AN INVESTIGATION OF BLACK WOMEN'S IDENTITY THROUGH THE ART WORKS OF BETYE SAAR AND HOWARDENA PINDELL

by

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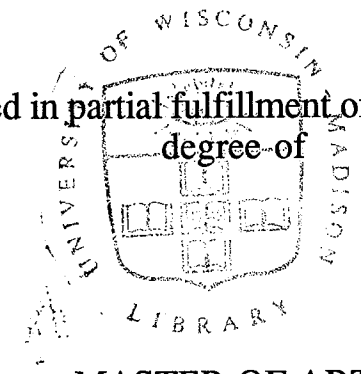

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background to Problem

In the present art establishment people of color and women of all ethnicities are extremely under-represented. There exists a definite exclusion of black artists in the general texts of art history and there is a great lack of evidence of the existence of black women artists in particular. But these artists do exist within a strong African-American art tradition, usually unrecognized by the existing patriarchal art establishment.

"Mainstream" art history tends to exclude and marginalize the art production of "others" through a critical process based on criteria established by European male standards. This process, therefore, controls the critical formula which upholds the "criteria" of artistic production. The limitations created by these "criteria" result in the devaluation of multiple cultural contexts and perpetuate the notion that art is "universal".[1] Given that "black women encounter myriad experiences that deny their reality"[2] and that the existing exclusivity of the art establishment reiterates this fact, it is necessary to call to question the existing criteria of the art establishment and to question why Black women and other people of color are excluded from the "mainstream" literature. It is essential to this particular study to recover the buried histories of Black women artists in the U.S. by recognizing the existence of Black women's artistic traditions and their contributions in the art history of this country. This work will focus on the importance of identity as it influences the creativity of two prominent Black women artists.

This study is an alternative approach to the dominant exclusionary practices of the existing art historical processes that continuously marginalize the works of artists of color and women artists of all ethnicities. By expanding upon current methodologies that promote a contextual approach, it not only aids in recovering buried histories but also discusses the need for a critical process that takes into

consideration the effect of Black women's unique identities, histories and realities on their artistic production.

Considering the lack of scholarship in this particular area, it is necessary to go beyond the confines of the existing system by contributing to scholarship in the ever growing field of African-American art history and Feminist criticism which asked such questions as; What is black art? Is there a black aesthetic?[3], Is there a female aesthetic? and Will the representation be different if the producer of the art work is a woman? These questions and many others are crucial because they expand upon the critical process by reiterating the need to address other important questions such as: How important is it to know the ethnicity of the artist in order to understand the work? Does art stand on its own? Is an art work effected by the culture and gender of the artist or the viewer? How are diverse choices for medium, technique and subject matter effected by the personal experiences of the artist, and in the case of this study, Black women artists? Given that previous African-American scholarship is mostly devoted to surveying the existence of Black art and artists, this work utilizes those collections and undertakes a specific methodological approach that considers both race and gender in order to analyze works by selected Black women artists. It focuses on the theme of identity as a primary issue in the works of these artists.

Problem

This work is an investigation into the relationship between identity and artistic production in the works of two prominent Black women artists--Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell. It examines personal identity as it relates to the particular choices these artists have made in the presentation of their art product. This study focuses on the use of self-imaging as an act of self-defining. It considers the influence of elements of identity in the artists' overall work by discussing the interrelation between outside factors and self-perception, and how these influence the artists' choices for style, medium, content and technique. By identifying the significance of factors such as race,

gender and class, as central to Black women's multiple identities, this work demonstrates the diversity of expression within Black women's choices for artistic production.

Black women's identity cannot be reduced to one single definition. It is dependent on the intersecting factors of culture, politics and society in their unique collective and personal histories. The expression of identity lies in the act of choosing, such as the right to name one's self and to self-define, as well as, in the right to claim one's rightful place in society and history, as an active participant. For Black women artists, their work is a vehicle by which to express the multiplicity of personal experience, knowledge and the "recognition of shared experience"[5], by promoting personal testimonies to their existence. As Black women artists, Saar and Pindell demonstrate the multiplicity of vision within the context of their shared histories.

The recognition of Black women's identity as it is manifested in visual art represents "a new reality, rooted in diversity and equality" as these artists re-define and take control of the way they are perceived within existing cultural frameworks.[6] By studying how identity translates into a visual language, this study explores the significance of gender, race and class within the context of social history. It also presents the need for a critical approach which contextualizes the influences of Black women's history and personal experiences and creativity. This critical process serves two purposes: 1. It presents an alternative method to the existing critical canon by giving greater consideration to the importance of influencing elements of individual realities in the understanding of a work and 2. It promotes the practice of a more inclusive art history.

Literature Review

Much of the literature in the field of Afro-American art attests to and makes distinct mention of the fact that there is a dearth of literature and scholarship on the subject. Many works actually begin by making note of this fact. Since the literature in this area is so limited, the studies on Black women's art specifically, are even fewer. It is therefore

necessary to situate Black women's art within the literature in the areas of African-American and feminist art history and criticism. By setting up a framework of African-American and feminist theory, it is then possible to put the limited area of scholarship in Black women's art into the a larger context.

When looking at specific artists, it is necessary to use exhibition catalogues and critical reviews by integrating them into the categories which have thus been set up as art historical context. A framework, set up from established areas of research, can then be used to review the existing materials specific to the area of Black women's art and can expose the areas which still need to be developed in both history and criticism.

The tradition of Afro-American art scholarship goes back to the 1920s when there was a renaissance in Black arts. The scholars, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke and James Porter, were the most prominent figures who acknowledged and discussed Black visual arts. Such essays as Du Bois' "The Criteria of Negro Art"[7], and Locke's "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts"[8] laid the foundations and agendas for the future of African-American art history by discussing a focus for the art works and the contexts within which they were produced. These works not only set up an agenda, but reiterated the importance of African-American culture to American culture as a whole and referred to a rich cultural heritage that emerged from an African ancestry. Books such as Porter's Modern Negro Art (1943)[9] and Locke's The Negro in Art (1943)[10] were imperative to chronicling the existence of Black artists throughout American history. Much of this scholarship addresses the lack of material on Black art and goes on to find methods by which to correct this gross oversight by developing historical evidence of the existence of Black art from slavery on and by reiterating its importance as part of American culture.

Porter's work was a major contribution to the development of African-American art history in terms of identifying African-American artists and styles within the context of their histories and eras of production. He, like Du Bois and Locke, was inspired in his search by

the knowledge that there existed a strong embedded tradition of African-American art despite "the constantly reiterated statement (by the Euro-American 'mainstream') that 'the American Negro has no pictorial or plastic art'".[11] Porter states that this idea instigated his search which opened his eyes to the neglect and indifference of the art world to the works of African-American artists.[12] Unfolding evidence of the existence of African-American art and artists, persuaded Porter to write his book about this history because of its deliberate and unnecessary exclusion from "mainstream" art history.[13]

For Locke it was a similar realization that brought him to pursue his research. He noted: "The Negro's creative career in the fine arts is longer and more significant than is generally known. . . .with very little attention, it seems, from either the art critic or the social historian, there has developed a little known but important art province challenging and meriting public interest, both racial and general".[14] Locke's essay, "The Legacy of Ancestral Arts," identified Africa as a rich cultural source for African-American arts. He recognized the appropriation of such sources in European artistic trends and emphasized the need for Black artists to claim their African heritage as a source of pride. Whereas the African influence in European styles might have been a fad or vogue, Locke emphasized the vital connection between the African idiom and the Afro-American artists tendency for a "racial idiom".[15] He also identified the lack of Black subject matter in American art and emphasized that "the Negro physiognomy must be freshly and objectively conceived on its own patterns if it is ever to be seriously and importantly interpreted. Art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid."[16] This argument parallels Du Bois' concern for beauty, truth and goodness to be reflected in the arts of Black America.[17]

Later, David Driskell continued to chronicle African-American art history with books and exhibitions such as Two Centuries of Black American Art. (1976)[18] This major work included critical analysis of specific works as well as an investigation into defining a Black aesthetic. Other important sources are Samella Lewis' Art: African-

American (1978)[19] and the two volumes of Black Artists on Art[20] (1969 and 1971), in collaboration with Ruth Waddy. Art: African-American is the most significant book to date that specifically deals with African-American art and artists. This book places the art and artists within socio-political, cultural and historical contexts and interjects brief analyses of the works mentioned. Lewis writes that her work is an attempt to remedy the omission of the history of the art of Black America "by uncovering the contributions of Black visual artists and artisans in the United States"[21] from the 17th to the mid-twentieth century. One extremely important aspect of this book is that she includes biographical sketches "as the primary tool, for it reveals both the personal lives of the artists and the public attitudes of the times."[22] The two volumes, Black Artists on Art, are of particular interest because they are surveys of Black artists which show photographs of the artists along with their works and statements. These quotes are significant to any discussion of identity in the works of these artists. Other books and exhibition catalogues focus on specific prominent artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White, Romare Bearden or Jacob Lawrence, but the majority of material on less prominent artists are critical reviews, or exhibition catalogues for group or solo shows.

One book which is important to discuss is Elsa Honig Fine's, The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity (1973).[23] Although this work chronicles Black artists from slavery through the 1970s, it is basically a survey which does not go into much in depth analysis of the works mentioned, nor does it develop the concept of identity as a source of inspiration. Even though Fine devotes a chapter to the notion of identity, she simply develops short biographical sketches of the artists mentioned without relating this to analysis of their works. She does place the artists within the historical context of the times but overall does not discuss at any length how the social, historical and political atmosphere impacts upon the works she has mentioned. One aspect of this work that is problematic is that Fine sets up two separate contexts for what she labels as "mainstream" and "blackstream" work. By doing so she removes many works from the frame of reference of

an African-American experience. The following statement seems to suggest that some Black artists, working in abstraction, simply follow the trend of a Euro-American aesthetic: "The mainstream black artist has been touched by the rapid changes in the International art world. Like his white counterpart, he is incorporating the various styles into his visual vocabulary and is trying to find a signature of his own."[24] She ultimately creates a dichotomous situation between the notion of "mainstream" and "blackstream" by stating: "The blackstream artist reaches into the Black experience and relates it to the human experience."[25] This is problematic since it seems to suggest that the artists which she labels as "mainstream" do not do this. Because of these deficiencies, this work stops short of being a crucial text in the investigation of identity in African-American art.

The most important text specifically devoted to Black women artists is the exhibition catalogue, Forever Free (1980), edited by Arna Alexander Bontemps and curated by Jacqueline Fonvielle-Bontemps.[26] This exhibition catalogue contains a text that briefly surveys a history of forty-nine Black women artists from Edmonia Lewis to the present, with bibliographical information on each artist. It is a testament to the existence of a rich visual artistic tradition perpetuated by Black women artists. In the introductory text, Fonvielle-Bontemps and Bontemps raise several questions about Black women's history: "What are the specifics of her contributions to that culture (African-American)? And what was the nature of the intellectual process through which she sought self-realization and self-respect both for herself and for those she loved? Unfortunately, the answers to these questions are sadly lacking, due to the dearth of scholarly research devoted specifically to the history of black women in America".[27] This work specifically seeks answers and remedies to the dearth of material in the area of Black women's artistic production. The text reveals the existence of a vital history. The authors state:

> *"Until we develop a meaningful interpretive context in which we can attempt to better analyze the special*

> *problems of black women in America,. . .until every component of the African-American cultural mosaic is recognized and understood on its own terms, rather than solely as a collective mass, we will never be able to develop a truly valid and comprehensive view of the total Black Experience in America."*[28]

This catalogue presents these artists but does not pursue any critical analysis of their works.

In addition to this text, there are crucial articles on Black women artists in journals and published anthologies. Freida High Tesfagiorgis' essay, "Afrofemcentrism and its Fruition in the Art of Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold: (A View of Women by Women)"[29] is critical to the area of studying Black women's art. She introduces the term "Afrofemcentrism" which identifies the intersecting qualities of race and gender in the lives of Black women. The essay discusses work that explicitly projects Black women's realities and stresses the importance of discussing both artwork and artist within the contexts of history, culture and politics. In regards to examining the relationship of identity to the art product, she states: "The importance of Black women's unique self-depiction is demonstrated along with the distinctive aesthetic beauty of their artistic production. Ultimately, as the visual manifestation of Afrofemcentrism is examined, the significance of Catlett and Ringgold in preserving Black and women's culture in America is highlighted."[30] The same can be said for Saar and Pindell whose work deals directly with their experience as Black women, and reflects it. This essay offers a methodological direction which stresses the importance of Black women's multiple identities to their art works.

Two anthologies on feminist criticism include essays which deal with material specific to Black women's art. Two essays are contained in Visibly Female edited by Hilary Robinson[31]. Michelle Cliff's essay "Object Into Subject"[32] is one. It discusses Black women's objectification and subsequent action against negative imagery through projecting positive self-images. The other is Chila Burman's essay,

"There Have Always Been Great Black Women Artists",[33] which discusses the exclusion of Black British women from the patriarchal order and (re)-claims Black women's art historical context. This material is just as relevant to Black women in the U.S. Lowery Sims' essay, "Aspects of Performance in the Work of Black American Women Artists",[34] appears in another anthology, Feminist Art Criticism,[35] edited by Raven, Langer and Frueh. This essay delves into the area of performance which is repeatedly neglected. These works are crucial to the act of chronicling the existence of Black women's creativity. They place the art by Black women in an art historical context relevant to its production, introducing theoretical issues of how Black women create, and examining the motivations and influences behind their artistic pursuits.

