

NYFAI

Interview: Phyllis Rosser interviewed by Flavia Rando

Date: Sept, 2nd, 2005

P.R. My name is Phyllis Rosser. Today is September 2nd, 2005. I first became involved with NYFAI in 1979, I think it was when Harriet Lyons at Ms. Magazine was promoting the benefit. That was the opening benefit. Louise Nevelson was going to be there. I think it was at the World Trade Center.

F.R. Right.

P.R. And, for some reason, I don't remember going to it. I don't know whether certain people from Ms. were allowed to go, or what the story was but I did hear Harriet on the phone for weeks calling people and asking people to come. That's when I first found out about it. I heard about what they were doing, and I became interested in the workshops. Nancy Azara was doing a weekend workshop on finding the artist within, or something like that.

F.R. Right.

P.R. And I thought, "Well that sounds good." I want to do that. So I signed up. And that was very powerful. In fact I still have a piece that I made in that workshop which I've never quite finished, an Indian goddess figure.

F.R. And had you been an artist well before that?

P.R. I had not made art since I was eleven years old.

F.R. Isn't that amazing.

P.R. When I was a child I received a 3 year scholarship to the Rochester Memorial Art Gallery which is now called the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, I think. It was very unusual for anybody that young to get a scholarship. I really wanted to be an artist. I would tell my parents, particularly my mother that I wanted to be an artist. She would get very upset and tell me "No, no, that is a terrible thing, artists are lonely people who lead miserable lives.

F.R. She believed the whole romantic myth.

P.R. Absolutely, dead set against it. So I never really went on with it although I was always interested and majored in art history in college. When I got out of college, I went to interior design school here in New York, trying to keep my artistic interest going but I

never did anything with it really before I went to NYFAI. Although I had been collecting wood on the Jersey shore and saving it, I didn't know what for. I did put some pieces together in 1968, I remember, because I was eight months pregnant with my son. And I hung it on a wall and someone came over and said "I really like that sculpture over your fireplace". But I never really thought about being an artist until NYFAI came along and I started thinking about returning to art. I had no particular relationship to art other than being an art appreciator and going to all the museums and making my children go.

F.R. That's a big relation.

P.R. I was really interested in art.

F.R. You were an art historian, what did you do at Ms.?

P.R. I was a contributing editor, that was my official title. I wrote articles for them and edited articles for them. But mainly I read the unsolicited manuscripts.

F.R. Important.

P.R. It had its plusses and its minuses. Since I didn't work there full time, I could take them home and read them. I was raising my children unlike hardly anybody else there. They either weren't raising children or they had somebody else at home for them. So that was something I could do on a part-time basis.

F.R. How did you become involved with Ms.? That seems part of the story here.

P.R. That was a whole long story. I started out in interior design and I worked in the field and I had some very nice jobs in the field. But after almost 10 years, it was getting time for me to have children, or not. And, I began to think about what I could do as a mother. I thought I'd have to go into private practice but I just didn't want to. I had been working for a hotel corporation in Boston which I loved partly because you don't have to worry about the client. And suddenly I realized I didn't care about talking somebody into buying a particular chair for their living room. That wasn't my calling. So there I was not really knowing what to do with my life, and feeling like the clock was ticking. I had two children and then I became very interested during the sixties in the social movement of those times. I was really drawn to doing something. I got involved in the American Literal Society and the wetlands legislation in New Jersey and somebody said to me, "You know you really ought to go to Trenton and become a lobbyist". And I said "That's not really something I had thought about doing." I learned I could write. I was

associated with the Monmouth Museum writing press releases for them. I found it was easy for me and I enjoyed it. When the women's movement came along that was something I could relate to. It was something I understood. I felt at home there. I lived in the same dormitory with Gloria Steinem at Smith so I went in to Ms. when I had a one year old baby and I persuaded her to let me volunteer there. She didn't want to do that, she said she didn't believe in volunteering and I said it was cheaper than therapy because I knew that would persuade her.

P.R. She said o.k. I started out as a volunteer and gradually became an editor.

F.R. Great, I'm so glad I asked you. So the idea of NYFAI, you were already ready.

