

NYFAI

Interview: Miriam Schapiro interviewed by Dena Muller; with Nancy Azara present.

Date: March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007

D.M. Today is Thursday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. We're at Miriam Schapiro's in Wainscott, NY on Long Island. Nancy Azara is here and we just met Paul Brach. We've just seen Mimi's studio and we're looking at some archival materials, some photographs and early printed matter from the New York Feminist Art Institute.

N.A. So here we have Lucy Lessane, Irene Peslikas, Carol Stronghilos, Miriam and myself. These were probably taken in 1979.

D.M. What was Carol Stronghilos' role?

N.A. She was one of the founders. I haven't seen her in a long time. She might still be in NYC on Laight Street – Yes Mimi?

M.S. I haven't seen her in years.

D.M. Did she teach?

N.A. Not quite teaching, she was co-teaching. Right? She co-taught with you.

M.S. Yes.

N.A. She taught at the Brooklyn Museum School which is how she originally came in. She and I were colleagues there.

(Pause)

N.A. So I see Miriam that you've got lots of archival things, photos and articles, not just about NYFAI but about me. You know some of the shows that I had in the 1970's.

M.S. Well I thought you'd enjoy it.

N.A. I do. Wonderful. Some of them I'd forgotten – especially what I had used for show cards, announcements for things – so it's really wonderful.

M.S. Well this is what I was thinking that I would loan these to you because they already belong to Rutgers – I promised everything – so if I loan them to you, then I would simply ask you to write something down that in about three weeks at the most, that you would send them back to me. So you can have them copied.

N.A. I'll have them scanned. I'll have them all copied and scanned. My papers are all going to Rutgers too so they'll all be in the same family.

D.M. And so are the NYFAI papers right?

N.A. The NYFAI papers are already at Rutgers so we'll have a whole family connection there.

M.S. Well, I haven't given them mine yet, and I have so much – so I'll get around to it. Look at this one [referencing photo]. Isn't that a nice picture?

D.M. Very nice.

N.A. That was good because it shows the scale of the sculpture in the photo.

D.M. And this was the piece in the Postmodernism show at Rutgers right?

N.A. Yeah, this one is from 1974.

M.S. And here's something I had and here's something you wrote.

N.A. Oh that one. I think that's the one that was in Ms. Magazine that my mother got mad at because the word menstruation was mentioned. Those were the days, you remember?

M.S. I do remember. Now, this is I think important for me. This is "The Femmage" and I think that people should know about these things because they're really important.

N.A. And Melissa Meyer did this card with Miriam. We interviewed Melissa. So that's great.

M.S. So what'd she have to say?

N.A. I didn't hear the interview yet.

D.M. She talked a lot about the same things we hoped to talk about today . . . the early years, founding the school, feminist practice and thought behind . . .

N.A. She was interested in being interviewed and she did teach at NYFAI for a couple of years I think. Two years, maybe three? She taught painting.

D.M. And I have to be honest, it was awhile ago now and I've done several interviews so I'd have to listen to it again and look at the transcription to think of the details.

M.S. No, I think you're right to talk about the fact that she was in the school and . . .

Look, the whole point is that when we were young, and when we were teaching people who were young – what does young mean? The way I see it, it means that something is going to happen. She will be something someday. But when you're with a person who hasn't discovered themselves as yet, it's interesting. But it's also interesting to see what it came to. I mean she's a good friend of mine. I love her.

D.M. You know what . . . it's coming back to me a little bit because now I'm thinking we talked about what she does in the classroom today; because she's a teacher today, and she was talking a lot about having young women students in the classroom and talking with them about the issue of how they identify with Feminism today. How comfortable they are with using the label Feminist to describe themselves and their values or to describe their work. And she talked about relationships she has with younger artists, younger curators, who are grappling with this question of how to incorporate Feminism in their work.

N.A. Didn't she design one of our first little cards?

D.M. Mmmhmm. We did talk about that. Some of the early graphic design, typesetting . .

M.S. I think she did, yeah.