The development of theory and criticism specific to Black women's art is slowly developing, however, it intersects with research in the areas of feminist theory and criticism (generally European and Euro-American), literary criticism on Black women writers and developments in Black feminism. Some crucial works in the area of feminist art theory are as follows: Vision and Difference,[36] a collection of essays by Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Art History and the Academy: Where are We Now?",[37] an essay co-authored by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, and "The Feminist Critique of Art History"[38] by Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews. These recent works are important in their efforts to expose and confront issues of sexism in art history.

Feminist art theory, among other things, attempts to answer questions about the image of woman in order to emphasize the necessity of women depicting their own diverse realities and identities. By addressing such questions as; how women are portrayed in art, how art has defined the female existence, whether or not images of women reflect reality and the consequences of men defining femininity[39], feminist scholars are pursuing questions similar to those raised by African-American scholars. The result of this questioning leads to the imperative for self-definition through art by both Black artists and

women artists. "Feminist scholars must explore the dialectic between image and reality"[40] in order to investigate male interpretations of woman's existence, as well as women's interpretations of their own realities and the social circumstances which contributed to their personal consciousness. This pursuit is essential to understanding the art work and how the art world establishes criteria for artistic production.

Given the notion that "an art work must. . .pass a series of entrance examinations, based mainly on its attributes as an object in social and so-called aesthetic isolation",[41] it is necessary to investigate the criteria for "good" art and who is creating this criteria. Feminist scholars have challenged this notion as part of their investigation as to why "mainstream" art history tends to ignore art by women. The "dominant paradigm. . .is not so much. . . defective but. . .can be shown to work ideologically to constrain what can and cannot be discussed in relation to the creation and reception of art."[42] This meant a questioning of the standards and criteria for which art was evaluated in the existing system since the "criteria of greatness was . . .male defined."[43] Feminist scholars emphasize the importance of discussing art within its social and cultural contexts as a means of understanding and interpreting visual language. Griselda Pollock discusses semiotic analysis as a way to understand "the role of cultural activities in the making of meanings. . . (and) the making of social subjects" because of the existence of art as a product of social conditions and ideological determinations.[44] She emphasizes the role of feminist scholarship in contesting the "dominant forms of social knowledge".[45]

Pollock further emphasizes that the discipline of art history is "a component of cultural hegemony maintaining and reproducing dominative social relations through what it studies and teaches and what it omits or marginalizes, and through how it defines what history is, what art is, and who and what the artist is."[46] She states that because of this it is essential that feminist art historians begin by critiquing art history itself "as an institutionalized ideological practice that contributes to the reproduction of the social system by its offered

images and interpretations of the world."[47] Gloria Feman Orenstein reiterates "it is based upon the written opinions and judgements of male art critics about the works of male artists and intended for a predominantly male audience."[48]

As with Afro-American scholarship, feminist art historians began their pursuit by questioning and uncovering the existence of women artists in history which leads into a re-structuring of the existing system since it has historically denied the existence of women artists. "'Omission is one of the mechanisms by which fine art reinforces the values and beliefs of the powerful and suppresses the experience of others'".[49] But as Pollock explains: "Women have not been omitted through forgetfulness or mere prejudice. The structural sexism of most academic disciplines contributes actively to the production and perpetuation of a gender hierarchy. What we learn about the world and its peoples is ideologically patterned in conformity with the social order within which it is produced."[50]

Instead of asking, as Linda Nochlin did in 1971, "Why have there been no great women artists" Orenstein asks "why is so little known about great women artists of the past" because this question rejects the notion of the acceptance of a false presentation of facts.[51] Orenstein begins her pursuit by questioning why women were written out of art history. This process of questioning, unearthing and documenting the existence of women artists was the fundamental beginnings of feminist art history. But merely recovering the historical facts of the existence of women artists in history and placing them within the traditional art history that excluded them in the first place became self-defeating. Although it was a crucial first step, it was insufficient on its own. The next step was to tackle a full fledged questioning and (re)-structuring of the traditional art historical structure.

Restructuring the process required a re-examination of the meanings of "good" and "bad" and the whole process of evaluation. It was crucial to question out of whose experiences did these criteria emerge and whether there was only one set of values from which an art object could be judged.[52] Not to question would mean an

acceptance of the Euro-male defined standard of "greatness" and as Pollock points out, "only feminists. . .have nothing to lose with the desecration of Genius."[53] Although Pollock discusses that feminists have nothing to lose, it is important to note that African-Americans have nothing to lose either. Feminist theory developed out of a need to understand why and how women's art history was buried. It's further pursuit is to prevent this from continuing by (re)-structuring the existing canons in order to include the work of otherwise "marginalized" women artists. This is a necessary pursuit because "gender is a factor in how women create and interpret images, not for biological reasons, but because their experiences of the world are different from those of men."[54] Furthermore, feminist scholarship developed out of the need to combat pre-existing images of women created by men since these are often based on damaging stereotypes.

The primary objective of the feminist perspective is a reformulation
of all of art history. Broude and Garrard discuss feminist scholarship as an integrating faculty which can ultimately present a whole and entire vision of history and culture. This vision incorporates a multiverse of lenses through which to view the art work of a diverse population with a multitude of individual perspectives.[55] Feminist theory and criticism needs to be committed to chronicling the artistic contributions of women in art history, but at the same time it needs to be aware of its revisionist role. Feminist scholars have ideologically asserted that "too much concentration on women artists can develop into . . . cultural feminism - that is, an uncritical overemphasis on women that obscures and denigrates other questions, above all those concerning class and race."[56] By attempting to re-vise the whole outlook of art history, feminism is an instrument to aid in deconstructing and re-structuring the dominant canon. Pollock states:

> *Shifting the paradigm of art history involves therefore much more than adding new materials - women and their history - to existing categories and methods. It has led to wholly new*

> *ways of conceptualizing what it is we study and how we do it. . . .A feminist historical materialism does not merely substitute gender for class but deciphers the intricate interdependence of class and gender, as well as race, in all forms of historical practice.*[57]

Overall the available material on feminist art history, criticism and theory is important as a means for understanding the work of women artists. But although feminist theorists attempt to create an all encompassing view of art history, they tend to focus primarily on the works of European and Euro-American women artists and in this way continue the tradition of authoritarianism that they attempt to diverge from. The well-known feminist art historian, Griselda Pollock, discusses this lack of attention in her own work:

> *The position of Black artists, men and women, past and present, in all the cultural and class diversity of their communities and countries need to be analysed and documented. Race must equally be acknowledged as a central focus of all our analyses of societies which were and are not only bourgeois but imperialist, colonizing nations. This remains a shadowy concern within this body of writings. But confronted by those involved in struggles around this issue, we must undergo self-criticism and change our practices.*[58]

Although Pollock and others are aware of their inefficiencies in this area, they do little to correct it. It is necessary to rely moreso on the little material that exists in the area of scholarship of Black women's art studies in order to confront issues directly involved in the context of Black women's artistic production. This material is more pertinent to Black women since the present feminist agendas focus primarily on women of European descent.

African-American women's experience is different from that of Euro-American women because of the effect of the intersecting factors of gender, race and class on their lives. Frances Beale, an activist for

SNCC, wrote about this concept in her essay of 1970 titled "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female". Other Black women scholars, Smith and Stewart, also examined this concept and emphasized the necessity of identifying the effects of this intersection. They wrote: "It has become increasingly clear. . . that racism and sexism must be understood not merely as independent parallel processes, but as processes standing in dynamic relation to one another."[59] They go on to discuss the complexity of this relationship and how it is almost impossible to discern which of these characteristics may have led to an oppressive incident or whether it was both.[60] Toni Cade's anthology, The Black Woman,[61] also of 1970, addresses the effects of racism and sexism on the lives of Black women as well.

As Black feminist scholarship has developed, it has become increasingly clear that racism is no longer considered to be the most oppressive, but "that racism, sexism and classism constitute three, interdependent control systems". Deborah King has labeled this situation multiple jeopardy as opposed to the previously used term double jeopardy. She states: "'multiple' refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. . . .racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism."[62]

Black feminist art theory and criticism is still in the early stages of development. For this reason it is particularly important to look at existing material on Black feminism because it provides an historical development of the specific awareness of the needs of Black women. Such scholars as Pauli Murray, Frances Beale, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks and Deborah King have discussed Black women's specific realities due to multiple consciousness, while Elizabeth Hoods essay, "Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation",[63] looks specifically at the inefficiencies of white feminism to encompass the needs of Black women.

Out of the foundations of African-American and feminist art histories grew the need for scholarship specific to the needs of Black women artists. By taking the valuable scholarship that has grown out of African-American and feminist theory, Black women's art historical

scholarship can develop a critical approach appropriate to Black woman's art production. It can refine and reformulate existing scholarship in order to engage a criticism that looks at the themes, topics, languages, forms and images used by Black women artists in their work.[64]

In terms of developing a criticism capable of taking into account the diverse specificities of Black women's lives, it is necessary to look at literary theory specific to Black women's writing. For example, Joanne Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin's anthology, Wild Women in the Whirlwind,[65] contains essays which are helpful in identifying Black women's identity in literary form and thus creating a platform from which it is possible to recognize similar evidence in the visual arts.

In the search for a re-structuring the existing critical canon, there are a number of works which pursue scholarship in this area. These do not deal directly with Black women's art, but are helpful in identifying alternative critical approaches, mainly contextualization. The essay "Art as a Cultural System"[66] by Clifford Geertz discusses the cross-cultural connectedness between art and life thus emphasizing a contextual approach to art. Kristin Congdon's essay, "Multi-Cultural Approaches to Art Criticism", investigates building a more diversified art critical language that incorporates and recognizes "art criticism formats and language styles of the Afro-American, African, Asian and Native American, the rural farmer, and those who are experiencing disabilities, just to name a few."[67]

Although there are general texts which deal with the overall need for reassessing the existing system, in general, scholarship is inadequate in areas specific to Black women in the visual arts. Recently there has been an increase in scholarship that relates specifically to the exclusionary practices of the art establishment. Howardena Pindell's "Art world Racism: A documentation"[68] uses statistical findings about galleries and institutions in New York and Patricia Failings article, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion",[69]

discusses the prejudices of the art world. These works in particular outline these practices as well as their impact on art in general.

In looking specifically at the artists, Howardena Pindell and Betye Saar, it is necessary to compile articles and reviews as well as catalogues of both group and solo exhibitions. In this regard, periodicals and art journals are crucial, as is Samella Lewis' publication, Black Art: An International Quarterly[70] (now titled International Review of African-American Art). This journal covers art of the African diaspora and often contains interviews with specific artists. Several exhibition catalogues, in particular, are crucial to this study; Rituals: The Art of Betye Saar,[71] Secrets, Dialogues and Revelations: The Art of Betye And Alison Saar,[72] Howardena Pindell: Odyssey,[73] and Howardena Pindell: Autobiography[74] are particularly informative. These catalogues provide extensive detail about personal histories and philosophies of the respective artists and shed light on many of the impacting incidents and influencing factors in each of their lives. In addition to these, Saar and Pindell are both included in Corinne Robins' book, The Pluralist Era: American Art 1968-1981,[75] and in Lynn Miller and Sally Swensons' publication, Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists[76]. An interview with Betye Saar is also included in Eleanor Munro's book, Originals: American Women Artists[77]. These works attest to the prominence of these artists and to their importance within various realms, including that of the art establishment.

Overall, there is not much literature and scholarship dedicated to the art of Black women specifically, but there are abundant sources in the area of African-American art history, feminist art theory and criticism, African-American literary criticism and Black feminism. From these areas it was possible to establish a foundation within which to situate Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell as individuals and as artists. In doing the same for their art, it was then possible to investigate the theme of identity as particularly relevant to their work and to incorporate their lives into the analytical process.

Significance

This work is a testament to the existence of Black women artists throughout American history. Through the act of chronicling, it builds on the foundations of scholarship in the areas of African-American art history and criticism, feminist theory and criticism and Black women's art history, in order to add specifically to the scholarship in Black women's art. Its discussion of the lives and works of two prominent Black women artists, Howardena Pindell and Betye Saar, identifies the specific realities and diversity of expression within the context of the artists' experiences as Black women. It discusses issues such as race and gender as critical to the formulation of their identities as Black women and how the intersection of these factors translates into their work. By focusing on their use of self-imagery, it demonstrates how Black women self-define in visual terms, despite the attempts of an exclusive Euro-centered, patriarchal art establishment to define them and their work in a narrow, pejorative manner.

This work attempts to increase the existing literature on Afican-American women artists and to emphasize the importance of their work to the whole of art history. It chronicles the art histories of two Black women artists as well as present a method by which their works can be analyzed. In so doing, it emphasizes the importance of a contextual approach in which the knowledge of their personal identity is critical to any analysis of their work. Ultimately, it presents the need for breaking down the exclusivity of the existing art establishment, through a restructuring of the present critical process, in order to promote the inclusion and acceptance of diversity of vision in artistic production.

Method of Study

In order to investigate my topic, I began by researching the existing literature on African-American women artists. Through an examination of available material, it became apparent that the majority of my sources would be exhibition catalogues, articles, reviews and interviews (some of which are in books that are now out of print). From the the material that did exist, I set up my research by looking at the art

works of Howardena Pindell and Betye Saar while investigating each of their personal biographies. I enhanced my research by reading and listening to interviews of each of the artist and then by conducting interviews of my own in order to examine issues of identity in their works.

I was able to listen to unpublished interviews of each artist conducted by Camille Billops in the 1970s. These were at the Hatch-Billops archives in New York.[78] Interviews were crucial to my study because in developing a critical approach to the works of these artists, I am emphasizing the importance of their personal vision as it pertains to their art. It is essential to be familiar with their personal experiences and views in order to identify elements of their identities as manifested in their work. Therefore, the words of the artists are beneficial to an understanding of their art because they reveal elements of self-defining. The analysis of an art object is greatly enhanced by engaging in dialogue with the artist.