P.R. I didn't have any problem with that idea. I became involved by taking this goddess workshop. I have a whole box that says Nancy Azara and the feminist art institute that I should probably dig out of my studio. Nancy asked me to do a lot of promotional articles for NYFAI so I have copies of those. I know at some point I started taking Nancy's visual diaries classes. They were very important to me, I took them two or three times. And I do have those diaries still, I could dig those out of the studio. I had never done consciousness-raising, like everybody else in the sixties, out there in New Jersey with the kids. Nobody was a feminist in New Jersey, I can assure you, at least nobody that I knew. So it was my first and pretty much only consciousness-raising experience. I loved the way we would sit and just draw and doodle and discuss the various topics: what made us stop doing art, or what our family thought or whatever, there was a whole bunch of topics that Nancy picked out.

F.R. I'd like to know the ones that seemed the most important to you.

P.R. Certainly those are the two that come to my mind.

F.R. If I could ask, your children were probably too young to say anything about it too much.

P.R. My daughter was born in '72, so she was seven. And my children were used to my working at Ms., so they were used to me doing a lot of different things. I became a board member of NYFAI. I also started taking sculpture classes with Nancy. I became very involved with Nancy.

F.R. You seemed to already be involved in that range

P.R. Here was Nancy working with found wood. And it was perfect for me because she gave me permission to use it. I took one carving class from her and realized I wasn't really a carver, that I was much more interested in assemblage. I guess that's what you call it.

F.R. Yes. Quite beautiful.

P.R. Thank you. So that's what I did. And at first I painted my work, like Nancy, and I also learned how to do gold leaf, but I only did it once. It wasn't what I was most excited about. She really encouraged me tremendously to do what I wanted to do. After a few years I began using wood that had a lot of different colors and people started saying "Oh, you really shouldn't paint it, it's more sophisticated if you don't paint it." I listened to them, but I miss the color. I still miss painting the wood. And I actually started to paint as a result, maybe I'll have to go back to it and the heck with them.

F.R. I think it's worth a try anyway.

P.R. I think so too, yes.

F.R. Something that allowed you to revisit that question or think about it again.

P.R. How was I involved with NYFAI? Besides taking the visual diaries class, I was involved in a lot of the weekend workshops. The one I remember most fully was the Judy Chicago workshop which was quite amazing. It was a birthing workshop. She was going around the country trying to get women's reactions to birth. I don't remember there being many women there who'd had children besides me, so that was interesting. It was very powerful. I really enjoyed it.

F.R. Do you remember the format that the workshop took?

P.R. She did a lot of talking at the beginning and then she did exercises. There was an actual birthing exercise where we passed each other down the birth canal. That was the one I remember the most. There were others where we paired off and talked to each other about various things, but the creating of the birth canal and passing people down it was sort of the culmination of the whole thing. The other thing I remember she said is that we couldn't leave the room to go to the bathroom. And I finally said "I have to go." And everybody said, "Oh thank you, thank you". Then she was mad because I had broken the energy. This was several hours after she started. I remember a big weekend at Spring Street (where I think Judy's workshop was also, at the Spring Street location). It

was a political weekend that was brilliant. Many, many speakers came. I think Ruth Messenger came, Geraldine Ferraro came. It was a huge turnout of women in the political arena. Nancy would remember what that was. There was so much energy that Nancy put into these projects to get them organized, to hold them, and it was very exciting at that time to be part of this whole thing. Another thing I remember were the lectures that Arlene Raven gave. She gave four lectures on feminist art just after she moved to New York. I think they were called art and feminism. They opened up a whole new array of possibilities to me. Of course there were many west coast artists I had never heard of. I began to see all of the activity that I hadn't been aware of, art from the sixties. And I interviewed Arlene Raven for an article about those lectures. Hopefully I can find what that was published in but I don't remember.

F.R. It wasn't Ms. Then?

P.R. No, and I remember doing it with a co-author, somebody else on the board. She didn't like it because I ended up doing most of the writing and we got into an argument about it.

