supposed to be dark, it's supposed to have this kind of hair, that kind of thing. In the 60s, we got it kind of straightened out so that people figured out what you're supposed to look like. You're supposed to look like me, whatever I look like. So you don't have to go around doing all of that.

D.M. In the mid-70s in Madison, Wisconsin, I had a black baby doll. White parents started buying black baby dolls for their children to try to get them to think broadly.

F.R. A lot of black people bought their children white dolls and I never understood why that was because there were black dolls. We always had African American dolls. I never had a white doll in my life until I became an adult and could buy my own doll. Then I would buy anything I wanted. But as a child, I always had African American dolls . . . so they made them. But there were a number of black people who bought white dolls . . . I never understood that exactly.

D.M. Do you remember anything about someone who had a really good experience with this workshop?

F.R. Let me tell you what I remember about this workshop. This workshop – and I'm so surprised by all the dolls. I made all of those. I thought this would be so wonderful. People really don't want to do their own doll. First of all, they want a doll that does something . . . it should cry, it should move, it should do something.

D.M. Sing when you squeeze it . . .

F.R. Something . . . something. And then the next thing is, they really don't want to make it. If they could make it just by making one stitch, then fine . . . but if you're going to tell me I've got to paint, . . . it comes on as cloth, it's all cut-out . . . it's too much, I don't

want to do all of that. I want to do much less. I don't even see why I have to do anything. You should make it and give it to me, or sell it to me, whatever.

D.M. That was the reaction people gave you?

F.R. That's right.

D.M. And you taught the workshop in several contexts, right?

F.R. I taught the workshop, I tried to sell the dolls, I tried to encourage other people to do the workshops. That's what I came away with.

D.M. Hmmm. Do you still have these kits?

F.R. I might have some. I probably do, yes.

D.M. Interesting. It says copyrighted in 1981.

F.R. My mother died in '81. It was the last thing I did with her.

D.M. Was make these kits?

F.R. Yeah. The last project that we had.

D.M. Do you remember, the kit says . . . "featuring a family of dolls 1you can make: 18" high mommy, 18" high daddy, little brother 15" and little sister 13.5." Each Ringgold doll kit contains front and back patterns, printed in detail on unbleached muslin. A box of 15 non-toxic pastel dye sticks made permanent by ironing. If you can color a child's coloring book and use a needle and thread, you can make a Ringgold doll.

F.R. But they didn't want to do it.

D.M. They didn't want to do it.

F.R. They do NOT want to do it.

D.M. We have to find somebody who took that workshop at NYFAI to find out what they did with their doll.

F.R. Well at NYFAI it would be different.

D.M. You think so?

F.R. Yeah, at NYFAI it would be different because people coming there would be interested in art from the beginning. But, we were trying to spread that around and get it to attract more people and it was just . . . people don't want kits, they want the thing done.

D.M. Look at this one. You put the two ideas together. It's called "Alter Image Weight Loss, Dollmaking" with Faith Ringgold, again we're not sure what year. It was the same

year there was a benefit. The year according to . . . and Arlene Raven, and Lowery Sims presented at a benefit for NYFAI, but that year you taught a workshop called “Alter Image, Weight Loss, Dollmaking” and it says . . . “Got a weight problem? I do but I’ve lost 88 pounds in 4 months, 40 more to go. Create an alter image 30 or more pounds lighter. Let’s talk about it while we make some fat artists’ dolls.

F.R. That sounds cute.

D.M. 35 dollars. And then the description here now makes the reference to Bernice Steinbaum. [Reading] Her next New York City exhibit will be at the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery opening on January 10, 1987.

F.R. Do you know Bernice?

D.M. I might have met her. She’s in Florida right? I think I’ll see her, I’m going down for Miami Basel.

F.R. Oh, my, Miami Basel, a lot of people are going.

D.M. So I think I will see her again when I do that. So this must have been 1986. So what about that? Do you remember anything about putting weight loss and the dolls together?

F.R. No. That I don’t know anything about.

D.M. You know, one of the things that must be hard about remembering these workshops is that they were only a one time thing. It said, Saturday, November 15<sup>th</sup> from 11 to 5. So it was a long section on one day and not something that you taught for a semester.

F.R. No.