In my own interviews, I asked both general and specific questions pertaining to each artists personal lives and work in order to help me identify those elements in their art.[79] This approach reinforced for me the notion that context greatly enhances the analytical process of art criticism. It became clear to me that the threat of misinterpretation and misrepresentation has led these artists to state clearly their pride in their own identity. If these women did not command control of their own self-image, the macro-society would interpret it to be of little or no importance and continue to perpetuate damaging stereotypes. Although interpretive possibilities are endless, it is the perpetuation of negative images that continues to fuel the racism of the art establishment. An understanding of the lives of these women greatly enhances the critical process. Therefore, the interview as an art historical tool is crucial to counteracting the damaging practices of the interpretive process because it presents an informed view. With all of these issues in mind, I formulated specific interview questions according to what I did know about each artists' life and work and focused on issues which were pertinent to my study. My questions

focused on personal life history, aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic choices within their work. (See interview instrument in Appendix A).

At the same time I looked at materials on African-American art, in general, to gain insight into the frame of reference within which these artists are working. Along with these general texts, I read material specifically on Black women's art. Because of their prominence, Saar and Pindell, are both included in some of these texts or in general texts on women artists. They often represent the only Black women or women of color in the later texts.

In order to gain greater insight into my problem, and to pinpoint my focus on the manifestation of identity, I studied and analyzed original artworks in the most recent retrospective shows of each artist. I viewed and photographed Howardena Pindell: Autobiography and Secrets, Dialogues and Revelations: The art of Betye and Alison Saar.[80] These shows offered me a chance to view the artists' most recent work as well as some older pieces. Viewing the works reinforced the theories I had been formulating about notions of identity and the act of self-defining.

Design

Researching the available material led me to a greater understanding of where this study fit into the problem I had set up. I gained insight into the problem through researching biographical, historical and analytical information. With this frame of reference, I could situate both art and artists within a context. This enhanced the interpretive possibilities of analysis for the chosen works because these works could be situated within a socio-cultural, historical and political context. By using interviews, the works could further be situated within a personal context which thus illuminated my emphasis on identity as a vital source for these artists in their work.

Through a contextual approach, this study is set up to accomplish two objectives. The first is to show that an understanding of the artists' lives is critical to analysis of their work. The second is to show the unique and diverse artistic expressions which may develop from within

the context of Black women's experience. Thus, the use of a contextual approach will demonstrate how each artist deals with the issues that confront her and effect her self-perception as a Black woman, and further how these effect her choices for style, medium, and content in her work. This approach ultimately leads to a greater understanding of the context from which these art works emerge. This type of approach will increase interpretive and evaluative possibilities based on an informed process.

NOTES

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[2]Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," Signs, vol. 14, # 1,(Autumn 1988), p.59.

[3]J. Edward Atkinson, ed., Black Dimensions in Contemporary American Art (New York: The New American Library,Inc., 1971), p. 7.

[4]Griselda Pollock, Vision & Difference (London: Routledge, 1988),
p. 10.

[5]E. U. Essien-Udom, "Black Identity in the International Context," in Key Issues in Afro-American Experience Vol. II (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), p. 237.

[6]Andree Nicola McLaughlin, "A Renaissance of the Spirit: Black Women Remaking the Universe," in Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press,1990), p. xlvi.

[7]W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Criteria of Negro Art," The Crisis, Vol. xxxii,
#6, (October 1926).

[8]Alain Locke, ed. The New Negro. New York: Atheneum, 1968.

[9]James A. Porter, Modern Negro Art (New York: Dryden Press, 1943).

[10]Alain Locke, ed, The Negro in Art (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1968).

[11]Porter, p.vi.

[12]Ibid., p.vi.

[13]Ibid., p.vi.

[14]Locke, The Negro in Art, p.3.

[15]Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in The New Negro (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p.262.

[16]Ibid., p.264.

[17]Du Bois, "The Criteria of Negro Art."

[18]David Driskell, Two Centuries of Black American Art (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

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[21]Lewis, Art: African-American, p.vii.

[22]Ibid., p.vii.

[23]Elsa Honig Fine, The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973).

[24]Ibid., p.213.

[25]Ibid., p.247.

[26]Arna Alexander Bontemps, Forever Free: Art by African-American Women 1862-1980 (Alexandria, VA: Stephenson, Inc., 1980).

[27]Ibid., pp.9-10.

[28]Ibid., pp.9-10.

[29]Freida High Tesfagiorgis, "Afrofemcentrism and its Fruition in the Art of Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold (A View of Women by Women)," SAGE, Vol. IV, # 1, (Spring 1987).

[30]Ibid., p.29.

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[32]Michelle Cliff, "Object Into Subject: Some Thoughts on the Work of Black Women Artists," in Visibly Female, (New York: Universe Books, 1987), pp.140-157.

[33]Chila Burman, "There Have Always Been Great Black Women Artists," in Visibly Female, (New York: Universe Books, 1987), pp.195-199.

[34]Lowery Stokes Sims, "Aspects of Performance in the Work of Black American Women Artists," in Feminist Art Criticism (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), pp.207-225.

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[41]Ibid., p.22.

[42]Pollock, p.2.

[43]Ibid., p.1.

[44]Ibid., p.7.

[45]Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," Women's Studies Quarterly Vol. XV, #'s 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1987), p.4.

[46]Ibid., p.2.

[47]Ibid., p.3.

[48]Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Art History," Signs, Vol.1, #2 (Winter 1975), p.505.

[49]Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, p. 328.

[50]Pollock, Vision and Difference, p.1.

[51]Orenstein, p. 507.

[52]Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, p.328.

[53]Pollock, Vision and Difference, p.11.

[54]Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, p. 337.

[55]Garrard and Broude, p.14.

[56]Vogel, p. 44.

[57]Pollock, Vision and Difference, p.5.

[58]Ibid., pp.15-16.

[59]Althea Smith and Abigail J. Stewart, "Approaches to Studying Racism and Sexism in Black Women's Lives," Journal of Social Issues, Vol.39, # 3 (1983), p.1.

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[62]Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology," Signs, Vol. 14, # 1 (Autumn 1988), p.47.

[63]Elizabeth F. Hood, "Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation," The Black Scholar, Vol. 9, # 7 (April 1978), pp. 45-56.

[64]Carol Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, eds., Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1986), p.15.

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[68]Howardena Pindell, "Art World Racism: A Documentation," The New Art Examiner, Vol. 16, # 7 (March 1989), pp. 32-6.

[69]Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," Art News, Vol. 88, # 3 (March 1988), pp.124-131.

[70]Black Art: An International Quarterly. Jamaica, NY: Black Art Ltd.

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[72]Elizabeth Shepard, ed., Secrets, Dialogues, Revelations: The Art of Betye and Alison Saar (Los Angeles, CA: The Wight Art Gallery, 1990).

[73]Terrie S. Rouse, Howardena Pindell: Odyssey (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1986).

[74]Margaret Sheffield, Howardena Pindell: Autobiography (New York: Cyrus Gallery, 1989).

[75]Corinne Robins, The Pluralist Era: American Art 1968-1981 (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

[76]Lynn F. Miller and Sally S. Swenson, Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981).

[77]Eleanor Munro. Originals: American Women Artists. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

[78]The Hatch-Billops archives is an extensive collection of books, journals, periodicals, articles, catalogues and taped interviews of African-American artists. It is a crucial resource that has been collected by James Hatch and Camille Billops and is archived in their home in New York.

[79]These interviews were conducted by me in November of 1989, in New York City with Howardena Pindell, and in January of 1990, Los Angeles, California with Betye Saar.

[80]The trips that I made to New York and Los Angeles, in order to interview the artists, view and photograph their shows, were supported by the Department of Afro-American Studies with specific funding from the Ford Foundation.

CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the "mainstream" art establishment, there is an evident lack of material on the work of artists of color and women artists of all ethnicities. Black art in general has been excluded from major art historical texts. Historical evidence of black artists was often lost or buried as a result of exclusion, segregation and prejudice. This exclusion prevented Black artists from gaining opportunities in the art world. James Porter recognized the harsh realities that existed for Black artists when he wrote:

> *It is hardly possible to exaggerate the economic poverty of the Negro painters and sculptors of the first twenty years of this century. They possessed scarcely any of the facilities available to whites for the exchange of ideas and the circulation and marketing of productions. . . Development of the Negro artist was ignored. . . .Little attention was given to art training. . .until after 1921.*[1]

The problem of exclusion and the realities of poor conditions contributed to the limited amount of material on Black art and artists. Another reason for the lack of material is that the overall impression that the larger society has maintained of Black expression is that it exists in forms such as literature, music and dance, rather than the fine arts.[2] But despite the obstacles and misconceptions, there exists a strong and vital African-American visual heritage.

Previous to the rise of race consciousness in the 1920s, any distinctiveness of Black art was discouraged by "mainstream" conventions. Black artists maintained these conventions in order for recognition or survival in the field. Alain Locke explains: "It has taken three or four generations to break these taboos of race disparagement, which, even more than limited opportunity, have held the Negro artist back. Then, too, our pioneer artists could succeed only as exceptional individuals, detached from the group, and, as a result, they eschewed

the Negro subject."[3] Issues such as this were some of the odds against the survival and historical documentation of Black artists in the past, and many of the same and similar issues remain for Black artists today.

This chapter investigates Black women's artistic production within the cultural context of African-American visual arts. By examining the context of Black women's artistic production, it becomes evident that it exists and thrives despite being denied recognition in a Eurocentric, patriarchal art establishment. The visibility of the artists, Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell, demonstrates that Black women can achieve prominence in an unfriendly art establishment without giving up their identity.

African-American women artists self-proclaim by dealing with issues directly effected by their personal consciousness as Black women. In order to understand the survival of these artists, it is necessary to look at the historical roots of African-American art and its relationship to Black consciousness by chronicling a short history of Black art on this continent and then by moving into the realm of women's art history in general. These separate histories have laid the groundwork for studying and understanding Black women's artistic traditions. But since they cannot encompass effectively the issues specifically involved in the lives of Black women, scholarship on Black women's art needs to focus on issues specific to Black women's existence.

From the onset of slavery, the pictorial arts of African-Americans were discouraged and destroyed or condemned as pagan or sinful. "This severance of ties with Africa meant a loss. . .of traditional forms."[4] The intention of slave holders was to strip away the material culture of the slaves through the discouragement of creating fine arts. Despite their efforts, a rich tradition thrived in the utilitarian sphere. Many of these arts such as quilting, carving, pottery and ironwork, which are usually labeled as craft, were inspired by African aesthetics which then filtered into "mainstream" American craft and fine arts as did many other traditions in Afro-American culture.[5]

With the advent of modernism and the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, scholars and leaders of the Black community began to call for a need to identify what was Black (Negro) in American society and to claim their own social history. They also wanted to counteract the perpetuation of damaging stereotypical conceptions of Black Americans which "was one of the viciously repressive factors on the improvement of race relations in early twentieth century southern society. . . .The portrayal of Negro character by southern fiction writers and illustrators, for example, dealt only with the fabulous, comical, quaint or criminal side of Negro personality."[6] This awareness led to a consciousness to counteract these negative stereotypes for the benefit of raising race consciousness and in order to strengthen a sense of pride in race and heritage. The call for Black artists was to promote an antidote to the negative image and to create a true to life, positive image of the Black American-"The New Negro". Locke, DuBois, and Porter, all influenced this trend through uncovering the existing artistic traditions in American culture that were inspired by African and Afro-American ancestral and cultural legacies.

During the Harlem Renaissance, the trend in the arts of Black America was to proclaim a strong artistic tradition that was part and parcel of American culture, and to identify their own contributions by exposing Afro-American art and culture as a vital and thriving contribution to American life. In his essay, "The New Negro", in his anthology of 1925 of the same name, Locke discusses the image of the old Negro and the necessity of projecting a positive image of Black Americans. He states "that the Negro of today (should) be seen through other than the dusty spectacles of past controversy. The day of 'aunties', 'uncles', and 'mammies' is equally gone. . . .it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts."[7] The objective of the Black artist was to create renewed self-respect and self-dependence and to instil a mechanism in which the arts of Black America could aid in racial uplift by reflecting serious self-images and not caricatures.[8]

The imperative for proclaiming a positive self-image and confronting negative stereotypes was necessary in establishing elements of Black identity and in counteracting negative stereotypes. In claiming a rightful place for African-American art in American culture and history, Black artists could call upon their heritage for its inspirational sources. W.E.B. DuBois' statement reiterates the imperative of a Black voice and calls attention to the exclusion of Negro art by writing:

> *It is not the positive propaganda of people who believe white blood divine, infallible and holy to which I object. It is the denial of a similar right of propaganda to those who believe black blood human, lovable and inspired with new ideals. . . .All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.*[9]

In this same essay he continues:

> *I do not doubt that the art coming from black folk is going to be just as beautiful. . .as the art that comes from white folk, or yellow, or red; but the point today is that until the art of the black folk compels recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compel recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new.*[10]

This emphasis on the foundations of Afro-American art was reiterated by Locke who reinforced the necessity of reclaiming ancestral inspirations from African art. He noted that with the influence of modernism, African art was assimilated into the European aesthetic movement. Locke writes that European artists, emerging from "a time when there was a marked decadence and sterility in

certain forms of European plastic art expression due to generations of the inbreeding of style and idiom", began to look at African sculpture as an inspirational source for aesthetic form.[11] Locke emphasized that while European artists could only copy African sculptural styles, Afro-American artists could sensitively portray an African sensibility based in cultural pride.[12]

The New Negro Movement not only emphasized the importance of ancestral sources, but also the importance of folk sources in America, especially through the literature being produced by its authors. But this movement was not without its dilemmas, as Samella Lewis states, "Black artists generally had to decide whether to identify with their race, accepting and exploiting the Black heritage, or with the international art movement, accepting and exploiting the security of the European artistic tradition."[13] But with the advent of the cultural awareness of the 1920's, more attention was given to Black artists and there were more opportunities due to the rise of a Black middle class which could afford the services of the artist.[14] The New Negro Movement got its strength and momentum from a need for racial and intellectual pride. It was spurred on by its spokesmen who emphasized the need for a Black (Negro) voice. This voice would, through the cultural medium of the arts, help promote a positive image of Black people and Black life for the benefit of the community as well as to promote the reclaiming of its space in American culture at large.