P.R. That started my friendship with Arlene which has been very close since then. I would say that for me NYFAI, it's hard to describe the sense of community, but you felt like it was a home. I felt that I was with people who were like minded. There was all this activity and it was a tremendous growing experience for me. I remember also there would be programs honoring women artists that NYFAI would do. And I can't remember how often they were, but I remember the one for Louise Bourgeois. She came to it, and I remember introducing her to my daughter. Those were in the days when she still left her house. And there were others. There was one for Isabelle Bishop. I don't remember if she was there, and there were others that Nancy honored, or NYFAI honored and they were wonderful. I also took a Saturday workshop with Elaine DeKoonig which was fabulous.

F.R. How did that go?

P.R. Great, I loved it. I did really well. She liked what I did.

F.R. Did you paint in that workshop?

P.R. I remember painting and then tearing it up and pasting it on to something else.

F.R. Assemblage.

P.R. It was right up my alley. So without going through my files I would say that those are the highlights I remember.

F.R. What did you do as a board member?

P.R. There were board meetings several times a year. Nancy would present what NFAI was doing and we would respond to it. It was a little cut and dried, the board members didn't participate very much. It was more like a rubber stamp than a real interchange in my recollection. I think she needed to have a board because she was a 501c3, but I wouldn't say that we were really active.

F.R. So then how did the plans for NYFAI come about, was it mostly Nancy?

P.R. From my vague memory it was mostly Nancy. There were other people involved in the beginning but they gradually seemed to fade away, but I can't remember why. There was a lot of sturm and drang. Nancy seemed to be the energy behind it, there is no question in my mind.

F.R. Did you go every week at that time, or how long?

P.R. I was involved with it for a long time, until it ended, when was that 80 something?

F.R. '88.

P.R. I took more workshops in the beginning and then I was taking the sculpture class with Nancy which was once a week. It meant driving in from New Jersey.

F.R. So you were still living in New Jersey this whole time, I didn't realize that.

P.R. I would take a class and then take a break. I don't think I kept going every week because everything was in the evening.

F.R. How did the experience influence your work?

P.R. The main thing was that it taught me I could do whatever I wanted to. There wasn't some prescribed art school way of making art. Particularly with Nancy, working with the wood, I could do whatever I wanted with that wood. However I could figure out how to fasten it together was fine. I guess that was a big fear for me, that there was some way of making art and I didn't know what it was. That was really freeing. I think that was the biggest influence. Then seeing what Nancy did, because Nancy was always generous about giving me ideas and ways of working.

F.R. Do you think in the first stage of your life as an artist as a child that you were discouraged from making art because you were a girl or do you think that your parents were just anti-artist.

P.R. I think they were terrified of creative expression. And later in her 80s my mother started taking painting classes.

F.R. Isn't that interesting, really interesting. So you must have in some way given her permission.

P.R. I don't know.

F.R. She saw you still held on to yourself.

P.R. I don't know what it was. She was supportive. She would always buy flowers for my openings, and she bought a piece of my sculpture very early on. Once I got married, had a family and did all those other things, it was o.k.

F.R. Did all the safe, good things that she could recognize.

P.R. Right, so, I don't know, you said how do I describe my visual and written work?

F.R. You interviewed Arlene.

P.R. Right at the beginning Nancy asked me to write press releases and I would interview artists for shows at NYFAI.

F.R. At Ceres or. . .

P.R. No, at NYFAI. I remember writing articles about different artists. Beth Ames Schwartz was my first article for Nancy. I did that for some time. NYFAI often had an Open House to promote upcoming classes and someone would lecture on her work. There were also a number of special events that included performances, lectures and readings.

F.R. This is the first I'd really heard about that.

P.R. That's funny.

F.R. Right in the space, in the teaching space.

P.R. Yes, somewhere there.

F.R. Well, not in the galleries, not at Ceres.

P.R. No, it wasn't at Ceres. Because Ceres didn't start until '84.

F.R. Were you involved in Ceres?

P.R. I was involved right from the beginning. In fact I was their president for the last four years. So I've been continually involved there. I was trying to answer this question

about visual work and written work. Well there certainly was the goddess element that Nancy introduced. And I think that influenced the very early work. There were a lot of patterns that came out of the visual diaries work that I think later led to my interest in the patterns of the wood. It's an awful lot about pattern, what I do. I took a psychic class from Nancy personally, which actually was so frightening that I didn't want to go on developing my psychic powers.