D.M. So that would be interesting to see if we could find any course work things from who took the course. . . . attendance listings from who took the workshops and see if we could talk to anyone about how they felt about it . . .

F.R. But I have a distinct memory that people wanted it done. The people who are interested in their ability to create an original form of something are doing it. They’re already doing this. They don’t need a kit from you. They’re doing that. That’s what I got.

D.M. The last one that we have documentation of is “The Once Upon a Time” performance workshop by Faith Ringgold, Saturday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1985.

F.R. Once upon a what?

D.M. It was either 1984 or 1985, “The Once Upon a Time” performance workshop. And the description says: “ Participants will perform their own original story starting with

“Once Upon a Time,” using autobiography, fantasy or fiction as content and mime or words as form. The workshop will begin with a performance by Ringgold from her new series “Once Upon a Time,” participants will then discuss the performance and devise their own. They will evolve a story out of a play with props and costumes and are encouraged to invite friends to view the resulting performances at 3 pm. This was a day long workshop from 10 am to 5 pm.

F.R. That is very interesting. I don’t have anything on that. Now, all my performance are well documented but I don’t remember “Once Upon a Time.”

D.M. “Once Upon a Time,” says that the workshop started with you performing . . . [reading] The workshop will begin with a performance by Ringgold from her new series “Once Upon a Time.”

F.R. I have all my performances documented but the “Once Upon a Time” . . . I must have changed the name. I changed the name.

D.M. Does the description seem familiar, using autobiography, fantasy, fiction for content?

F.R. Oh yeah. That sounds fine but the title.

D.M. It started in ’84 or ’85.

F.R. The title is not the same.

D.M. I think it’s June of ’85.

F.R. But I did performances right straight through to the 90’s.

D.M. And they probably weren’t videotaping or documenting at NYFAI in that way right?

F.R. Oh, I have videos for days. No, I don’t know. I just don’t remember that title. That title sounds foreign to me. “Once Upon a Time . . . “ The “Bitter Nest” if you said . . . Oh, I probably did the “Bitter Nest.” Yeah, I remember doing the “Bitter Nest” there.

D.M. The “Bitter Nest” was an autobiographical performance?

F.R. The “Bitter Nest” was not autobiographical for me. I made it up. It was about this family in the Harlem Renaissance and it’s what happened to them, what they did. I wear this mask and interact with the audience. That’s probably what that’s about. Those paintings that are in my living room [referencing adjacent room] with the raffia hanging over the side of them . . . I just put those on the face and then I would wear a mask that

sat on top of my head with raffia coming down over my head so that you could not see my eyes. But I could see to read set and I would do this performance wearing this high mask that sat on top of my head.

D.M. Did you use that format in other contexts where you had students prepare performances in a class context and prepare it for the . . .

F.R. Yeah probably, because I was fascinated with mask wearing. Because when you do a performance and you're wearing a mask the audience is captivated because they're not seeing a change in you're demeanor, they're just relating to the face up there. . . . Oh, I can show you one of those right now.

D.M. Did you have students make their own masks?

F.R. Yeah. I'm sure I did.

D.M. Did that go better than the dolls? We're people responsive to it in making their own?

F.R. Well, maybe no. Well there was no kit involved, that's for sure. You see this is a helmet mask [referencing mask she is holding] and it sits on top of your head.

D.M. Right. And the raffia hangs down over your face.

F.R. Right. [showing images of mask]

D.M. Huh. Amazing . . . with braids and all.

F.R. And, I liked this no face doll. No face mask because usually African masks have very distinct . . .

D.M. Have really strong expressions.

F.R. Strong eyes, nose and mouth. But here, I wanted to make one that did not have that and people would still look up. Once I had this on my head they don't look through the raffia because my eyes would be in here but they don't look there, they look up here, because whatever is on top, that's where they're looking. Fascinating.

D.M. Right. This is going to sound like a trite comparison, I'm sure, but have you ever seen or heard about Julie Taymor's the Lion King?

F.R. Yeah.

D.M. Because her set, her puppetry, the masks and puppets that are the costuming for that show are so amazing.

F.R. Oh they are.

D.M. And it is exactly that same process where you find yourself watching the dancer and then watching the puppet that they're controlling and your energy shifts back and forth between the mask and the performer.