Within the period of the New Negro Movement there arose in the legacy of Black pictorial art history, the calling for a Black identity or the portrayal of the Black image by Black artists depicting truthful images of Black Americans. The primary purpose was to instill pride in self and in heritage and race. Locke reiterated the imperative in his foreword to the anthology The New Negro: "So far as he is culturally articulate, we shall let the Negro speak for himself".[15] Locke pointed out that the artist reflects the ordinary feelings and thoughts of all Black Americans. But he emphasizes that the New Negro Movement did not lead artists into a "racialist art" but into the mainstream by "expressing his modern self in contemporary idioms, those of his adopted

culture."[16] In this essay he also reiterates the notion that Black art, being produced within American culture and society, is typically American while it is also specifically representative of Black culture.[17] It became apparent to the early leaders that Black art could not simply be an aesthetic pursuit. One of its tasks was to combat predominant negative stereotypes not only because of their damaging effects on self-image, but also because these preconceived notions prevented a serious interest in the arts of Black America and were not inspirational sources for Black artists.[18]

By the 1930s and 40s, an "intimate and original documentation of Negro life was definitely under way."[19] In visual art, the primary style for African-American artists, as well as for other American artists, was realism.[20] In the words of the late artist Romare Bearden: "Whatever increases the self-awareness of black people will therefore enlarge the opinion they have of themselves - as well as the opinion other people have of them."[21] From these imperatives grew a stronger tradition of black subject matter and a power in the notion that art is inspired by experience and thus reflects the existence of personal consciousness and its emotional condition.[22]

From the legacy of the New Negro Movement, there followed a continuous trend throughout the following decades for Black artists to proclaim their identity through art. This notion of identity extended throughout artistic styles and methods of expression to reiterate the place of Black artists in history. For Black artists, identity was a central focus because of the need to celebrate heritage and to confront the histories of suppression, appropriation and negative stereotyping.

Although Locke and Porter had different philosophies in encouraging the trend and focus of Black artists, they set the agenda for contemporary African-American art.[23] The differences in their philosophies parallel the various concerns still prevalent today among African-American artists and scholars. The Art Historian, Sharon Patton explains:

> *"While Porter encouraged a generation of black artists to erase the distinctions of race in pursuit of personal expression, Locke was concerned with the deliberate search for and retrieval of elements of black culture that reflected their African origins, and with incorporating these elements into an African-American aesthetic. It was a controversy that was to resurface, with new passion, in the 1960s and 1970s."*[24]

It is clear that artists of the 1920s and 30s were involved in sustaining a rich visual tradition and that more Black artists began to use Black subject matter out of the necessity of raising race consciousness and exposing a true chronicle of Black life.

From the foundations of the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance, the decades that followed were a time for inquiry in terms of claiming a Black aesthetic as well as a time to survive and be recognized as artists.[25] The social realism of the 20s and 30s passed, although the assertion of Black identity through the portrayal of Black people remained a primary objective. By the 1950s Black artists began to experiment, especially in the style of Abstract Expressionism. But many discovered that for them "the formalizing and intensely introspective view of modernism did not satisfy the aesthetic requirements. . .many. . .African-American artists put upon their work. They wanted to create works whose imagery was abstract, yet still understood by their African-American public."[26] The Civil Rights era reinforced clearly these desired links and a need to confirm and acknowledge African-American life and existence.

Many artists in the 1960s realized that the past agenda was not strong enough for the radicalism of the following decades. With the rise of black nationalism came a distinctly more militant agenda for artists. The agenda required that the arts emerge directly from an African-American context so that the artists would not be acculturated into Euro-American culture. This was a period when Black artists were speaking out on the importance of issues of identity as it influenced their work. Just as there had been differences between Locke and

Porter, this era gave rise to many differences among Black artists due to their choices for styles and their specific agendas and criteria for their art. It is interesting and important to note what artists themselves were saying about their own identity and artistic pursuits:

> *My work is primarily that of Black experiences because I am Black, and I feel a spiritual and visual closeness to the principal forms of traditional art in Africa. I believe that in order for an artist to create and develop truth in his art he must draw strength from his heritage. In my case I look to Africa.--George Smith*[27]

> *Art, to me, is a relationship of symbols which formulate an idea, bringing into being thoughts of past and present in a contemporary way which relates to my environment.--Margo Humphrey*[28]

> *Certainly the American black artist is in a unique position to express certain aspects of the current American scene,. . .but if he restricts himself to these alone, he may risk becoming a mere cypher, a walking protest, a politically prescribed stereotype. . .*
> *In America, black is bound to be black not so much by color or racial characteristics, as by shared experience, social and cultural.--Raymond Saunders*[29]

> *Nobody should attempt to limit artists in their response to the world.-- Barbara Chase-Riboud*[30]

> *In a country where human values are constantly being raped and murdered in the name of technological and economic progress, Black art must deal with the common humanity which unites all mankind.*
> *Black arts' function is the rediscovery of its own roots, and the examining of the depths of the beauty, the poignancy, and the humor in the souls of Black people. . . .I aim to produce a portrait of a people; the reservoir of images is unlimited.-- Marie Johnson*[31]

These artists' statements exhibit a diversity of expression within a common striving to establish their identities as Black artists. Not only were artists searching to capture a specifically defined African-American aesthetic, but they were pursuing an individual aesthetic which included an African-American sensibility.[32] David Driskell states: "Like all forms of expression, art is seldom so ordered that any one style is acceptable to all who consider themselves artists. Black artists. . .need to express their individual sensitivities."[33] So just as Porter and Locke had differing agendas, so too did the artists and trends of the 1960s and 1970s. While the move into the late 1970s saw a decline in such issues, Patton notes that recently this political momentum and social concern resurfaced. She writes:

> *The 1980s. . .saw a revitalization of black visual arts through critical and institutional support. . . .*
> *The 1990s portend challenge for black artists, but one which - given the history of African-American art and artists - will be more than adequately met and reshaped as part of a continuing process of defining self through the visual arts.*[34]

The 1960s and 70s were filled with political agendas, and the art of the times reflected the political trends. Many artists became united under the motivation to focus on the needs of the Black community. Artists were involved in public art projects and the promotion of Black pride through their visual imagery. They focused on influences from Africa in terms of color and style. Artists, like Betye Saar, were creating imagery that promoted a positive image of African-Americans, active in their quest to demolish stereotypical moulds. It was also a time when Black artists, like Howardena Pindell, derived diverse styles from prevailing artistic movements such Abstract Expressionism and Conceptual Art.[35]

It is clear from the material presented above that Black artists are effected by their environment as they experience Black life. Their art

reflects their consciousness of environment whether it is manifested explicitly or not. Although Black women share black experiences, their identities are distinctly different than those of Black men because they experience life as women. Their consciousness as Black women is also distinctly different from each other's and from that of other other women who are not Black. In order to discuss the work of Black women, it is necessary to look at the issues specific to race and gender and then to look at the intersection of these in the lives of Black women. From this vantage point, it is then possible to investigate the varied elements which contribute to the multiple consciousness of Black women's existence.

Since the "mainstream" images of women in art is as passive objects, women artists often reclaim their identities as active subject in their art. Women artists were particularly involved in proclaiming active roles in the 1970s as a result of increased awareness and the women's movement. This brings up the notion of woman's voice and how women can express themselves in a society which silences them through co-opting their imagery and denying them access to communicative platforms.[36] This notion is reminiscent of Du Bois' concern about the imbalance which occurs when propaganda is confined to one side. There is a similar imperative for feminist artists and scholars to recover and reclaim the image of woman as well as to proclaim women's contribution to culture, since "representing creativity as masculine and Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring masculine gaze,. . .denies knowledge of women as producers of culture and meanings."[37] This statement holds true for the portrayal of any group as a stereotype.

For women artists to question male definitions meant also that they question female definitions and whether these differed according to gender. Thus arose the question of female consciousness and the existence of a female aesthetic. This was a necessary step in that women artist's aesthetic choices and choices for subject matter, which were formerly considered trivial, were "heightened to the level of serious art-making"[38] and it acknowledged that woman's experience

was different than man's. But labeling the existence of a specified female sensibility was problematic since it suggested that there was one defined universal female experience and that this identity "is shuffled from century to century or from society to society as if it was something that already existed independent of particular circumstances."[39] Much of the investigation into a female aesthetic centered around the existence of body imagery in the works of women artists, but this assumes that there is some ultimate reality which is common to all women. "This bold embracing of a correlation between the female body and women's imagery in art struck many as excessively reductionist and limiting, a form of biological determinism that women were trying to escape."[40] This assumption is problematic for many women artists because, as Vogel explains, this focus assumes that an individuals experience is completely based on gender without any regard to class or ethnic distinctions.[41] "While it has been necessary to reclaim that often pejorative category in order to insist that there is art made by women. . . .It may lead us to believe that there are such unitary ideological categories as women's art, women's culture, or women's consciousness."[42]

Since defining a female aesthetic "effaces the specificity and heterogeneity of women's artistic production",[43] women artists found it necessary to reiterate the importance of diversity within their experience and their art. Vogel expresses this sentiment by stating: "Women artists must be free to explore the entire range of art possibilities. We who have been labeled, stereotyped and gerrymandered out of the very definition of art must be free to *define* art, . . .as *what women* [artists] *do* ".[44]

Although feminists were investigating all the possibilities of women's art, their basic agenda had nothing to do with the particular realities of women of color. It became evident to Black women that the white women's movement was another realm of exclusivity and that it did not address issues specific to Black women's existence. The movement ignored Black women's existence, primarily in the bottom economic rung of society, as well as their confrontation with damaging

stereotypical images based on their race as well as their gender. Black women refused to contend with white women's racist attitudes in a realm within which women are supposed to be acting in sisterhood against oppression. "The unwillingness of white women to identify with the special problems of black women and the white female's refusal to take offensive against racism set up barriers between the two groups"[45] in the women's movement.

In a study on Black women's attitudes towards the women's liberation movement, Willa Mae Hemmons concluded that the main reason that Black women did not join the women's movement was that they had different priorities. They wanted the same educational and economic opportunities, but that they were more concerned with addressing economic oppression such as unemployment and underemployment as well as racial oppression.[46] Deborah King discusses that the assumption by white women that they could represent a "universal" concept of female oppression, denied the structures of inequality due to an intersecting of race, class, religion, and the existence of diverse cultural heritages. "While contending that feminist consciousness. . .emerged from the personal. . .the reality of millions of women was ignored" as a result of the assumption that a few women's lives were prototypical of all.[47]

The inabilities of general African-American and feminist platforms to identify the specific realities of Black women's experiences, and their inability to confront directly the struggles Black women encountered in asserting their own identities,[48] reinforced Black women's development of their own separate paths towards liberation. After realizing their exclusion from various contexts and identifying stereotypical imagery pertinent to them specifically, Black women then began to investigate the effects of "normative" imagery on their own identities. As the Black Feminist writer Bell Hooks states: "No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women."[49] Other scholars, Althea Smith and Abigail Stewart reiterate this fact by observing that in studies on racism and sexism, black women are consistently excluded from research.[50]

Black women were motivated in the 1970s to proclaiming self-identity, as were Black men and other women, but their consciousness of the exclusion of their realities from all platforms led to the necessity of distinguishing their priorities for liberation as different from others.

The stereotypes particular to Black women have a legacy carried on from slavery. Black women are categorized historically as mammy, as dominant matriarch, and as exotic primitive. The legacy of Black women as sex object and breeder has often had a negative effect on their self-image[51] as has the image of beast of burden.[52] "Being the target of social oppression creates a self image of worthlessness. . . (and) self-doubt which leads to internalized feelings of inferiority."[53] But Black women have shown that they reject this view of themselves as formulated by others. Black women have historically demonstrated their "obstinate strength and ability to survive"[54] by challenging these so called "normative" images. Given that western culture encourages assimilation and undermines self-esteem through a process of pejorative labeling of sexual and cultural difference, it follows that Black women resist oppression through negative imagery by "reinterpreting", "reasserting" and "reproducing" their heritage and thus empower themselves through a process of self-determination.[55]

In identifying differences in Black women's realities, it is important to recognize that they differed from those of Black men and white women. Elizabeth Hood discussed in her study of 1978 that the reality for Black women involved the intersecting burden of race, gender and class and that the agenda of the white women's movement could not encompass Black women's priorities because being black was "still more difficult than being female".[56] Racism was "the greatest obstacle to the black woman's struggle."[57] As Black women addressed the intersection of racism and sexism which produced a specific oppression not experienced by either black men or white women, they began to develop their own personal agenda. Andree Nicola McLaughlin discusses the complexities of this multiple consciousness as it relates the vast scope of Black women's realities due to a diversity of experiences.[58] The acknowledgement of these

diverse existences has led to the agenda of Black feminist thought to encompass this diversity of vision and the ultimate desire for Black feminism to aid in the liberation of all people.