F.R. So you had some, huh?

P.R. I remember touching a woman's shoulder and seeing something that had happened to her when she was a child, underneath a table. This was a stranger, a complete stranger, and I thought, "Oh no, I can't handle this". I was intrigued but ultimately didn't have the courage. The most important aspect of my experience at NYFAI. . . was beginning a career in art and going on to Ceres. That was tremendous. Without that, I don't know how I would have ever taken myself seriously as an artist. Nancy really encouraged me to join Ceres. I didn't feel I was good enough. And, she said, "Of course you are." I said, "I couldn't even imagine showing my work." And she said "Don't be silly." That was about 1986 when I joined.

F.R. Is this work that I'm looking at from that time period?

P.R. No, it's later.

F.R. It's beautiful.

P.R. Thank you. This is about six years old, maybe seven.

F.R. And the one behind me.

P.R. I guess that's around six years old too.

F.R. Very, very beautiful.

P.R. Thank you. My relationship to feminism at the time, I guess you'd say I was an activist feminist working at Ms.

F.R. Just before we get to that, could I ask you a little bit more about your experience at Ceres?

F.R. You were involved almost since the beginning at Ceres?

P.R. It was founded in '84 but I didn't join until '86. So I was not part of those early founding days. But I think I showed my work there as part of the NYFAI show. And

then I began showing work there as a Ceres member. Is there anything you wanted to know about Ceres in particular?

F.R., Did you show your wood sculpture?

P.R. Yes.

F.R. Assemblage?

P.R. Yes.

F.R. Did you show your paintings there?

P.R. No, I only started painting about thirteen years ago. I'm getting worried at age seventy that I'm not going to be able to carry wood up the bank where I find it in the Connecticut River, in Bellows Falls, Vermont. (But I think I'm going to be able to hire people to start carrying for me.) I thought I should probably have something else I could do. And I miss the painting too.

F.R. There are very interesting similarities. Although on the face of it they're very different.

P.R. They are very different. The sculpture is so abstract and the painting is so tight.

F.R. But the way the patterning goes, the way the line goes through there is a certain flow that remains.

P.R. That's interesting. I study with Grace, do you know Grace Graupe Pillard? She says the same thing. She sees that same sort of pattern and line and obsession with nature.

F.R. How did you come to be the president of Ceres?

P.R. Because I lived in New Jersey most of the time I was a member, I felt I couldn't be involved a lot. It was difficult for me to put up shows and take them down and so on.

F.R. Very good.

P.R. I did things you didn't have to be in the gallery for. But when I moved to New York, four blocks away, I thought now is my time to give back to the gallery and it didn't seem like it would be that complicated for me anymore. They needed someone to step in and be president at that time. So that worked out and we moved to Chelsea.

F.R. When NYFAI closed did your involvement with Ceres fill its place, or begin to?

P.R. No, I still had children at home, I still lived in New Jersey. I was eleven years away from moving to New York at that time.

F.R. How did you feel about NYFAI at that time?

P.R. I felt sad about it. It seemed to be a time when the energy was running out of feminism. It was that whole Reagan, push against it?

P.R. I hadn't been taking courses there for awhile. And, it had been a struggle because there was less and less attendance and less and less money. So I was sorry but I guess I was resigned to it. Of course Ceres did continue and provide that sort of community for me.

F.R. Would Ceres have existed without NYFAI?

P.R. Well that's a contentious question.

F.R. Oh is it?

P.R. I think that most of us who were members of NYFAI thought it was an outgrowth of NYFAI. But I know there are people who don't feel that way, who weren't members of NYFAI, mainly Carol Goebel.

F.R. I see, o.k.

P.R. And certainly Ronda Schaller, and I don't know about Polly Lai, but I know Ronda was very involved in NYFAI. Of course Darla provided the space. So I can't say. We just had a whole evening at Ceres celebrating Nancy, Darla and NYFAI.

F.R. Yes, I was there.