F.R. Oh, it's just magic. It's very powerful. So this is one of them [referencing image of mask] I had many, many, many, many masks. I have a number of them here but many of them are at ACA, my dealer.

D.M. Well, Nancy gave me this list. The last time we talked she said - - we already went over your being a guest of honor at open houses at NYFAI, we already went over you being a teacher of workshops there, we talked about you being a resource person for the NEA sponsored collaborative projects. She mentioned that you also curated exhibitions during that time that sometimes included NYFAI students or people that were also teaching at NYFAI. Is there anything that you remember about curatorial . .

F.R. Oh my god, I did a lot of stuff didn't I? I did a lot of things didn't I!?!?

D.M. Of course you did.

F.R. Good for me.

D.M. She talked about an exhibition at P.S.1 in the 80s.

F.R. Yes. There was an exhibition at P.S.1 called . . . .

D.M. Who was in the show? What was it about?

F.R. A lot of people that I knew of course.

D.M. I think that's what Nancy was thinking about is that they were also people that were teaching at NYFAI maybe.

F.R. I was just looking at some pictures of it recently. By that time I was teaching out at UCSD. By 1984, I went out there. It's right on the tip of my tongue. . . the name of that show.

D.M. What was it about?

F.R. It was some kind of biographical thing.

D.M. Like artists' whose work is biographical.

F.R. No, they had to make up something biographical and . . . I'll get it for you. I can't remember it right now.

D.M. I think that Nancy was thinking that the nature of the exhibition, the work that was in it in some way overlapped with the kind of workshop that you were doing at NYFAI

and the way that your presence as an advisor and a person who was helping shape curriculum there was putting . . .

F.R. And I think it did. I'll remember it, I just can't remember it right now.

D.M. One thing we didn't talk about – and you showed it to me when we first walked in – but Nancy also mentioned about you being a student in her course that she called: “Art in the Unconscious.” She said it was focused on meditation and using sculpture to make shamans and altar pieces. Can you talk about – I see the pieces here that you brought out – Do you remember anything about that course.

F.R. Yeah, that was great. We had a lot of fun with that.

D.M. What was the structure of the course?

F.R. As you see, I have continued to do those things. This is something that I did for another show, for another group of women in the 90s, but this I did with Nancy. These two pieces on the end [point to art piece made in Nancy Azara's class “Art in the Unconscious”]

D.M. What's the tall piece? We should describe it for the tape.

F.R. Well it's like several photographic images of myself using sequins and fabrics and feathers and beads and soft sculptural parts. One of them hangs from the wall and the other one stands up, it is a structured sculpture which has a wooden base. They are all focused on me. Well, that's the shaman, right? Your spiritual self.

D.M. Is that what the course was about?

F.R. Yeah, it was about spirituality. You power, your chakra forms or your power. It was great. It took me a long time to finish both of them. This one's not even finished yet. But I think I'm going to finish it and have it in my show that's going to travel if I can get it so . . . The little one is no problem. I do need a plexi trunk, that's all. It's getting old. It's going to cast dust.

D.M. You made it probably in the mid 80s right?

F.R. Yeah.

D.M. What was the meditation piece in the class. You actually meditated in the class?

F.R. Yes we did. Yes we did. After that, I went other places and did meditation. I'd go away places.

D.M. Was that your first experience with meditation?

F.R. You know what, I'm thinking yes. And then I bought all kinds of tapes from this place where I used to go to meditate and I would meditate at home and I discovered that meditation is not easy. Some people can't meditate.

D.M. I can't

F.R. Really! You've got to be kidding.

D.M. No, we'll talk about it later. The brain is going all the time.

F.R. Let me tell you how I got to meditate. I went to this place and the guy who did the meditation he was just really wonderful. I said to him . . . "You know, I can't meditate because I just can't seem to concentrate enough," and he took this kind of feather thing . . . he had this long thing like a peacock feather and he hit me with it and he said, "Turn within." And that was all he needed to do. I've been meditating every since. And then I bought all of his tapes I used to meditate all of the time. Oh, it was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. "Swami Muktananda" there he is. There's my guy.

D.M. But you think that "The Art and the Unconscious" Workshop with Nancy was one of the first times that you meditated?

F.R. Let's see if we can get a date on this.

D.M. On this book?