D.M. Early graphic design, she talked about that. Maybe for the very first flyer you did to notify people of the course offerings.

M.S. But now this one I wrote Max Kosloff photographed this catalog for me – “pink school catalog, 1979.”

N.A. Oh he did?

M.S. The whole thing, yes.

N.A. Wow. I didn't know that. And this one we have copies of. That's beautiful.

D.M. That's Joyce Kosloff's husband?

M.S. Yes.

N.A. And he was the editor of *Art Forum* at the time, or before then.

M.S. I don't remember exactly what time it was.

N.A. But he was with Art Forum.

M.S. Oh yeah.

N.A. So, I will make a note that Max Kosloff did the first pink brochure that advertised NYFAI. That's interesting and I didn't know that.

M.S. He did the whole catalog.

N.A. What the design? The design of the benefit poster was done by Heidi King. She had found a Medieval wood cut of a woman painting a woman and she thought that that would be a wonderful way to start. I think the reason that this is listed with Carol Stronghilos here as the person to get in contact with was because she was taking the

admissions for our program. And we used this also on our announcement for our benefit at the World Trade Center, March 1979.

M.S. I'm sure you have this.

N.A. Not that one. I'll take that one and make a copy because I have the one that advertises our benefit which has this on it.

D.M. Advertises the benefit? Well this is the actual invitation to it.

N.A. Right. That's the invitation that we put in the mail, but we had a poster with this on it. Right. And this is our first board of advisors.

M.S. Do you have that? (Photo of founders)

N.A. I think I do but I'll take this in case I don't.

M.S. And what about this? You'll take copies.

N.A. I love these. Aren't these wonderful.

M.S. O.k. but you don't need all of them. You already showed me one.

N.A. I like the other ones with us smiling. I like this one because I'm smiling and I'll take one of those because you have duplicates right? (B & W photo of original NYFAI group)

M.S. I have three.

N.A. Well this is a different one.

M.S. Oh yeah.

N.A. This is the one of me smiling, ok. And this is the one that's in the brochure. If I could just have this one and this one, what I'll do is I'll have them put on computer discs.

M.S. You don't mind doing all that?

N.A. I don't mind. This is what we're trying to do. We're trying to really put NYFAI in it's proper place in history and this is the way to do it.

D.M. And Emily can help with that in the studio right?

N.A. Yes.

M.S. I thought that would be really helpful to you. Now this one of The New York Feminist Art Institute plans gala benefit. Oh yeah, that was something. That I remembered so well.

N.A. Oh wasn't it wonderful with the music.

D.M. Was it a party?

M.S. Yeah.

D.M. Do you remember the details? You were involved in planning it right?

N.A. Oh yeah.

M.S. Yeah, well we had a lot of interesting people. I think it tells you here.

D.M. It was at the World Trade Center. I've heard that part of the story.

N.A. With Louise Nevelson as the guest of honor. Here she is here.

M.S. So you have information on it. O.k. everywhere that I put this on, this little clicky thing, it has something to do with me, or I'm mentioned in it, and I thought that would be the way you would find what to say in whatever you do.

D.M. Right, that's helpful too because Nancy was talking about how there's some interest – remind me of the Art Historian's name who's interested in writing?

N.A. She's an arts educator, Laurel Lampela.

M.S. Nancy . .

N.A. This is the article but there's also this, Joan Mondale, Alice Neel.

M.S. Yeah, those are the people that you asked me about just before.

N.A. Well this is the WCA Achievement Awards.

D.M. Is that the first Lifetime Achievement Awards for WCA?

N.A. Dena was very active in the WCA.

D.M. I recently finished a term as their board president. It was a challenge.

M.S. For who?

D.M. The Women's Caucus for Art.

M.S. Oh yeah.

N.A. And now she's going to be the Executive Director for Art Table.

M.S. That's a big job.

D.M. It is a big job.

M.S. Congratulations.

D.M. Thank you. I'm excited about it. They just hired me. I just found out last weekend and I start in mid April. So we'll see what happens.

M.S. It isn't a top thing is it?