P.R. Ronda talked young women who didn't want to have women of a certain age in the gallery. They didn't want to have Helen Stockton. That's when Ronda said, "No, this is going to be for women of all ages." And all the young art students left.

F.R. It's interesting because just yesterday, a senior woman, a mature woman, came into my introduction to women's study class and she wanted to audit. She was extremely anxious about it. I said of course. But I could see how difficult, how this was such a big thing to her, how it was so important. . .that's all. . . just a moment, you know something I can offer to someone, a triumph.

P.R. That's wonderful. Helen was a wonderful artist. She had studied for a long time, was very professional. She had her last show when she was '86. It was not too long before she died. She had a huge retrospective in both galleries. And I remember her saying to me, "This was so much work for me, it was so hard." She came to all of our openings. She was so supportive, an incredible bedrock person. I ended up writing a lot

of art criticism too. Nancy had me cover a couple of her shows. Then Arlene got me writing art criticism. There were a lot of people that she wanted to write about but couldn't afford to because they were for New Directions For Women or Women's Artists News which didn't pay. So she'd send me off to interview them.

F.R. And you have. . .

P.R. I have copies of all of it.

F.R. I would love to see that material.

P.R. There's a lot of it. I wrote for Cynthia Navaretta at Women's Artists News first. Then I think she stopped publishing and I wrote for New Directions For Women, once a month until they stopped publishing. Then Arlene had me write for High Performance Magazine, and I did that until they stopped publishing. And that was about it. That was the end of my art criticism writing.

F.R. And when was, when did they stop publishing, when did you stop writing, do you remember?

P.R. 1994 was when I stopped writing. They were terrific. I really liked that magazine. You asked how my experiences at NYFAI influenced my art and life today? I'm a professional sculptor, and I show my work every two or three years, plus I show at other places.

F.R. Where do you show?

P.R. I apply to juried shows and sometimes I get in them. I just recently had a show in Keyport, New Jersey, at a gallery there called the Mitchell Sanborn Gallery. I'm about to have a show at the Smith College Alumnae House, which is nice because it's also my fiftieth reunion.

F.R. Very nice.

P.R. I told you I was president of Ceres, and I'm now involved in a project of Judy Chicago's promoting feminist art shows in relation to the opening of the Sackler wing.

F.R. You are. . .

P.R. I'm also on the board of the Princeton Review Foundation which is another part of my life. I'm an educational researcher specializing in gender bias on the SAT, that grew out of my Ms. work, not related to my art work. It started in 1979 when I discovered that women get lower scores on the SAT than men even though they get higher grades in

college. It wasn't really well known until I started carrying on about it. I testified before Congress and have written a couple of books about the gender gap. I've been on TV several times.

F.R. Do you think that your experience at NYFAI sort of developed this public persona, or helped to develop it, or is that somebody you always were?

P.R. I don't know. (laughter) I don't think I did any speaking at NYFAI. Something happened to me as a teenager about tests and I was very upset about them. I didn't like to do right brained things but when it came to testing, I would force myself to do that research. That's about my only right brained activity, being an authority on SAT testing.

F.R. Well, that's quite adequate.

P.R. What happened in the last few years is that women are getting more of the bachelor's degrees now, then men. So their problems on the SATs have become almost moot. Nobody is particularly concerned about them. so I just wrote an article that's going to be in the fall issue of Ms.

F.R. Oh, look at that. It's something I can tell my students about.

P.R. "Too Many Women in College" it's called.

F.R. Fabulous. I might just Xerox that and give it to my students to read.

P.R. They should buy the magazine.

F.R. Well they won't.

P.R. I know. It's supposed to be out September 21st.

F.R. You were saying you wrote a book on the SAT?

P.R. I got a government grant. The Women's Educational Equity Act of the U.S. Education Dept. gave me a grant to do an item analysis of two SATs to find out how many questions favored women, how many questions favored men. . .and I did a breakdown by race. I found there were a number of questions that favored one sex or the other by ten percent. And there were more that favored men than favored women.

F.R. What percentage about?

P.R. Seventeen math questions favored men by ten percent or more and in the verbal section there were four verbal questions that favored men and two that favored women.