Black women call attention to the diversity within the Black female experience, which is essential to the success of a Black feminist agenda. They have learned from the mistakes of male dominated African-American and Eurocentric feminist agendas which tend to deny Black women's realities.[59] They recognize that Black women's lives and experiences are varied; that not all Black women experience the same economic status, and that Black womanhood is multifaceted. They defy any one single label to describe their realities. Pauli Murray States:

> *The lesson of history that all human rights are indivisible and that the failure to adhere to this principle jeopardizes the rights of all is particularly applicable here. A built-in hazard of an aggressive ethnocentric movement which disregards the interests of other disadvantaged groups is that it will become parochial and ultimately self-defeating in the face of hostile reactions, dwindling allies, and mounting frustrations.*[60]

The specific agenda of Black feminism has therefore become focused on the liberation of all people through the liberation of Black women.

McLaughlin asserts that the empowerment of Black women ultimately presents an opportunity for a new definition of the human community. Through self-determination, Black women battle against multiple jeopardy. Thus Black women's multiple consciousness recognizes the oppression of all people and demands re-claiming elements of "humanhood and wholeness". McLaughlin writes that by counteracting the Western image of a fragmentary universe and by demythifying Western imagery of the "other", Black feminism will promote the acceptance of the diversity and integrity of all human identity.[61] Reiterating this notion, King outlines the basic ideological agenda of Black feminism in three parts: 1. First and foremost is the

visibility of Black women, 2. self-determination is an essential part of empowerment through the right of Black women to interpret their own realities, 3. Black feminism should fundamentally challenge the oppressions of the dominant society by defining the elements of multiple consciousness. Ultimately, "a black feminist ideology presumes an image of black women as powerful, independent subjects. By concentrating on our multiple oppressions, scholarly descriptions have confounded our ability to discover and appreciate the ways in which black women are not victims."[62]

Just as Black feminism needed to set aside a specific agenda from those of Black men's and white women's movements, so too do Black women artists need to establish their own direction. Chila Burman, a Black woman artist, discusses issues that pertain to the visual arts in her essay, "There Have Always Been Great Blackwomen Artists". She presents the same concerns about the invisibility of Black women's art despite its existence. Her statements reinforce similar agenda across the disciplines. She states:

> *It is true to say that although Blackwomen have been the staunchest allies of black men and white women in the struggle against the oppression we all face at the hands of the capitalist and patriarchal system, we have hardly ever received either the support we need or recognition of our pivotal role in this struggle. . . .It is this realisation which has a lot to do with . . .developing an awareness. . . of ourselves as complete human beings. . . .*
>
> *. . .The bourgeois art establishment only acknowledges white men as truly creative and innovative artists, whilst recognising art by white women only as a homogenous expression of femininity and art by black people (or, more accurately, . . ., black men) as a static expression of the ritual experience of the daily lives of their communities. . . .In this system. . .Blackwomen artists, quite simply, do not exist.*[63]

Michelle Cliff discusses the problems Black women face in the art world and society at large due to the desire by white society to remain dominant. She criticizes the objectification of Black women in imagery.

The objectification of Black women is manifested in many stereotypes and is maintained through denying access of black women to art and the power of self-definition.[64] "Under racism the person who is oppressed is turned into an object in the mind of the oppressor."[65] Objectification is a process of dehumanization wherein the objectified becomes "other" and is denied self-hood, history and culture.[66] "The practice of objectification stands between all Black people and full human identity under the white supremacist system: racism (sic) requires that Black people be thought different from white; and this difference is usually translated as less than."[67] She goes on to emphasize the imperative for Black women to take control of their own image and to proclaim their existence and personal identities through art. This is a process of liberation as well as a recognition of the right to this freedom. She states:

> *We face many problems when trying to establish the very existence of Blackwomen's art,. . . .Firstly, we have to struggle to establish our existence, let alone our credibility as autonomous beings, in the art world. Secondly, we can only retain that credibility and survive as artists if we become fully conscious of ourselves, lest we are demoralised or weakened by the social, economic and political constraints which the white-male art establishment imposes and will continue to impose upon us.*[68]

The role of Black women in art, according to Jacqueline Fonvielle-Bontemps, has increased. As she states:

> *(Black women's) vision of black reality will shape the visual imagery of black life in America. . . .Perhaps this means that she (Black women) is beginning to question herself as much as she questions society and to think of her own*

> *personal development. . . .Clearly she has begun to reveal more and more of herself in her art, thereby increasing its complexity and meaning, its power to captivate and inspire - to disturb and challenge - all of us.*[69]

Some discontinuities exist in feminist theory because it often does not allow for diversity. It is interesting to note one example of this here in order to recognize the extent of difference within work by women. Feminist artists and scholars place much emphasis on the use of body imagery. This focus assumes that all women, regardless of cultural or racial orientation have this focus in their art. But Black women's art in general does not tend to have the same focus, for example, on vaginal forms, as some white women's particular artistic agendas did, especially in the seventies. This observation is pointed out in High Tesfagiorgis' essay in which she discusses the emphasis by Black women artists on promoting images of Black women as active subject, tied to a strong cultural heritage.[70] So while both Black and white women do use the subject of woman, they have focused on women's biological manifestations very differently.

"Despite these differences. . .the idea of recording herstory, of celebrating women's culture, of addressing women's issues and of presenting self-defined images are factors which, to some degree, unify Afrofemcentrism and feminism."[71] High Tesfagiorgis reiterates that Black women's art projects Black women's realities. She emphasizes that their depiction of Black women as subjects, rather than objects, "insightfully enlarges and activates images of Black women, celebrating heroines and documenting herstory while integrally addressing political, social and personal issues."[72] Also on the agenda for Black women, as discussed by Bontemps and Fonvielle-Bontemps, is the desire by Black women from diverse backgrounds, to be creative in an atmosphere that encourages individual artistic choices.[73]

Since "Blackwomen's own culture plays a large part in determining the content and form" of their work[74] the necessity of developing a separate methodology related to historical developments

and based in the existing scholarship, is readily apparent. Many artists and scholars are reiterating the necessity of developing critical processes capable of analyzing works by "marginalized" artists. David Driskell states that without critical interpretation to reinforce and help clarify the aesthetic and stylistic significance of art work by Black artists, their contribution to art in America will never be accepted as relevant.[75] This imperative has been a priority since Locke, Du Bois and Porter called for an art that would raise the cultural consciousness of Black people. Porter stated: "Deprived of constructive art criticism and lacking other necessary incentives the black artist can scarcely live much less create."[76] The search for an appropriate critical process is still being investigated. Feminist theorists have developed further in terms of investigating an appropriate methodolgy. It is important to look briefly at the possible reasons why African-American theorists have made little strides in this area by investigating the racism built into the mainstream art critical structure before questioning contemporary developments in art history and theory.

There can be little doubt that racism and sexism has existed historically in the art establishment from the evidence presented here, but it is important to look at contemporary evidence in order to reiterate the

critical imperative of re-structuring the existing critical system. The prejudice of the art establishment manifests itself in several ways; by assuming that there is no art market for Black art, by categorizing black art as "political", by denying that black art exists in a cultural context, by labeling it as inferior and the list goes on. Keith Morrison states: "The assumptions have to do with the notion that art is culture-free, and it is these assumptions that have led to an inadequacy of modern American art."[77] In looking at Black women's art, in particular, Chila Burman attests: "All the forces of the dominant aesthetic ideology are brought to bear on us. Black women artists are ignored, isolated, described as 'difficult', slotted into this or that stereotype and generally discouraged in every conceivable way from expressing ourselves in the way that we want to."[78] This system of oppression and exclusion

is important to recognize in order to discuss Black women's achievements in the art world.

The history of Black women's artistic production, as Orenstein reiterates regarding women's art in general, is a testament to the "perseverance of women artists despite the ostracism experienced by any artist working in a style that diverges from the predominant trend of the day".[79] Despite the exclusionary practices of the art establishment, it is quite evident that there do exist strong artistic traditions outside of the "mainstream" and that some art by women and men of various ethnicities does achieve visibility in the existing system.

Acknowledging that art by people of all ethnicities is marginalized because of exclusionary practices is crucial to remedying the existing prejudicial critical system. It is important to chronicle some of these exclusionary practices in order to gain insight into the existing structure of the art establishment. Orenstein states that in 1970 even though women constituted 60-75% of the art student population, and 50% of the artist population, only 5% were represented in galleries and 3% in museums.[80] For Black artists, even though there was promise with the rise of African-American art exhibitions in the 1960s, by the 1970s this wave had subsided and "today. . .black artists and critics are scarcely represented in the history of American art and 'far less than one percent of all black artists have professional gallery affiliations,' indicating that little has changed in the art establishment's attitude toward black art."[81]

In Howardena Pindell's extensive documentation of art world racism, that she presented at the Agendas for Survival conference at Hunter college in New York in 1987, and published in 1989 in the New Art Examiner, Pindell has listed over 50 New York galleries which represent only white artists or are at least 95% white. She reviewed seven major art institutions and summarized their exhibitions during the 1980s. Her statistical evidence showed that not one museum devoted less than 82.22% of their exhibitions to European artists or artists of European descent.[82] There is consistent statistical evidence of art world racism, but it is difficult to label or identify as such. In this culture

"people still believe or act as if the values of Eurocentric culture are universal" and racial exclusionism is disguised as artistic or aesthetic taste or judgement of quality and competence.[83] Tastes represent those of gallery owners, critics or museum curators which is then passed on to public opinion.

As a legacy to the higher percentage of African-American art exhibitions of the 1960s, black artistic production is often labeled as 'black art'. This labeling generalizes the diverse range of styles and mediums of Black artists by creating only one category. In addition, the media and the art world tend to focus on the 'exotic' black artist. As Benny Andrews observes: Few publications would ever "write about an ordinary, non-esoteric, mid-career black artist just because he (sic) makes good contemporary art."[84] But this raises questions about black artists who have been "integrated" into the "mainstream" art world. Patricia Failing asks: "Does their success deflate Pindell's data, by demonstrating that major institutions do in fact make judgements based solely on artistic quality?"[85] She uses as an example the case of Martin Puryear who has achieved great visibility and prestige in the art world and represented the U.S. in 1989 at the Sao Paulo Biennale. Aware that his success and recognition for artistic merit could may be viewed as tokenism, Puryear states: "Black artists have been making art throughout this country's history. . .but it's been very difficult for us to achieve visibility. . .it would be sad if the most exciting thing about my inclusion (in the Sao Paulo Bienniale) were the color of my skin and not the work I do. I think there's something to be angry about as well as pleased."[86] For artists such as Puryear there is not only the threat that his achievement will be interpreted as a form of tokenism, but there is also the threat of appropriation, and denial by the white art establishment in assuming that cultural heritage does not effect his life and work. These issues create a potential bind for black artists; to achieve visibility through the mainstream route, or to achieve visibility exclusively in black institutions and shows. Failing explains:

> *Sustained in part by stereotypical assumptions about the accomplishments of American black artists, this narrowness of vision continues to limit opportunities for experiencing and evaluating their work. An Art News survey of 38 artists, dealers, collectors, art historians, and museum curators reveals unanimity on one point: The art world is not widely informed about the scope and quality of visual art now being produced by black Americans.*[87]

Pindell emphasizes that the existing system is a closed circuit which keeps artists of color on the fringes by cutting them off from existing routes. This forces "outsiders" to create alternative institutions and media which then results in the mainstream using this further as a means to exclusion by assuming that they no longer need to deal with works by artists of color since they have their own platforms. But the resultant omission from the primary networks "creates a false and rather fraudulent impression that only artists of European descent are doing valid work."[88] Pindell continues by emphasizing that two-thirds of the worlds citizens are people of color and that pejorative terms such as "minority" are used to "demean, limit" and render people of color powerless. She stresses the need for "a new language which empowers" artists and all people of color.[89]

The creation of a critical approach appropriate to analyzing the works of Black women artists in particular can be developed from the paths forged by African-American, feminist and black feminist scholars. As with any scholarship views are many and varied, but it is essential to touch on the common prerogative of restructuring existing canons. Lucy Lippard points out that counteracting mainstream thought is one way to create a new platform but that this runs the risk of "being controlled by what one opposes".[90] She states: "Perhaps the greatest challenge to the feminist movement in the visual arts, then, is the establishment of new criteria by which to evaluate not only aesthetic effect, but the communicative effectiveness of art."[91] She also emphasizes that the critic must be aware of her own cultural

experience in order to examine the influences of this on how she views the cultural consciousness of others.[92]

Mary Garrard emphasizes the necessity of examining the content of a work based on the knowledge necessary to a better understanding of the art work in general. She states in her essay, "Feminism: Has it Changed Art History?": "We have before us the prospect of an art history that takes sexual attitudes into account as subjective values and value judgments. . . . These values can be examined and assessed as part of the content of a work of art, factors often just as relevant to our understanding of it as other factors that we routinely take seriously."[93] Both Pollock and Bass agree that the perspective of the critic needs to be acknowledged otherwise "the whole 'translated' by the words of the critic who, while pretending merely to comment upon, in fact refashions the meanings of the work of art in his or her own ideological image."[94] Bass explains that the critic needs to recognize "that her reactions, associations, likes, dislikes, are connected to who she is. . . .She is limited by her culture, age, economics, politics, sex, imagination; and she is aware that another person, or even herself at another time, would be touched. . .in different ways. . . .What she sees depends not only on what one looks at, but also from where one looks."[95]

Feminist criticism attempts to take into account the factors which effect women's vision of life and how they reflect it in their art. It tries to accept the differing perspectives which result from diverse world views due to personal identity and culture. However, as has been noted, feminist criticism is not without problems. "The best criticism has always raised more questions than it answered."[96] One reason for this is that, as Langer attests, "there are no well-trodden paths to fall back on in doubt and fear."[97] She views feminist criticism as a multiverse that holds a great potential in being undefined by strict boundaries and open to difference. Even though feminist criticism, in reality, has its difficulties encompassing the works of Black women, its essential philosophies are important in developing a critical approach for the works of black women since it discusses the existence of the influence of gender on artistic expression.