D.M. What do you mean?

M.S. Well Judy Brodsky was the . . .

N.A. You're doing Judy Brodsky's role next right?

D.M. Well, Judy Brodsky was the board president, she's a member. This is the Executive Director so I am an ex-official board member but I'm the paid administrator of the organization. It should be interesting. I expect to learn a lot more about the art world.

N.A. Oh yes.

M.S. O.k. this says a lot about you.

N.A. Oh it does?

M.S. Yeah. And then somewhere, if I put this on it means that my name is in it. Here it is. And here's another one. You know I was wondering who wrote these.

N.A. Well, this was written by Karen Lippert and Harriet Lyons of *Ms. Magazine*. If you remember *Ms. Magazine* was a big factor in helping NYFAI get started.

M.S. Yeah I remember.

N.A. And do you remember that the reason that we had the benefit at the World Trade Center was because Harriet Lyons knew Ronnie Eldridge, who worked for the Port Authority, and all the *Ms. Magazine* people helped us, and the Port Authority donated that space for us.

M.S. I know Lyons really well but I didn't see her for years and then I went to something for Judy Brodsky and I met her again. It's very very odd to meet people after so many years.

D.M. And like you said, so interesting to see, if you've known them throughout all these years, where they started, where they are and how all the projects have unfolded over the years. It's interesting.

M.S. Yes.

D.M. It's interesting for me.

N.A. Well, it's interesting for us too. It's a little hard to go over the years.

M.S. I put these on where I'm mentioned. So on that, it's Miriam and then it's Carol and and then it's Phyllis and so on. So you'll use what you can.

N.A. Sure

D.M. So how was this earliest board of directors formed? You said that Carol Stronghilos was one of the founders and might have done some teaching afterwards. Selena Whitefeather?

N.A. I don't know if she ever did any teaching. Selena Whitefeather was someone that Carol Stronghilos knew who was very involved in her Native American roots. She's not here.

D.M. Maybe she's in that picture?

N.A. She didn't stay around for a very long time.

D.M. So she was on the Board of Directors because she was . . . .

N.A. Well, she helped found the school.

D.M. . . . because she was one of the earliest people meeting to formulate the ideas behind the school, the structure of the school.

M.S. There weren't too many that had ideas.

D.M. It's a small board. It's 6 people.

M.S. I know.

N.A. And we worked hard. I really worked hard trying to get these people together. Miriam did too.

M.S. There's one thing I'm very interested in and that's about consciousness raising. That really was one of my shticks. So it talks about that. And I think there's another place where it talks about it too . . . here's consciousness raising. Integral to the women's movement is a method of achieving critical self-awareness and collective understanding. How much about it do you know?

D.M. Quite a bit. And I understand how critical it was to the formation of most of the late 60s early 70s Feminist projects. That all of the conversation originated out of consciousness raising, either formal consciousness raising groups or dialogues amongst colleagues that had that consciousness raising nature in it.

M.S. They didn't have the nature until they understood what it meant.

D.M. Right. I know that many of the earliest members of A.I.R., since I was the director of A.I.R. for all those years, many of the founding members of A.I.R. were members of a consciousness raising group together and that the nature of their earliest conversations had that same intention.

M.S. It was for me - and I'm talking about the very earliest time - for me it was the most important thing. Because what did it mean? It meant that women would get together, women would talk, women would listen to each other and all of a sudden it would hit

them that women had something to say. Because who listened to women . . . you're young so you have to think of what it might have been but we know that it was very hard for us. I married this guy because he was the only guy I had ever met at that time who was interested in a woman, namely me at that time, who had something to say, had something to make, had something to do, you know, and he himself is that kind of person.

D.M. Right. He could see you as a peer and relate.

M.S. Yeah, exactly. And for me, it was wonderful because I'd go to bed at night and I'd think about how so many women had husbands who weren't interested in talking to them about art or Feminism and it was fantastic for me to see that women could come to a point where they were women. That, that was important. That, that was what it was about for them. I had to work so hard on that. But it wasn't that hard, I mean, again, if the women were with other women, and they went every Thursday and the group that, maybe 7 people or 8 people, and every night it would be a different woman who'd be in charge. It'd be at her house. And then it was a learning of all kinds of things and ways that women were because women had ways of talking to others like how to make chicken or how to fix this or how to do that, but it wasn't . . . .