F.R. Well that's an enormous advantage.

P.R. Of course, and that's why you get this big difference in scores. It was once again a 42 point gender gap this year. The average score differences between females and males.

F.R. Really? Do you still look at them?

P.R. I still look at those scores. Of course they added a writing section this year, but they're not giving out scores on that yet. The big thing about the writing is that women always do better on tests of writing, even ETS tests of writing. We all thought maybe that will eat up some of that math gap but they're not releasing any numbers next year, they said.

F.R. Who is going to read this writing?

P.R. They've hired people to read the writing in a certain time frame.

F.R. But what perspective will it be read in order for it to be counted a success or a failure?

P.R. There was a professor at John's Hopkins who said he found that the essays that got the highest scores were the ones that were the longest. (laughter) Of course ETS is saying "Oh no no, that's not what it's about." As far as the races go, we couldn't find any pattern of questions they were getting right or wrong by sex that could be changed. But it was pretty obvious that overall the test could be made gender fair. ETS knows which sex does better on every question they put on the test because they pre-test them. There's a 30 minute section on every SAT that's a pre-test. So they know and they could do it, and they choose not to.

F.R. Isn't that interesting.

P.R. It's kind of a crusade.

F.R. Well, it's now going to be brought to my women's study class.

P.R. I'm happy to provide you with any materials on that subject. I received another grant after the WEEA one from the National Center for Testing and Public Policy which eventually became housed in Boston College. The paper I wrote was called Gender and Testing. It is supposed to be on ERIC. I had people actually administer the questions that were the hardest from the 1987 SAT (November) to students and give them all the time they needed. We found that the women, when they had all the time they needed for math questions did better than men because what they're doing on the math test is working the problems the way they've been taught math in class. On the SAT they don't have

time to do that. The men are better at using test taking strategies. So that's why coaching courses work so well for women. They learn the tricks that men seem to know intuitively.

F.R. Well they know they can, they have more confidence in their strategy and their hunches, I think.

P.R. Right.

F.R. It's interesting because I'm fortunate in the times I teach that there are sort of club hours afterward and I can extend. I say "You know, time is not the issue here, I want you to write a decent essay. So just sit there and write it." And I'd say about two-thirds of my class will take an extra half hour where they sit there and they very carefully think it over and work and do quite well actually. Quite well compared to what I understand other students are doing because you take that pressure away.

P.R. Right. The whole idea of a timed test like this is false. It's not going to exist in the rest of your life at that level.

F.R. Yes.

P.R. And of course women are getting better grades in all college subjects. So the SAT has been under-predicting ever since it was written. I've heard anecdotely that somebody at ETS said, (I've never seen it in writing), that this sort of balances out the bad grades that boys get in high-school.

F.R. Oh.

P.R. So you can't help but feel it's a political decision that's being made. That's my testing life.

F.R. What a bonus this is for me.

P.R. I got to put the results from the second grant in the forward of a testing guide book, *The Young Women's Guide to Better SAT Scores*. How would I describe the legacy of NYFAI. . . I feel that at the time, it was very exciting. There was nothing like it. The whole world was becoming aware that women had been written out of history. And that was certainly true of women artists. There was all this energy and excitement about bringing that to light. And NYFAI was such a big part of that here in New York. The same was true for women artists, you know, they showed up for these events, they supported what NYFAI was doing.

F.R. Do you think that those women were, say it is Louise Bourgeois, or Louise Nevelson, were they as yearning after this community recognition?

P.R. I thought the fact that they came showed they were desperately aware of the problem. If they had felt they hadn't experienced discrimination, I don't think they would have paid any attention. Even though Louise Bourgeois now says, oh no, she never had any problem.

F.R. We can all rewrite history as many times as we wish. Did they ever refer to it explicitly?

P.R. To NYFAI. . .or to their problem?

F.R. Yes, to discrimination. . . did they give a little talk of acceptance?

P.R. You know, I don't remember. Probably . . . I just felt that the fact that they showed up . . .and Elaine DeKoonig doing a workshop, and Judy Chicago doing her workshop. . . I felt that they were all concerned. Judy was more understandable because she was a feminist.