Fundamentally, feminist criticism investigates the effects of societal codes, social practices and expectations as social constructions that are created based on a hierarchical structure of dominance. It ultimately strives toward minimizing the continuation of these practices and is actively opposed to patriarchal art, art history and criticism.[98] It rejects the notion of a universal aesthetic and calls for a re-examination of the notion of aesthetics along with "the inherent biases and assumptions informing the critical methods which (in part) shape our aesthetic responses."[99] It recognizes how language in the confines of the existing structure is both Eurocentric and androcentric and therefore establishes the act of definition as a white male prerogative in which "the sanctified concept of art as...'True, Good and Beautiful is born of the aspirations of those who are empowered to shape culture.'"[100] It therefore attempts to go beyond labels, classifications and evaluation.

A non-evaluative criticism is believed to be possible by some theorists while others believe the the very act of interpretation automatically demonstrates that art is not value-free.[101] Lippard sees evaluation as authoritarian[102] and Pollock reiterates this when she writes that art history as a form of appreciation automatically creates a positive and negative. This creates distinctions between major and minor, good and bad, "the eternally valued and momentarily fashionable. This kind of evaluative judgement has particular implications for women. Art created by women is consistently assessed as poor art."[103] The focus of feminist criticism tends to be on a contextualization of art within history and culture and the identity of the artist/creator. Bass explains that seeing art is like viewing of "someone else's truth" and a contextual approach will help to clarify what the work means and its inspirations.[104] This process ultimately validates the notion of a multiplicity of vision and expression in art. Therefore the foundations created by feminist critical theory are essential to the further development of a pluralistic critical approach.

Art Educator Kristin Congdon's essay, "Multi-Cultural Approaches to Art Criticism," emphasizes the imperative of

recognizing, accepting and including diversity in criticism. Sociologist Elizabeth Fox-Genovese reiterates the need for multi-cultural acceptance as a means to break the hierarchical structure that privileges one form of cultural expression over another. She states:

> *If the canon ignores or demeans African-American women, how can an African-American woman be expected to acknowledge it as the highest expression of her identity as an American?. . . .the growing numbers of postmodernists stake their conception of a transformed culture on expanding the numbers of voices to which we attend in order to let groups that have been excluded speak directly of their own experience.*[105]

It is therefore most advantageous, in searching for a critical approach appropriate to Black women's artistic production, to look at the actual lives and works of Black women artists. And in so doing to focus on works which actively self-define through depicting images of Black women as they sees themselves and as expressed through their own voices. In this way it is possible to illustrate the imperative of a contextual approach and thus to demonstrate the multiple consciousness evident in a variety of works. This approach utilizes the philosophical pursuits of African-Americanists, feminists and Black feminists in their search for appropriate critical analyses of artistic production outside of the mainstream art establishment.

By building upon the foundations thus created, the analyses of works by two artists, Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell, will attempt to continue the investigation into a contextual critical approach and into a restructuring of the existing canon. It will present a method by which Black women's artistic production can be analyzed by taking into account historical, cultural, political and personal contexts.

The use of a contextual approach will demonstrate the pertinent issues in the lives of Saar and Pindell and show how these issues effect their artistic endeavours. It will uncover the elements of identity and multiple consciousness present in the artists' lives and works and will

ultimately show diversity of vision as these women express themselves and their existence as Black women. Betye Saar is now working within a well established artistic career, and Howardena Pindell is now mid-career and currently gaining more visibility in the art establishment.

NOTES

[1]James A. Porter, Modern Negro Art (New York: Dryden Press,Inc., 1943), p. 93.

[2]Alain Locke, Ed. , The Negro in Art (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1968), p. 8.

[3]Ibid., p.9.

[4]David C. Driskell, Two Centuries of Black American Art (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 17.

[5]Ibid., p.14.

[6]Porter, p.82.

[7]Alain Locke, "The New Negro", in The New Negro (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 5.

[8]Ibid., p.9.

[9]W.E.B. DuBois, "Criteria of Negro Art," The Crisis, v. xxxii, #6, (Oct. 1926), p.296.

[10]Ibid., p.297.

[11]Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in The New Negro (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 258.

[12]Ibid., p.256.

[13]Samella Lewis, Art: African-American (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p.61.

[14]Ibid., p. 95.

[15]Locke, The New Negro, (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. xv.

[16]Ibid., p. 8.

[17]Ibid., p. 10.

[18]Porter, p. 98-9.

[19]Locke, "The New Negro", p.9.

[20]Robert Doty, Contemporary Black Artists in America (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971), p. 12.

[21]Ibid., p.7.

[22]Ibid., p.12.

[23]Sharon F. Patton, "The Search for Identity," in African-American Artists: 1880-1987 (Seattle, WA: Univ. of Washington Press, 1989),p 73.

[24]Ibid., p.73.

[25]Ibid., p. 73.

[26]Ibid., p. 84.

[27]New Perspectives in Black Art (Oakland, CA: Art West Assoc. North, Inc., 1968), p. 20.

[28]New Perspectives, p.21.

[29]Patton, p. 100.

[30]Doty, p. 12.

[31]New Perspectives, p. 20.

[32]Patton, p. 104.

[33]Driskell, p.74.

[34]Patton, p.110.

[35]Lewis, p. 132.

[36]Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 15.

[37]Ibid., p. 17.

[38]Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews. "The Feminist Critique of Art History". The Art Bulletin LXIX, #3 (Sept. 1987), p. 334.

[39]Pollock, p. 8.

[40]Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. "Feminist Art History and the Academy: Where Are We Now?" Women's Studies Quarterly XV, #'s 1&2 (Spring/Summer 1987), p. 12.

[41]Lise Vogel, "Fine Arts and Feminism: The Awakening Consciousness," in Feminist Art Criticism (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 42.

[42]Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," Women's Studies Quarterly XV, #'s 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1987), p. 5.

[43]Ibid., p.5.

[44]Vogel, p.42.

[45]Elizabeth F. Hood, "Black Women, White Women: Separate Paths to Liberation," The Black Scholar, Vol. 9, # 7 (April 1978), p. 54.

[46]Willa Mae Hemmons, "The Women's Liberation Movement: Understanding Black Women's Attitudes," in The Black Woman (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE pub., 1980), p. 297.

[47]Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology," Signs, Vol. 14, # 1 (Autumn 1988),pp. 57-8.

[48]Chila Burman, "There Have Always Been Great Blackwomen Artists," in Visibly Female (New York: Universe Books, 1987), p. 199.

[49]King, p. 45.

[50]Althea Smith and Abigail J. Stewart, "Approaches to Studying Racism and Sexism in Black Women's Lives," Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 39, # 3 (1983), p. 8.

[51]Pauli Murray, "The Liberation of Black Women," in Women: A Feminist Perspective (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Pub. Co., 1975), p. 353.

[52]Bonnie Thornton Dill, "The Dialectics of Black Womanhood," Signs, Vol. 4, # 3 (Spring 1979), p. 553.

[53]Smith and Stewart, p. 3.

[54]Dill, p. 555.

[55]Andree Nicola McLaughlin, "Black Women, Identity, and the Quest for Humanhood and Wholeness: Wild Women in the Whirlwind," in Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 170-1.

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[57]Dorothy Porter, "Preface," in The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1978), p. ix.

[58]McLaughlin, p.151.

[59]King, p. 159.

[60]Murray, pp. 362-3.

[61]McLaughlin, pp. 174-6.

[62]King, p. 72.

[63]Burman, pp. 195-6.

[64]Michelle Cliff, "Object into Subject," in Visibly Female (New York: Universe Books, 1987), p. 145.

[65]Ibid., p. 140.

[66]Ibid., p. 141.

[67]Ibid., p. 142.

[68]Burman, p. 195.

[69]Arna Alexander Bontemps and Jacqueline Fonvielle-Bontemps, "African-american Art History: The Feminine Dimension," in Forever Free (Alexandria, VA: Stephenson Inc., 1980), p. 45.

[70]Freida High-Tesfagiorgis, "Afrofemcentrism and its Fruition in the Art of Elizabeth Catlett and Faith Ringgold," Sage, Vol. IV, # 1 (Spring 1987).

[71]Ibid., p. 27.

[72]Ibid., p. 26.

[73]Bontemps and Fonvielle-Bontemps, pp. 40-1.

[74]Burman, p. 199.

[75]Driskell, p. 62.

[76]Ibid., p. 68.

[77]Keith Morrison, "Art Criticism: A Pan-African Point of View," The New Art Examiner, Vol. 6, # 5 (February 1979), p. 4.

[78]Burman, p. 197.

[79]Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Art History," Signs, Vol. 1, # 2 (Winter 1975), p. 516.

[80]Ibid., p. 524.

[81]Allison Gamble, "'Choosing': Defining a Black American Aesthetic," The New Art Examiner, Vol. 14, # 10 (June 1987), p. 30.

[82]Howardena Pindell, "Art World Racism: A Documentation," The New Art Examiner, Vol. 16, # 7 (March 1989), pp. 33-5.

[83]Patricia Failing, "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion," Art News, Vol. 88, # 3 (March 1989), pp. 124-5.

[84]Ibid., p. 128.

[85]Ibid., p. 130.

[86]Ibid., p. 130.

[87]Ibid., p. 124.

[88]Pindell, p. 32.

[89]Ibid., p. 36.

[90]Lucy Lippard, "Projecting a Feminist Criticism," Art Journal, Vol. 35, # 4 (Summer 1976), p. 337.

[91]Ibid., p. 338.

[92]Ibid., p.339.

[93]Mary D. Garrard, "Feminism: Has it Changed Art History?", Heresies, Vol.1, # 4 (Winter 1977-8), p. 60.

[94]Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology," Women's Art Journal, Vol. 4, # 1 (Spring/Summer), p. 42.

[95]Ellen Bass, "In Place of Criticism," The Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 4, # 1 (Spring 1975), p. 43.

[96]Sandra Langer, "Is There a New Feminist Criticism?", Women Artists News, Vol. 10, # 5 (September 1985), p. 4.

[97]Langer, p. 5.

[98]Cassandra Langer, "A Working Gynergenic Art Criticism," in Feminist Art Criticism (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 117.

[99]Joanna Frueh, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Art Criticism," in Feminist Art Criticism (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 157.

[100]Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, p. 340.

[101]Frueh, p. 156.

[102] Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, p. 343.

[103]Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," p. 4.

[104]Bass, p. 43.

[105]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Between Individualism and Fragmentation: American Culture and the New Literary Studies of Race and Gender," American Quarterly, Vol. 42, # 1 (March 1990), p. 8.

CHAPTER III

The Life and Work of Betye Saar

A discussion of Betye Saar's life and work will demonstrate the personal and artistic development of a significant Black woman artist. It will expose issues of identity by examining her act of self-defining through art. Through an investigation of a chronological series of events and experiences in her life, it is possible to expose how her personal artistic development and life echo one another in a process of self discovery which continues throughout her work from the 1960s to the present. But her process of self-definition cannot define that of all black women or black women artists because while it involves investigations into racial and gender-oriented identity, her life experiences and resultant art products are highly subjective. The act and process of self-definition are based upon an individual response to unique life experiences. Although there may be similarities between individual lives due to culture, race or gender, the choices for expression are highly personal.

The work of Betye Saar is one example of the way in which Black women artists utilize a unique visual language, which is inspired by personal experience. A development of her biography and a discussion of her artistic developments, through an analysis of specific works from the 1960s to the present, will demonstrate the individual quality of the act of self-definition within the context and experience of being black and female. It is necessary to identify key experiences from her childhood to the present in order to uncover the sources which inspired her work throughout her life. This process will set up a framework within which her overall work can be analyzed.

Saar's work, like that of many artist, is a direct product of her interpretations and commentary on her surroundings. Therefore, each work ultimately emerges from her immediate experience. Several of her works directly pursue identity through the image of self, in this way confronting the viewer with a strong statement of self-knowledge. Through self exposure comes strength and a positive sense of self-proclaiming which ultimately confronts damaging stereotypes and

categorisation. For example, some of her works are a direct response to racism. Saar, comments on how past rejection, due to racism, led her to channel her energy into a positive reinforcement of self-knowledge through her work when she states: "I don't think the experience was all bad. . . .anger . . .helped drive me. . .Wanting revenge is a good way out. It pushes you."[1]

The issues of her identity which are present in her work become more apparent when correlating them with the impacting incidents in her life which helped to form her ideas from childhood to the present. She was born in Pasadena in 1926 and as a child she spent the summers with her grandmother who lived on 117th Street in the rural Watts area of Los Angeles. She played in her grandmother's "wild gardens"[2] where she would dig up little "treasures" from the ground.[3] In the early 1930s, the Watts area was country. "It was there that her life as a noticer of things around her, a picker-upper and so an artist, began."[4] She would play in her grandmother's backyard and find glass, beads and stones and she would collect shells at the beach and discarded objects along the railroad tracks. Saar says that she has been a collector all her life.[5] While visiting her grandmother she would often pass the Watts towers which were being built by Simon Rodia who began construction of these in 1921 and worked on them for thirty-three years. The steel towers are adorned with mosaics of broken glass, shells, pottery and tiles. This technique of accumulation was later quite impacting on Saar's style and has inspired many of her works. In one piece, entitled Version of Survival, 1983 (slide 1), she incorporates an actual photograph of a section of the towers. In another work, Spirit Catcher, 1985, the influence of the spiralling towers is readily apparent.[6] Saar says that the towers were "magical and strange and curious. But it wasn't until I was grown and took my own children to see them that I spied bits of crockery and tiles and glass".[7] From these works and others, it is apparent that the towers continue to inspire her work as a source of memory.