N.A. Substantial. It didn't have depth.

M.S. It didn't have depth.

D.M. One of the students that I interviewed, I'd have to look back and remember which interview this came up in, but one of the students I interviewed said exactly that. That she was so exhausted with the playground mommy conversations she was having – being with her children and being in the city with her children that coming into the classroom environment at NYFAI was one of the first times she had where women were actually talking about their thoughts and their art and talking to each other, listening to each others ideas, and were not talking about our children as extensions of ourselves. She said it was on of the first opportunities in her life to not be described by her role as a mother.

M.S. Allowing themselves to, yeah.

D.M. That was interesting. And I have to say that definitely came through in all of the interviews that I've done with students. For many of them, being in the classroom at NYFAI was their only experience with something like a consciousness raising group. The



class, especially Nancy's Visual Diaries course, a lot of people talk about that as the first experience they had that no one is in this room to judge me and everyone is here to share their real experiences and hear that they are not alone with their experiences, to actually be listened to and validated. That process of self-knowledge where you start to understand yourself in relationship to your own family life, your society, all of that.

M.S. Also listening to themselves to what the future could perhaps be. Oh, that was so important. And very hard to come to. That was a big deal.

N.A. Because we didn't allow ourselves really to have much personal future.

D.M. And like you were saying before, here we are in the future. Then's future is now and the things that you allowed yourselves to do and be because of that process. Right?

M.S. Yeah right. So I write about it a little bit. When I was young that was one of the things I was really, really interested in. I had something written on the back here but I think I want to say it right now. It's that when I left the New York Feminist Art Institute it was because my paintings were beginning to be in many museums. I felt it was necessary to spend as much time as possible in my studio. While I was sorry to leave such a good program, I spent an enormous amount of time making new works of art. I'm glad that I had brought my friends to the board of advisors. Do you remember this?

N.A. Oh, I do.

M.S. Dorothy, Mary Garrard, Judith Brodsky, Paul Brach, just to name a few.

N.A. And I think there was a William Hood too wasn't there? Yes, William Hood, those were the two men. And I think William Hood was somebody you brought too is that right? From Ohio or something?

M.S. Ohio? Iowa is where I was from.

N.A. Well you were from Iowa, but I thought William Hood was maybe a teacher, maybe he was friends with Thelma Gouma Peterson. . . some connection there?

M.S. Could be.

D.M. Was he an artist? He taught art?

N.A. I think he was an art instructor of some sort, a professor.

D.M. There's Lucy Lippard on the list. How did this Board of Advisors function? They were people that supported the cause, supported the project of NYFAI, were they . . . ?

M.S. Well we all had ideas, isn't that true?

N.A. Oh, yeah.

M.S. We knew this one, you knew that one. I knew . . . we brought people in.

D.M. I mean, did they meet? They were lending their name to the idea of NYFAI, or did they have other resources that they brought to the project.

M.S. No, different people at that time knew people. I brought people that were well know.

N.A. I think you and Harriet Lyons brought in most of the well known people because she had access through Ms. Magazine. She didn't have the same access that I did.

D.M. Gloria Steinem I see here on the list. So I know, for example, Faith Ringgold taught at the school right? She ended up doing workshops and things. Adrenne Rich, was she ever at an event, or participated in any way?

N.A. No, but Miriam used her quote on a page of the pink brochure. There's a beautiful quote from Adrienne Rich.

M.S. Yeah.

N.A. It's a beautiful quote.

M.S. And then there's my favorite one. Can I read it to you?

N.A. Oh yes, please.