F.R. Because that was sort of her identity.

P.R. Right. . . I know there was a lot going on in California, and that was the crux of it and then this coast. Miriam and Judy were out there teaching at Cal Arts and doing Woman House and. . .

F.R. And of course NYFAI was unaffiliated with any major institution.

P.R. Right.

F.R. That makes a huge difference.

P.R. So did you have other questions you would like to ask me?

F.R. Do you have anything that you would like to share with the younger generation about NYFAI or something that you see as a . . .?

P.R. Well there's no question that women are still struggling and that they're not being shown. When MoMA put up their new show, it's outrageous that more women weren't included. The fact that the art world has ignored feminist art is discouraging. It seems to me that although we tried, I don't feel we made the impact that I would have expected.

F.R. I think we made the impact but again almost as soon as it was made, it was appropriated and written out.

P.R. Is that it?

F.R. I do think so, and I think that this is really the moment and this is part of that moment, to really put this back in history. I really do feel that way. I mean, it was really because of the feminist art movement that sort of the minimalist. . . I mean everything shifted, shifted dramatically.

P.R. Right, I know.

F.R. And I think the Sackler wing at the Brooklyn Museum will make a huge difference. In fact, well before the summer, Maura Reilly and Patty Cronen who also teaches at Brooklyn College and I, met to do some collaborative work on that. What are you doing on that exactly?

P.R. Well Judy Chicago and I and Arlene Raven got together and decided there should be exhibits, as many exhibits as possible about art and feminism for the year 2007.

F.R. Right, they're working with Ferris Olin. She is a very good friend of mine.

P.R. They have been trying to get people together to be involved in that.

F.R. Right. I'm involved in that myself, but at a different level.

P.R. They've had a few meetings about it to kind of get the energy going. There's that big exhibit opening in L.A. at the end of 2006 which is going to travel to Washington, so Susan Fisher Sterling has been involved. I know Rutgers is going to take it over but up to now, it has been people coming together and fomenting, or foaming at the mouth. (laughter). . . trying to figure out what could be done. Now it's beginning to gel a little bit and somebody's writing a grant for a show we hope will be at Ceres in February of 2007. That's how I'm involved.

F.R. Is that a show of Ceres. . .

P.R. No, it's curated by Dr. Leslie King Hammond and I don't know what she's going to do. I have no idea. She and Anne Swartz had to get their proposal in this month.

F.R. So what do you say to the younger generation about this new project? You know, in a direct lineage of NYFAI. . .

P.R. I would say that feminist art should become a part of art history. We should be aware that Julian Schnabel wouldn't have broken those plates if Feminist Art hadn't been there. There was consciousness-raising and Jerry Springer came out of it, and Oprah, all of those confessional shows.

F.R. That's an interesting idea.

P.R. Because that was kind of the beginning of people telling their. . .

F.R. Their stories. . .

P.R. Their horror stories. That's how women began to realize they weren't the only one who had had that experience. That was the whole thing, you didn't have to hide those horrible stories anymore. In fact, we all had them. I know that was the big moment for Gloria Steinem, when Ellen Willis took her to a RedStockings meeting and they were talking about abortion. And Gloria had always hidden hers and she realized "Oh, we've all had this experience, but were hiding it." So I think young women who have never had a struggle, are going to have to struggle now .

F.R. You would be surprised how much they struggle, in a different way.

P.R. Well, they're not struggling in the same way I had to struggle.

F.R. Right. But I'm shocked with how much pain they're carrying around with them. I think the sexualization of women is so crude and has become so defining of women, you know, they hate it. They don't even know they hate it. All of a sudden they open their mouths and there's consciousness- raising there, how much they hate it.

P.R. Really?

F.R. So it's quite interesting how much pain there is there. Rather than trying to make a hierarchy of struggle about how much pain they are carrying.

P.R. I thought well, we couldn't do anything in my generation except be a secretary or a teacher or a nurse.

F.R. I know.

P.R. And now they can do anything they want.

F.R. Well they can do anything, but they also have all of these other very regressive ideas being pushed on them. This sexualization of popular culture. . . cruel.