Among the many influences that helped to formulate Saar's life as an artist, was her mother. In an interview with Camille Billops in the

early 1970s, Saar says that her mother, although not an artist herself, was very sensitive to the arts. She would take her children to summer recreation and craft classes in the parks.[8] Saar states: "There was always a space in our house, or materials. . .to work with art. . .so it became a part of our lifestyle."[9] Since Saar's father died when she was six and her mother worked all day, she and her siblings used to spend their time working with crafts.[10] Within the family they were encouraged to pursue art, but at that time, it was generally not recommended that black students enter an art program except in design.[11]

Saar's history as an artist began early on in her life, but her career as a "fine" artist began after her children had grown. She majored in art in High school and junior college in Pasadena. She transfered to UCLA, majored in Design and received a BA in 1949. She went on to do some graduate work at Cal. State-Long Beach from 1958-62 where she focused on printmaking with Dick Swift. She attended USC in 1962 and studied with Don Leveer who really encouraged her. Saar states: "It took me a long time for me to say 'I am an artist.' I would say, 'I am a designer or an artisan or a craft person.' To say I was an artist took a lot. . .I was so insecure about that. . . .at that time Blacks were not particularly encouraged in the arts."[12] However, in the mid-1960s she gained some recognition through various awards she received for her prints[13] and as her children grew older she had more time to devote to her art as a career.

Her early work was inspired by her existence as mother and wife, and by her education and training in graphics. The work, Girl Children,1964 (slide 2), which pictures her three daughters, exemplifies "the lack of distinction Betye makes between being an artist and a mother."[14] When asked by an interviewer how she managed to be both a mother and an artist she replied "what's the difference?"[15] Her art "needs to be taken. . .as one with her life. She makes no separation between the two. The environment and activities of her life are parts of the same assemblage. She lives her life as art and lives her art as life."[16] Like the influence of her mother's house, Saar saw her own

house as part and parcel of her artistic environment. Her daughters were part of that environment and they never got in the way of her artistic pursuits. She states:

> *Art is part of them, because when I was pregnant I was an artist, and when they were very young. . .I mean I didn't always have a large space, but you can draw, in between nursing or naps or things like that, and because I was into print-making I would take them as babies to the print lab and they would just like fool around or play around. So I'd never let them stop me. It just took longer that's all. But I never minded the time.*[17]

Historically, women artists, who were denied access to traditional art education, "portrayed subjects from their personal surroundings - especially their families. A continuation of this tradition to the present day attests to the importance women still place on familial ties."[18] Although Saar had formal training in Design and printmaking, she followed this tradition of reflecting the world around her, of her immediate experience, and demonstrated that it was not necessary for her to separate her life from her work, in fact it was impossible and undesirable. It was part and parcel of her existence as an artist. She states that in her early work, especially, "nature and my children were mostly the things that were in my prints. And lots of things about women, women and birds, women and children. . . .art. . .would just fit in the day, you know between the laundry and gardening and whatever I had to do."[19] The underlying philosophy of Saar's work follows closely along the theme of revealing the world as she sees it and from there moves into the discovery of unknown realms, both mysterious and yet familiar to her.

Girl Children is an early print work. This etching is very flat and two-dimensional. It is figurative and simplified. Saar uses muted earth tones of browns and greens to depict her three daughters. Printmaking was her primary medium until she began to combine mediums, as in Mystic Window For Leo, 1966 (slide 3). This work is a transitional

piece in which she combined a print with a window frame,[20] a style which she began to utilize in various works. And later, after seeing a show on the work of Joseph Cornell, she realized the potential of assemblage. "The art of assemblage is the art of metaphor, the art of juxtaposition. . . .it is often described as 'lyrical'. . . .poetry in visual media."[21] It is a technique which involves order as well as chance as it unfolds from the subconscious mind as if from a dream.[22] Her assemblage works show her change from a realistic influence to and emphasis on surrealism and magic-realism, which is readily apparent in her later works.

Saar's subject matter owes its inspiration to many sources extending from her personal experience, history and consciousness. These include nostalgia, ancestral memory, cross-cultural rituals, the occult[23], spiritual power and Black female consciousness. "Saar's approach tends to embrace a direct personal link with the spiritual world and emphasizes the individual's relationship to the occult via astrology, palmistry and magic"[24] reflecting her "interest in cultural diversities and universal similarities".[25] Subjects and themes document her travels through life and across continents, recording "a person on the move 'making her own history.'"[26] Since many sources tend to intersect in her work, it is impossible to stress the importance of one over the other. They can be identified through an analysis of several of her works; in this case by looking particularly at works which utilize self-image or the image of Black women.

Since Saar had always collected things, it was a natural step for her to begin combining materials, as she did with Mystic Window for Leo. When she found an old leaded window in a shop on Big Sur, in California, she began filling each frame with prints and drawings.[27] This marked the period when she began to develop a style that investigated three-dimensional form. In her process began gluing objects on top of the windows and eventually she moved away from the use of prints and into mixed media. In the work, Black Girl's Window, 1969 (slide 4), Saar was still using prints in a window format, but she incorporated other materials such as photographs or small three-

dimensional objects into the piece. She discusses the effect of the combination of lost or discarded objects in her work: "It's the way that they relate. . . .Certain things have a certain look about them that's enhanced by what they're placed next to."[28] The act of recycling and renewal are inherent in her work with each object bringing its own residual energy to the piece from its previous history.[29]

In Black Girl's Window, Saar began to mix graphics and collage in a window format. It demonstrates her search for identity in her early career. It is a landmark piece which is both enigmatic yet familiar. It encompasses past, present and future, each panel relating to her life. The work, as life, revolves around the theme of death in the center. This has personal significance as a reference to the death of her father but also relates to the cycle of life. Death is part of a cycle; it rarely stands alone in her work. She sees death as part of the mystical in life, along with birth.[30] The small central panel depicts death as a white skeleton. The color white represents the spiritual realm in African culture. Beneath the extended arms of this figure, in the lower right hand corner, is a smaller, three-dimensional black skeleton glued to the top of the window. Saar identifies the death of her father as the time when she lost her gift of psychic vision. She stated: "His death marked my life. . .it was as if a door had shut."[31] Mary Schmidt Campbell explains:

> *Though her father's death affected her clairvoyance, aspects of her childhood gift of a special vision, a special avenue to knowledge remained. As an adult, dreams, feeling and intuitions became important sources for her art. The occult, too, began to hold special for Betye and she became a student of the symbols, emblems and ritual ceremonies of various supernatural systems. Phrenology, palmistry, voodoo, shamanism, the secrets and mysteries of the occult, like the found objects she would incorporate into her art, contained bits and pieces of information, small revelations. Her intuitive understanding of the ancient insights of such systems provided Betye Saar with a rich*

visual vocabulary from which she would draw during her entire artistic career.[32]

For Saar death is a cycle, a transition. She states: "I think it probably stems from a time that, I was so young when my father died, that it left a real strong imprint. . . .these discovered objects, they're dead discards and are somehow reborn through me."[33] Black Girl's Window displays Saar's utilization of the process of accumulation which results in a collective energy, a vital force. Vital force is a concept that emerges from an African notion that all things contain an energy that when combined with other elements creates a greater, cumulative energy.

In African religion everything exists in duality. This duality is a source of energy and vital force - the result of combining elements or "power-gathering". "Saar has explained that for her the work of art is not merely an object, but an object of power."[34] The notion of power was reinforced when Saar visited the Field museum of natural history in Chicago in the early 1970s. There she saw traditional ritual objects from Africa and Oceania and was overwhelmed by their spiritual intensity. She has stated that the museum and the objects on display had a great impact upon her work and changed it.[35] The power in her works also emanates from a deeper level which she attributes to cultural memory. She states:

Where is that information coming from if I'm doing something before I even see it?. . .that spiritual quality. . . .What I try to do is make it feel comfortable. I don't try to do threatening things because I'm not about imitating African art or primitive art, but I am interested in the power it has and that power being transferred to the work that I do.[36]

She goes on to say that some of her imagery is created on a conscious level by pulling imagery from sources she feels akin to. But at other times her source comes from a deep rooted intuition in which she is not

aware of what she is doing and an interior part takes over "like I'm on automatic artist or something".[37] The spirituality comes through without her conscious awareness of it[38] as if being guided by a preordained destiny.[39]

The theme in Black Girl's Window is autobiographical and represents a "search for her identity as a woman, an artist, (and) an African American".[40] Saar says that at the time she made this work, she knew it was about herself. "We'd had the Watts riots and the black revolution. Also, that was the year I got my divorce. So in addition to the occult subject matter there was political and also personal content. . . .(the) two hands represent my own fate. . . .Everything revolves around death."[41] The panels around death hold images that relate to Saar's life, past, present and future. The tintype of a woman relates to her history and ancestry. Although Saar does not know the white woman in the picture, the woman represents Saar's mother's mother who was white and Irish. It represents a duality of black and white.[42] Below this is a shadowy figure in whose hands are astrological symbols relating to Saar's own fate.

The form of the window frames her vision: Inward and outward as if it is unclear whether she wants to escape or to remain. "The window is a way of traveling from one level of consciousness to another, like the physical looking into the spiritual. I once read 'art is a window, a way of sharing.'"[43] Clothier writes that this work "was a break through in Saar's search for a form that would permit her to begin to explore that sense of wholeness of self."[44] Saar states that the more autobiographical her work, the more abstract and cryptic it becomes. After going to a psychic, she began to understand this work. The psychic "explained how one's energy is locked away. . .the body is a door. . . .She explained to me that there was energy locked away in me. . .I was still. . .that child who was six when her father died."[45]

Black Girl's Window deals with Saar's own life as well as destiny in general. She states that she was always interested in the occult but that it didn't enter into her art until 1965 when she was using astrological signs and then began to use symbols from palmistry, phrenology and

tarot. Her use of stars and moons represent how they "rule our lives, or destiny or fate."[46] These disciplines are also associated with vodun which is another source for her work extending from a pan-African influence. Her works act as charms, or mojos, which "combine. . .mystical symbols with natural objects."[47] Saar's use of accumulation as an extension of an African cultural heritage was reinforced when she read an article by the late Art Historian Arnold Rubin entitled "Accumulation: Power and Display in African Sculpture". Rubin wrote, in 1975, that African art "served to define and focus group identity and to reinforce the sense of community which provided the only context in which individual identity was meaningful or even conceivable."[48] He also wrote that African assemblage emphasized "Consensus, and consolidation, and the affirmation and reinforcement of social values and continuity."[49] Saar reiterates that her work emphasizes a tie to cultures which are related to the earth and nature. In this way many influences intermingle as her work evolves from "putting materials and symbols and colors together so that in one piece you may find materials or symbols or signs or designs from several cultures, but it all works together"[50] and it is "pan-religious".[51]

Saar acts as a shaman who gleans from the environment for special ingredients and objects with which to fabricate her mojos. The found objects are altered, manipulated, regenerated, recycled and transformed into assemblages, collages, altars and installations. She states: "I was just thinking about my work, how most of it tells stories, and the stories are about the materials because it's the materials that act as the catalyst. You know, rather than the idea. It's like. . .the story comes together. In a way it's like the oral history or role of the griot that tells the story, only I do it with art materials and objects. . .discovered objects. . .and selected."[52] The works are therefore a form of narrative that tells a story or fragments of a story.[53]

Saar's work is diverse, yet it ultimately strives to capture the essence of human spirit and emotion through exposing her "self", her identity, both directly and indirectly. According to Beryl Wright, in her 1989 catalogue, "In the past, Betye Saar chose to avoid 'the blatant

confrontation with one's image 'preferring instead fragmentary perceptions of self. . . .autobiographical symbols - photographic fragments from personal history. . . .Over the past five years, Saar's work has become more holistically self-reflective." By using objects "laced with personal and collective connotation"[54] Saar creates a vehicle for her audience to become personally involved in her work.[55] Thus, her act of self-expression, though highly personal, enters a realm of familiarity for those who encounter it.