M.S. It's so beautiful, so beautiful. It's just so stunning. It's still as relevant today as it was in '79. "The power of art to create connections denied by the intellect working alone, to transfer the un-nameable into something palpable, sensuous, visible, audible, to take our unexpressed thoughts and desires and fling them with clarity and coherence on the wall, as screen, a sheet of paper, or against the long silence of history. This power has been instinctively recognized by women as a key to our deepest political problem, our deprivation of the power to name. In beginning to create art which claims this right, we begin to create a politics which is a critique of all existing culture and all existing politics." Well I have to tell you something, this changed my life. Can you guess why?

D.M. Well the power to name you were talking about . . .

M.S. It's about Feminism. It's the word that I developed. I was determined to develop a word without asking, "Femmage"

N.A. So the concept of working.

M.S. Will I be able to read whatever's written?

D.M. Of course.

M.S. I would appreciate that.

N.A. We'll send it out as soon as it is transcribed. It will be transcribed and then mailed to you.

D.M. Emily Harris, who is the Assistant Director at A.I.R. Gallery and Nancy's studio assistant is doing the transcriptions so there will be a disc with a recording on it that you can play in any cd player, that you could listen to it if you wanted to.

M.S. That's not really what I want to do.

D.M. And Emily is also going to transcribe it and you'll have a chance to edit and look at any . . .

M.S. I'm not a big editor but sometimes I'll just see some little thing . . . I would like to have that . . .

D.M. And the audio recordings are going into the archive so people will have a chance to listen to this exchange if they wanted to but with the transcription, there is an opportunity to edit and annotate the transcription if you want to.

M.S. Well I believe that you will take good care of everything.

D.M. Who is Irene Peslikis?

N.A. She was a part of our board. This is Irene here [pointing to figure in photograph]. She was a collage artist and very active in Red Stockings, a very radical Feminist. She was a member of our board and she did teach there later.

D.M. She taught collage?

N.A. Yeah, different kinds of things. Do you know who mentions her is Joan Arbeiter who took her workshops. She mentions her classes and some kind of discussion.

M.S. There's a lot of painters here but all of a sudden I found something.

N.A. Perfect.

M.S. Not much.

N.A. Perfect.

M.S. Did this upset you that I wrote this?

N.A. Not at all. I'm glad you did. Thank you.

M.S. Because suddenly I quit, you know? So I thought you might want to know what was on my mind when I did that.

N.A. And your work just took off after that. I remember when you made some really beautiful pieces, and you had a lot of the women who were students at NYFAI actually working in your studio. I think you had a lot of assistants doing that.

M.S. No, I didn't have a lot. It was usually when I did teaching and in those days I had to do teaching otherwise I didn't have a way to make money.

N.A. And you traveled all over doing teaching, if I remember.

M.S. Oh, did I ever.

N.A. You traveled and traveled.

M.S. Yeah.

N.A. So, this is very beautiful because we have all these things from the women who were on the Board of Advisors including a letter from Adrienne Rich.

D.M. And these are materials that you didn't have already.

N.A. I didn't have this. I don't have a lot of these things, some may be duplicates but not many.

D.M. Thank you Mimi.

N.A. This is really great Miriam. I appreciate it.

M.S. So do you need this?

N.A. That statement? I think we have it now. It's on the tape, you read it. She did right?

D.M. Yes. It's not a bad idea to have a copy of it, no?

N.A. Fine. We'll take it.

D.M. And send it back with the rest of the materials. What I wanted to say about that is . . . what interests me, or what seems to be a unique challenge about the women's art movement as opposed to Feminist activity in other aspects of society is that artists were put into this role of having to also be administrators, organizers, fund raisers, do all this work, and that does take you away from the time and focus that you need for the creative process. Right? So that statement makes a lot of sense to me because at some point everyone wants to get back to the original impulse. And because the things that should have been supporting you as artists didn't support women artists . . . all of the institutions and resources that should have been supporting you so that you could be in your studio painting were not supporting you. You had to make your own institutions and your own projects.

M.S. We were always trying to get those corporations that would give us money so we always had to write to those people and explain who we were.

D.M. Yes, I heard the story. Judith Chiti told in detail the story about the Ford Foundation grant and how complicated that was. That it was on, it was off, it was on. The whole process of getting that original funding.