P.R. What do you mean by that exactly?

F.R. For example, how women are being portrayed in music videos is what young people watch.

P.R. Oh, that's horrible.

F.R. And hip-hop lyrics, film. You know, just regular Hollywood film, nothing special. They all bring it up. Like one woman said in the last class. . ."And when they show all of these pictures about women being raped, they show her leg and her breast, people get to

look at her. It's awful." I mean that's an eighteen year old. So that I think they carry. And also, so many of them are more balanced, well, you know, Brooklyn College has a very immigrant population, working class, with very traditional immigrant upbringing, which is taught to still do both. . .

P.R. Right, which is much more puritanical.

F.R. Very, very puritanical. I mean, to their detriment. And then somewhere in there they're supposed to have a home, a family and a high powered job. So it's become a double burden.

P.R. Well we used to talk about that, the super mother syndrome. . .

F.R. Right exactly.

P.R. But you get out of touch with where it is in the culture now.

F.R. I'm actually surprised at how, and this is somewhat due to the working class, immigrant population, you know, from all over the world immigrant population, how many of them have an extremely traditional upbringing. And also their anger at this sexualized creature they're expected to be. They don't want to be that kind of person. That doesn't mean they don't want to have a sexual relationship.

P.R. No, I understand. I thought MTV had sort of gone out of the music video business.

F.R. I think it's more powerful.

P.R. Oh no, really. Well I know the hip-hop culture is horrible.

F.R. It's horrible. . .it's horrible for men too.

P.R. I suppose that everything goes now, where there were more brakes put on things.

F.R. That was inhibiting, and sort of blocked knowledge but also. . .

P.R. . . .was protective.

F.R. Right, slightly protective. That's exactly what I was going to say, slightly protective. And I think that is what I'm seeing. These young women are looking for protection, you know, in some kind of impersonal, cultural way. And also the other thing I see is that I always have three or four art majors in my class and they don't know anything about women's art.

P.R. Oh, isn't that awful.

F.R. Even though it is a very good department, the courses are offered very infrequently, and unless they happen to hook up with a feminist instructor, they know very very little.

F.R. I gave one class presentation about feminist artists, it's not really the subject matter, but I just thought, you know, let's go for this. And you know, Ana Mendieta, Judy Chicago, oh I really forget, Faith Ringgold. . . but just a group of . .

P.R. Faith did a workshop for NYFAI .

F.R. I did want to talk about that. Hung Lui and I had two art people who were studying in New York and said they had never heard of anyone. . .

P.R. That's pretty mind blowing.

F.R. That is a little distressing.

P.R. Yes . . . given the feminist work. I should give all of those Ms. copies to somebody.

F.R. I mean, the Sophia Smith Archives are taking them aren't they?

P.R. No, Smith isn't taking the feminist work.

F.R. And why is that, do you know?

P.R. I don't know, they were just interested in my testing work. They have all of Gloria Steinem's archives so what do they need mine for. . .(laughter)

F.R. Would you be interested in me inquiring in say, the Brooklyn archives or another university?

P.R. It's possible, I've got copies of all the articles I wrote and the research material for them sitting in my studio.

F.R. And also, you know, Rutgers. . . Ferris is putting together quite a wonderful archive.

P.R. I should talk to Ferris.

F.R. I think you should. Talk to Ferris, I think she would be very interested.

P.R. You know, I've probably got to survey what I have. I know I've got copies of everything I wrote for Ms. during that time. I was writing education articles for other magazines like: Learning Magazine, Gifted Children Newsletter , that sort of thing. But it was all about revolution and education.

F.R. One of my favorite topics.

P.R. I don't think we're ever going to get there but. . .

F.R. I speak to Ferris pretty regularly.

P.R. O.K.

F.R. Would you like me to mention it to her?

P.R. I would be thrilled to have you mention it to her.

F.R. O.K. Very good.

P.R. It's too bad my kids are just going to toss this material.

F.R. Well, I doubt that, but it's good that it is going to a place to use as a research resource. What I would like to do, and you tell me if you're comfortable with this, I would like to come by and look at your material.

P.R. Yes, come by my studio.