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**MEMORIES OF THE FEMINIST ART INSTITUTE**  
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By the mid-70s, the feminist art movement, like the feminist movement in general, was divided along reform versus radical lines, and many feminist artists had settled into a comfortable state of apathy. With some, albeit minimal, presence in university art departments and art world visibility for their work, they were fearful of rocking the boat, and activism fell by the wayside. Others were restless. In New York (I believe it was early winter, 1976), a group of women from the art world began to meet and discuss the state of feminist art and artists. There emerged a desire for “a voice” and “a space” separate from men. “The voice” became *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, which began publication in 1977 and “the space” developed into a feminist art program/school that went through changes over the years, eventually becoming the Feminist Art Institute that offered classes and workshops and sponsored events. (I met with both groups for a while during the brainstorming and early planning stages, but eventually dropped out of the meetings for the school because *Heresies* was moving along quickly and demanding so much of my time. I couldn’t do both.). I believe the Institute finally opened its doors in 1979.

I taught Painting and American Women Artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (a wildly successful art history class that I had previously taught once at the University of North Carolina in 1983 and once at Hunter College in 1984).

The classes I taught met at night. I remember taking the subway, and then walking over to that big empty building above the bus station. The NYFAI office and studio was upstairs. It wasn’t big, but it was a space. The studio facilities weren’t great to say the least, but it was a supportive educational environment outside of university or art school structures, where women artists of varying ages and degrees of experience, or women who wanted to be artists, could meet and take classes from feminists who were practicing professional artists.

**Painting**

In the painting classes I taught, the emphasis was on identifying, developing and articulating personal content (often based on women’s history and experiences) in abstract painting, something many of the students were interested in.

The physical logistics were difficult as there really weren’t enough walls, tables, floor space, or storage racks to spread out and work large or store works-in-progress. While, they could come in and work in the studio off hours, most the students chose to lug wet paintings back and forth each week on the subway..... However this spirit of roughing it contributed to a comraderie among the women and an empowering sense of making art “despite” all the restrictions and limitations that conspired against it.

Many of the students took more than one class and/or continued to take one class after another over, allowing them to develop their work over a period of time. They became good painters! In particular, I remember Darla Bjork, Helen ??, Eleanor Pironti and Priscilla Green.

### **American Women Artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Many of the women in painting also took this class. We met at my loft on West 22<sup>nd</sup> St. where we could project slides, and I could share catalogues and books from my library.

I remember when we decided to offer this class, we did not know if anyone would even be interested much less willing to meet on Friday evenings!! But, every week, 8-12 women came (often bringing friends) for what basically amounted to a slide lecture about American women artists (both in and outside the mainstream) and their work from the late 1890's to the present.