M.S. I did get some good ones though.

N.A. Oh, you did. You did.

M.S. Not a lot but . . . let's see . . . there were a couple.

N.A. So, I remember Miriam, you recruited students by calling all these different people you knew, all these contacts from throughout the United States and having these students come study with you for that first year that you were teaching there. I have some pictures actually of them working on some of the projects that you did. I think one of the people that we interviewed said that she would open the door and she'd feel these exciting things happening in your workshop and that it was just thrilling to her. That you did a lot of interactive things with the students. Do remember any of those that you could talk about because most of it was your traditional way of teaching, right?

M.S. Yeah.

D.M. You're asking about some of the specific class projects . . .

N.A. Yeah, because she did all kinds of exciting things. People would open the door and were just thrilled at what Miriam was doing there. I think some people became animals, or worked on their power animals; that kind of thing. I don't remember specifically what they said and I was just wondering if you could help us understand a little about your teaching method, at NYFAI, or in general around that time.

M.S. Don't forget CalArts and don't forget Women's Building.

N.A. Which was the start of it. So perhaps if you could just make us a little thread between the three, that would be wonderful.

M.S. I don't think I can.

D.M. Can I ask a question? What I understood about it is that the idea for NYFAI started out of conversations with Joyce Kosloff, that you had over several years before the school opened . . .

M.S. I don't remember Joyce in this.

N.A. Joyce wasn't involved in NYFAI, she was involved in "Heresies" but as I remember this . . . you came to New York with Joyce. The first time I met you, you came to New York and came to be part of my women's group at Marcia Tucker's loft. But then a couple years later, you came to New York with Joyce and called this huge meeting, and I remember that there were maybe a hundred women there, and you and Joyce talked about all the exciting things that were happening in California and how you wanted to start a magazine and a school in New York, remember that?

M.S. Yeah.

N.A. So then, out of that discussion, "Heresies" developed and this small group of women who were interested in a school. If I remember correctly, Joan Semmel was part of, I think Elke Solomon for awhile, Harmony Hammond, Marty Pottinger, Susanna Torre, and several other women who I can't recall at the moment. And we met . . . I don't remember, it was probably bi-monthly or something like that, to discuss starting the school.

M.S. There was a big problem about that. I had come from California and I brought the idea of the school but they didn't like it.

D.M. You mean the women in New York didn't like it.

M.S. Yeah, they didn't like it.

D.M. What did they say they didn't like about it?

M.S. It was something they didn't want. They wanted other things.

D.M. Gallery representation.

N.A. Well, "Heresies" for sure, a magazine about their work.

M.S. They wanted a magazine. I don't know, maybe it had something to do with me, but I was really, really interested in having a school. And that was how you (Nancy Azara) and I came together, that's what it was.

N.A. Well, if I remember you and I met in that group . . .

M.S. In other words, all of those women did not want what I wanted. O.k., so that left me someplace else. And so, you and I, and a few others, did want it and that's how it started.

N.A. That's right.

D.M. Why did you think that New York needed a school?

M.S. Oh it was obvious, of course we needed a school. I mean we had to start it and I think she (Nancy Azara) just made a wonderful thing out of it.

D.M. But what were the things that were positive about your experiences in California that you felt were really necessary . . . were missing in New York?

M.S. I don't think it was so much in California. You see, when you were asking me before about my teaching, my teaching just came quickly. It was something that was in my head and it just came out.

N.A. Intuitive.

M.S. Yeah. I would just talk about it, but once I got to talking, I realized what it meant to me. And that's how I got in and . . . so I never really had a special way of teaching, it was things that came to my mind and then I took them and enlarged them because that was what was coming to my head. Not everyone is the same, people are different. I had my ways of doing it. I didn't stay up at night and plan it. I didn't. It just happened.

N.A. But as you talked about before, you talked about Consciousness Raising being like the base.

M.S. Yeah.