F.R. Yeah, let's see if there's something that tells us. See, this is my guy.

D.M. There he is.

F.R. "Swami Muktananda"

D.M. This is copyrighted in 1979, first copyright in 1975 and then reprinted in the United States in 1979.

F.R. But, you know, I don't know when I came to it. I used to go to intensives. Now this place was in New York. You would go some place and then they would take you there, something like that.

D.M. Or you would meet in a certain place and then be taken as a group.

F.R. I think so.

D.M. So you didn't know where you were going?

F.R. Oh no. It was Swami Muktananda and I would play his tapes and meditate and chant and carry on and all that. Well obviously it was in the 80s somewhere. I don't know that I had these books immediately.

D.M. Was that the first time in that course that you made altar pieces like that?

F.R. Well, I didn't make any altar pieces before that. I never was interested in making art that was spiritual. Spirituality in art was not something I was interested in. I was interested in political art, not spiritual art.

D.M. O.k. I had two more pieces here that I was hoping to speak to you about. One is this piece on NYFAI celebrating its 10 year anniversary in 1989 and your name is on the list here along with a picture of you. That must have been taken at NYFAI.

F.R. Oh, I see. I'm looking at . . . isn't that Pollock's wife . . . Lee Krasner. Isn't that Lee Krasner?

D.M. I don't know.

F.R. Oh no, wait a minute. That's not Lee Krasner.

D.M. The school closed not too long after that anniversary, the ten year celebration. Do you remember the ten year celebration? And do those pictures of who was there and who was involved help you remember the tone of the place?

F.R. Oh, there's Nancy Spero.

D.M. Yup.

F.R. Well, you know, obviously I was there.

D.M. [laughter] The photo evidence proves it.

F.R. Yes. I can't say I wasn't there, I was. But at the same time, I don't know. Oh, Alice is a sweetheart, Alice Neel. You know there's nitty gritty too you know. There's a lot of nitty gritty and I don't know what to tell you about it but it was a lot. I wish I could remember some anecdotes to tell you about what happened at some of these events.

D.M. Well, I think that we got good detail in thinking about the "Art in the Unconscious" course that you took with Nancy and we also got a lot of detail about the performances that you gave there and your feeling in general about those performances. Right?

F.R. Yes.

D.M. Do you remember . . . this flyer here that we were looking at before [reading flyer] "Political Consciousness, Political Action Dialogues and Strategies for Women in the 80s" and it looks like a several day series in April and there is a talk here that was called "Racism and Sexism, Cultural Links on Various Levels, Institutional Racism and Sexism,

Personal Attitudes and Economic and Class Implications, Jane Galvin Lewis from the Natural Resources for the National Council of Negro Women.

F.R. Mhmm.

D.M. Faith Ringgold and Kara Schapiro, formerly with Girls Clubs of America. Do you remember this day at all or this weekend of . . . The personal is political, it was Friday, Saturday and Sunday, April of 1981. This is what Nancy was saying would have been your earliest involvement with NYFAI because it would have been . . . The school had opened in the Fall of '79, so this would have been in it's 2<sup>nd</sup> year of operation. And it looks like before you were teaching workshops there you were part of this three day symposium on political activism.

F.R. Blank. Wow.

D.M. Well, for what it's worth, I think that's a testament to how amazingly active your career has been.

F.R. Let me tell you. I have in general, all around memory of a lot of activities and people, most of the people I definitely remember. That's not Lee Krasner, that's another woman, I can't remember her name. I saw her. Not too long ago she was in the audience at the M.E.T. – I spoke there – and she got up and asked a question which was very interesting. She was very active.

D.M. In closing is there anything general that . . . you just said there generally that you remember the activity level being really high, the energy level being high, right? And you remember the participation of a lot of people that were you professional colleagues in many other overlapping ways.

F.R. Yes. And I think that in the process of writing my . . . part II, I think I'm sufficiently away from this time period, to write about it again in part II. Because when I have visited, all these different places that I've been to this year in this remembering the famous movement in the 70s I'm trying to piece it together in what was really going on and what is not going on now and what REALLY happened and what needs to happen, what needs to come up again to happen. All of these thing that need to be considered. And what is this feminist thing anyway. You know, what is it really. So I'm thinking about all those things.

D.M. Thank you Faith.