N.A. So that was the base level. So the whole kind of umbrella around your teaching was getting women to see themselves in the place that consciousness raising would bring them too. Is that sort of what you're saying?

M.S. Yeah. I'm trying to remember something. Give me a minute here. I remember in my class at CalArts, I asked the women who were in the class to come and stand in a line. They came and they stood in the line and I said "What's your name?" – the first one – and she said "Mary" and I said to the second "What's your name?" and she said "Jane" and it went on and on and on. Everyone had a name, a name. So I told them "Please sit down again" And I told them "Do you know what you were doing, have you any idea?" And they didn't know what I was talking about. And I said "Well let me tell you, you only gave me one name. That's the name that your mother and father use." And I said, "But as for me, or someone else you don't know, or someone else you just met, you have tell them your whole name, what is your whole name. And so on their own, they just sort of yelled it out loud – what their name was – and I said "That's so important, It's so

important for you to become someone.” See I was making this up as I was talking. I hadn’t been thinking about it the night before.

N.A. That was very intuitive.

M.S. Yeah. So they began to understand that what I was trying all the time was to get them to find a way to have the thought of who they were and it was important to understand they were somebody. It had a name, this somebody. And also they had to think not only of the presence of who they were now, and who they were going to be. And of course they knew that they didn’t know who they were going to be, but it was there in their head now, that it had to come about sometime. So for example when the next term came, and they had to decide what they were going to study . . . o.k. so maybe they had been thinking about that, so maybe they had some idea about what they wanted to study for a reason.

N.A. Giving themselves a place in the world.

M.S. A place in the world, knowing who they are, and also trying to understand – because there was a question that I always asked which was a question about your brother, “You and your brother, you and your sister, you and your mother, you and your father. Who are these people to you? How did they treat you? How do they help you? Or don’t they help you? What is it? Have you ever thought about it?” - And it was the whole idea of . . . it was my idea of Feminism. This is what I thought Feminism was, what I taught. There were so many people who had such crazy ideas about what Feminism was and then in the newspaper, in the very beginning, they were so mean. Oh, were they mean to us. They said terrible things to us.

N.A. Oh, I know.

M.S. It was in the newspaper all the time.

N.A. Well that’s what people thought.

M.S. And we realized that we had to do something about it. We had to be people that would say “no.” “No, that’s not us.” And a lot of women were confused about what Feminism was. And I tried to make it easy, just very easy. Feminism is when you know who you are and who you want to be, and you know how to speak and you know that you can speak well, people can understand what you are saying, and you know that you want



to talk, and you know that you want to have friends with whom you can talk etc., etc.,  
Simple things.

N.A. We didn't take those for granted. I mean, we didn't have those as our birth right. So you were giving that to your students.

M.S. Yeah. I worked hard on that.

N.A. Could you talk a little bit maybe if there was an influence between your work and your teaching?

M.S. My art?

N.A. Yeah.

M.S. My art comes over me. It comes over me. That idea I had there, [pointing to art work in her studio] it was about Frida Kahlo, but I also made it so it would look like me. That's who I wanted to be.

N.A. Of course, why not? I wouldn't mind.

D.M. (laughter)

M.S. Here's the baby that she had. The baby didn't live.

N.A. Right, that died.

M.S. Yeah. That died. And, this piece was the nice piece. "The Power of Feminist Art" the cover that came from England. The one that came from America was horrible. But this one was nice. And so I got the idea about her (Frieda Kahlo), I found everything that you needed to know about her, and then I made a whole series and that kept me going for awhile.

N.A. I see that as part of what you're talking about with your teaching.

M.S. In what way?

N.A. Well, it's like finding yourself, identifying yourself, giving yourself permission. Even taking it to the next step, choosing "heroine" which then one can, - not male heroes, but heroines, which one can place oneself in to be part of the identification. And that seems to me what you're saying that you were trying to do with the kind of teaching methods that you were using was really instilling that in women . . . coming up the next generation and beginning to work with that.

M.S. I don't know what the hell I did but I have women still write to me.

N.A. Because you moved them so much. You really gave them that sense of self as you're saying.

D.M. They write to you about the impact that your teaching had?

M.S. No, they write to me about what they're doing and whether they're really involved in art. What they're doing with art. Oh, god, I had one for years, I'd see the letter come, and I would think, Oh my god, it's going to be something awful again. – awful in the sense that she doesn't have any money, and she didn't get a job and on and on – and then all of a sudden, she got a show and everything sold. So I was thrilled, and that's what she sends me now. The good things.

N.A. Oh, that's nice.

M.S. Yeah, lovely woman. And that's my aunt [pointing to figure in photograph] and that's my sister – my sister's on the side. And all of these people in back of you are all of my family. I have absolutely no family now.

N.A. You have a son don't you?

M.S. Yes, Peter. He was an adorable child when he was young. And here's when he was older. And here's Paul and his brother, he has a lovely brother. This is my father, my father at 19 and he made this picture.

N.A. He's an artist?

M.S. They're all artists. My uncle, here's my uncle. He's the one who gave me the first paint to paint with. This is my father, he's very good looking. And this is a painting he did. And my grandma, and this is my grandfather, that's my grandfather, and this was me, and that was Paul and that was me, and that was Paul's mother. And here's "Heresies" retreat. We used to go there, all of us.

D.M. Where was that?

N.A. The "Heresies" retreat? There was a place upstate in New York, was it?

M.S. Right under your feet there, see that? They want me to do the same thing you're asking me. Oh god!

N.A. It's important. So you know, we met, you and I, I just remember with great pleasure, we used to have lunch together and then we would go to the thrift shops and I remember Miriam sitting on the floor going through boxes of stuff . . . looking for just the right doily, or the right embroidered apron, and over those conversations, the thrift shop

and the lunch, we would talk about starting a Feminist art school because the other group that had come from the original meetings really was more interested in “Heresies” and didn’t really stay. So that’s how we began to make this thing really happen. And Harriet Lyons came in the middle because she was interviewing you, remember for Ms. Magazine? And so Harriet would come and say “I just spoke to Mimi and had the most wonderful conversation with her.”

M.S. She wrote me recently.

N.A. Did she? Yeah. To say hello?

M.S. Well I had met her at Judy Brodsky’s . . .

D.M. The renaming of the Brodsky Center, The Innovative Print Center.

M.S. You want to hear a weird story?

D.M./N.A. Yeah, sure.

M.S. Well, I just felt that I had found a . . .

N.A. Treasure, a little treasure. (Referring to a box of photos and reviews and articles)

M.S. Well, I just thought that maybe you could put it together in there and . . .

N.A. A little treasure Miriam, it is really wonderful to have some of these things because some of them I never had, some of them I haven’t seen in years, and the pictures are thrilling. I mean it’s wonderful to see these pictures. I’m really glad to have them.

D.M. Well and one thing I’m thinking about as we’re . . .

M.S. I was told to do something in specific if I loan them to you.

N.A. Oh, I’d be happy to sign on anything you want. I’ll leave my bracelet. (laughter)

D.M. We’ll make an inventory of it so . . .

M.S. I don’t need that just as much as I need just how many are there.

D.M. Are you sure you don’t want to know what they are?

M.S. I believe you, I just need to know. It’s not so much for me as it is for Rutgers.

N.A. No, no. I’ll take them. I’ll put them on a disc. And Rutgers I’m just signing the contract with them now too so, they’re all going to go to the same place which is wonderful, all my archives and everything.

M.S. Can I ask you something?

N.A. Sure.

M.S. They put my name as being the person. I don't know what the hell they're doing with it but as the person who is – I don't even know what I'm supposed to be doing, I'm not really doing anything – but it's I think for women who are now part of Rutgers. So it started out by me giving a certain amount of people that I remembered from that time and they didn't know anything at that time so they thought that was wonderful and they put my name on something. Well, I'd like my name to be on that, but I don't know, they're not doing anything about it.

N.A. Using your name as part of the center? Is that what you mean?

D.M. Yeah. There's so many projects happening on Rutgers' campus.