Through the use of personal mythology and history[56] Saar pursues a vision that can be shared. Wright suggests that her ultimate objective is "to place the viewer in a relationship with the object that promotes self-reflection and personal enlightenment."[57] By exposing her self, she touches a common cord in her audience who shares in the human experience. By interfacing the personal with the collective, the viewer can participate in the works because the works contain objects that he or she can relate to.[58] By delving into her "deepest self", Saar retrieves images which are "fragments of collective identity whose resonance speaks beyond self and echoes in the human memory."[59] In a 1990 interview, Saar commented that her art is about being human. She states: "I guess that's why a lot of my work seems personal because it's about. . .human emotion(s) and not being afraid to expose those at whatever level I expose them."[60] According to Lucy Lippard, Saar's work unifies personal pasts and releases the resultant energy out into a public sphere where it emerges as "a cumulative public healing process."[61]

One of the keys to interpreting Saar's work is to understand her major objective in touching her audience both at the heart, and in the mind. "Saar's assemblages are artistic memorials that draw us into such personal domains that they come close to an infringement on privacy."[62] Yet they achieve through such intimacy a familiar space for the viewer to enter and share in her intense relationship with the emotional content of life. Varying statements by several critics reiterate this fact. Welles states that Saar creates this "sense of intimacy by using select personal objects which give insight into both artist and

subject."[63] Clothier states: "She has always managed to objectify the self far beyond self-indulgence." Her works evoke a sense of "personal destiny in the darker context of universal fate."[64] And Burke states:

> *(Saar) orchestrates intricate dramas about the play of public and private consciousness in works that strive to transcend their formal containment. Saar seems to be making a prolonged journey through the layers of the past to another side. . . .the depths of dream and memory. Psychic souvenirs are encrusted in richly textured surfaces that combine all-but-readable albums of the past.*[65]

These "fragments" and "psychic souvenirs" reach into the depths of human memory and retrieve sentimental images of the past. By evoking the human emotions involved in memory and nostalgia, Saar makes use of an incredibly powerful tool that can make her viewer feel as if she is returning to the comforts of childhood, taking a sentimental sojourn which has been triggered by the recognition of objects that were once familiar but had been forgotten. The intense emotional responses to her works range from feelings of gladness and comfort, to sadness and nostalgia. Saar uses the power of this human reaction to draw her audience into her world and to ultimately show common experience and shared emotion. "Part of the power of Saar's work comes from her search for commonality between self and others, between artist and society" by exposing a collective consciousness that emerges from human memory.[66]

Saar's work is ultimately a pursuit and reflection of personal vision with the desire to discover and uncover the essence of human spirituality and emotion. Through self discovery she discovers the world. Janice Edwards writes: Saar "always seems to be exploring the self--peeling away, one by one, layers of self-knowledge--in each body of work. . . .Because it is so personal, Betye Saar's art informs us of her vision and her views on womanhood, family and society."[67] Although her mediums and dimensions change continuously, her work seeks to expose the connectedness and mystical almost indistinguishable

boundaries between the realms of time and space. Her work deals with issues of autobiography, emotion, spirituality and accumulative power in an attempt to capture the human spirit and other spiritual realms. It attempts to exceed beyond barriers and expose a common thread between time, space, energy, history, culture, memory, and human emotion. Saar's work provides "ample record of her explorations of self, family, feminism, black experience and other cultures."[68]

While different incidents in Saar's life may impact her style, presentation and subject matter, her underlying philosophy remains quite consistent. In dealing with her "self", Saar confronts those issues which extend from her own identity as a black woman, primarily those of race and gender, as these come directly out of her personal experience. Even though she creates work which elicits common responses from her viewers its sources come directly from her own experience with evidence of it. By using family memorabilia, she develops "a new symbolism that incorporates psychic discoveries and private histories as microcosms for African American history, tracing at the same time the threads that run through the world's non-Western cultures."[69] She states that her work evolves from a stream of consciousness[70] and that it comes out of an intuitive sensibility and a willingness to expose herself.[71] It reconstructs fragments of her heritage as an African-American woman by invoking imagery that emerges from her subconscious memory.[72]

According to Peter Clothier her "oeuvre exists itself like a huge assemblage, all of whose parts are interdependent and intrareferential, and, in a strange way, timeless."[73] Saar reiterates this concept by stating: "Reflecting on what's gone on before. . .has also enabled me to look ahead. I can no longer separate the work. . . .It's more homogenous. . . .If I break it down to point out certain ideas, then something could be from one culture or another, or an historical period, or something that predicts the future. But what I'm working at is to make it all blend together so it just seems right."[74]

Saar states that her work has progressed in a "spiral fashion".[75] "The creative process . . .is a spiral. I am starting one piece while I am

in the middle of another, while I'm finishing yet a third, and finally , I'm continually re-interpreting the finished works."[76] Although Saar discusses her work as spiral it is never static, it is always changing. Thematically, Saar orchestrates her vision like a spiritual medium, retrieving images from a rich visual vocabulary inspired by the occult, memory and personal experience. But within her repertoire she creates consistently innovative styles and subject matter. She has simultaneously pursued varied mediums in which she has explored two-dimensional and three-dimensional work, graphics and mixed-media, boxes, altars and installations. In the 1960s her primary medium was graphics but in the late 1960s and early 70s she began to mix graphics with windows Then throughout the 1970s the majority of her works were boxes. She moved into altars and installations in the 1980s. Her installations seem as if her smaller works have increased in dimension, without losing their intimacy. In her installations, it is as if her boxes have been magnified to room size proportions. Munro explains: "Making boxes led to an obsession with things. Things led into the past as she went back into the cupboards of her family house and so backward into other recesses: dreams, personal memory and the history of her race."[77] Clothier states that the spiral is a manifestation of an inward move towards self discovery which thus moves outward to the world as Saar reinterprets the past histories of her ancestors, her family and her own life.[78] Munro states:

> *Saar's work pays the most literal witness to the point. . .that the artist moves in a circle to reclaim the past. The subject matter. . .is taken directly from her life and her family's: days of old, relatives here and gone, the larger family of her race. The very mediums she works in. . .can be seen as a metaphor for life interrupted by death and revived by the imagination.*[79]

Many of her works deal with the commonality of religions through the combination of elements and the use of common symbology. Although not all of her symbols can be pinned down to an exact cultural

or ethnic inspiration, it is important to develop an understanding and familiarity with her major sources in order to pursue an interpretation of her visual language. By focusing on several works in particular, it is possible to identify her consistent desire to address the reality of the human experience and her own reality as a Black woman. These works demonstrate her artistic development as well as her affirmation of self through the use of highly personal material, Black women's identity and self-imagery.

One consistent trend in Saar's work is that whatever her choice for presentation, she strives for a sense of ritual. Her art as inspired by mysticism, nostalgia, the occult, tarot, dreams and vodun which may all contribute to the ritual in the object. She states: "The act of making art, for me, is a ritual". She identifies five steps to this process, which are as follows:

> *The imprint - ideas, thoughts, memories, dreams, from the past, present and future.*
>
> *The search - the selective eye and intuition.*
>
> *The collecting, gathering, and accumulating of objects and materials, each bringing a presence, an energy (old,new, ethnic, organic).*
>
> *The recycling and transformation - the materials and objects are manipulated and combined with various media (paint, chalk, glue).*
>
> *The release - the work is shared, (exhibited), experienced, and relinquished. The 'ritual' completed.*[80]

Her emphasis on ritual demonstrates the similarities that exist between diverse cultures and religions. Her primary sources are Africa (including Egypt), Asia and Mexico. Elements of many cultures can be found in her work both alone or in combination. Her work is both mysterious and mystical. She chooses symbols from her varied sources

and combines objects which have been collected from rummage sales, thrift stores, and her travels. These objects are the power sources which give the work its spiritual and magical essence. "Magic is the communication between material and spiritual worlds."[81]

As shaman she combines "found", discovered and chosen objects, each with its own personal history, in order to capture the resultant energy. The mixture of these forces makes a powerful ritual object. "Old things have secrets of where they've been before, people that they've related to."[82] By recycling these Saar is also making art for other people, to give them pleasure.[83] History and the personal are a vital sources for her work but she is also inspired by the present and the future. Her final product elicits a strong emotional response from the viewer that emerges from the depths of a collective unconscious that reaches beyond the boundaries of time and space. She explains that there are varying degrees of magic which has "to do with something outside of the realm of our everyday reality, but . . .some works are four-leaf clover works and some works are visionary experiences. And there are all those pieces in between."[84] For Saar the act of ritual is an extension of the personal - of her own life experience. The following poem, written by Saar, describes the ritual effect on her work:

Ritual

(I never had the
stroke for
'mainstream'
it went against
my flow)

From the past
remnants of lost
ceremonies
the loosening and
unwrapping of mystery
emergence
from the shadows

to face the
unknown.
Purification.

(these works are what I leave
behind).[85]

Saar's work, whatever medium, follows along these lines of the act of ritual. The act of acculmulation, as part of that ritual, becomes more pronounced as she moves from windows to boxes. Saar began to use assemblage in boxes as a result of seeing the work of Joseph Cornell. Saar states: "I was impressed with Cornell's work and he has influenced my work just because his work was the very first kind of thing I had ever seen in a box. I have always liked collecting little things and liked collage, but when I saw it in a box it just seemed perfect."[86] Her works are not limited by the visual boundaries created by box or window frame. The inner "dreamscapes present the ultimate ironic comment on the 'window' by reversing the 'view' toward an interior reality." Her style resembles an allegorical story with complex layers within "structural improvisations".[87] Her box assemblages mix an abstract surrealism with methodical messages. They are historical narratives that refer back to the passage from Africa. Saar states that they reclaim the history of "lost and dead civilizations" and "contain relics of the past."[88] "She has described her boxes as both coffins and windows, symbolizing transitions between levels of consciousness. Each box, as well as each object nested within it, has specific implications - mythical, autobiographical, historical, cultural."[89] This process of accumulation reflects Saar's philosophical pursuit of exposing the close relationship between the personal and the collective.

An example of one of Saar's box works is The Liberation of Aunt Jemima, 1972 (slide 5). Although not altogether autobiographical this work asserts a (re)-claiming of the image of Black women. In the late 1960s Saar's work focused on the historical use of derogatory images of Black people. These works were an effort to expose racism and the

damaging effects of stereotypes.[90] By using common commercial images, Saar calls to question the mechanisms of racism and exposes the depths to which they are embedded in our culture. This work raises the consciousness of her viewer as well as asserts her claim over control of her own image as a Black woman. The use of derogatory images is not only a vehicle for transformation but also to empowerment through self-proclaiming.

Within the framework of the political climate of the 1960s and 70s, in which African-Americans were focusing on cultural awareness, Civil Rights and a search for identity, Saar began to focus on the anger and hurt she felt from the negative imagery projected in popular culture. Many African-American artists, at that time, were working with images that portrayed their anger and desire to promote images that directly related to the African-American experience.[91] During this time there was an increase in focus on African-American art because of the establishment of Black art institutions and an interest in art exhibitions specifically devoted to African-American art within "mainstream" institutions. Saar's images of the late 60s had definite, explicit political content as a form of protest. Her work at this time was exhibited in important shows such as Contemporary Black Artists, curated by Robert Doty in 1971 and Blacks: U.S.A at the New York Cultural Center in 1973.

In her pursuit of (re)-claiming, Saar has taken a familiar popular image and transformed her. This Jemima is in active pursuit of her own liberation. She is taking initiative, and thoroughly capable and self-reliant. The traditional symbol of Aunt Jemima is reclassified to demonstrate how Black women can control their own identities despite the conditions imposed upon them by the macro-society. This Jemima breaks through binding stereotypes and proclaims that Black women are quite capable of breaking the bonds of limiting classifications. Through asserting their identity, Black women can and do define themselves outside the traditional western notions of Black womanhood such as "mammy" or "saphire". In this work Saar's focus is on

"personal and cultural existence" was intensified[92] by infiltrating stereotypical images with messages of reality.

Lowery Sims situates The Liberation of Aunt Jemima within the context of the political climate of the period, when she writes:

> *In the 1960's and 1970's black Americans were involved in a movement to assert their right to economic, social and political equality in this country. One of the crucial strategies in this effort was the recasting of the self-image of the black American. In this context, Betye Saar's legendary work The Liberation of Aunt Jemima of 1972 burst into the visual lexicon of American art like a molotov cocktail. This boxed assemblage of modest proportions gathered found objects into a 'mojo'. . .that transmuted the mythical stereotype of Aunt Jemima from a fantasy of the good-natured black servant to a dedicated terrorist outfitted with a grenade and rifle.*[93]

Other artists were dealing with the image of Aunt Jemima and Saar herself made several works that utilize other stereotypical images. Examples of these are Sambo's Banjo, 1971-72 and Whitey's Way, 1970. The Liberation of Aunt Jemima deals specifically with a well known portrayal of Black women. In this work Saar accentuates the figure's power and strength by dressing her in a vibrant and assertive red dress.

In dealing with this derogatory image, Saar utilized her role as shaman to transform the role of servant to a position of power.[94] By exposing the objectification of Black people, she was confronting white American exploitation. Saar has "changed the function of the figure she is representing. She has combined the myth with the reality of Black women's historic opposition to their oppression."[95] The representation of Aunt Jemima rattles the very foundations of the institution of racism by presenting an unexpected vision of the docile, contented slave/cook/maid. The power of this work lies in its controlled assertiveness. Jemima is not ashamed of her image, she is proud,

confident and self-assured. In this work Saar actively reclaims the history of her foremothers.[96]

In discussing her stereotype pieces, Saar states that she realized the historical importance of "the subservient role that protected the youth so that they could grow up and get an education."[97] Sims writes: "What Saar's work did was to provide another reading, another consideration of those images, their historical reality, and their social impact. She recognized that these images could be mechanisms for survival, thus co-opting the distortions of racist ignorance."[98] In a 1990 interview Saar explains about this work: "I was really nervous about exhibiting it because black people had been ashamed of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom, and I was presenting her as a positive image, as militant in like what ever way she had to survive."[99] For Saar the victory of liberation lies in being yourself and feeling good about yourself , which ever way that is.[100]

Saar transforms Aunt Jemima into a revolutionary figure. Since Aunt Jemima is a Euro-American stereotype, Saar's liberation of her subject emphasizes the capabilities of Black women to break through the moulds projected upon them by society. The powerful figure of Aunt Jemima is fully prepared to fight on her own behalf. Equipped with rifle, pistol and black power fist, she is poised and ready to defend her liberation, willing and able to free herself, and strong in the knowledge of her own ability to self-define. "The relationship between redefining the self. . .and discovering the political dimension of such redefinition, is especially apparent in the work of Betye Saar."[101]

After the active political climate of the 60s began to die down, Saar's work became more introspective with respect to events in her own life.[102] Saar was motivated, as many artists were at the time, with a desire to provide an Afrocentered perspective that reflected the need for collective political activism. Her own agenda began to change after the stereotype works as she began to focus on personal history. She stated: "With the derogatory images, the background behind that was anger. After a while, you're not angry any more."[103] Whereas Aunt Jemima is a general symbol of the stereotype of Black womanhood,

Saar's Aunt Hattie, another subject, was a real woman who greatly impacted Saar's existence. Aunt Hattie was an important member of Saar's immediate family which emphasizes her significance as a real subject instead of just a symbol.

Saar's Aunt Hattie died in 1974 at the age of 98. She had raised Saar's mother and had been like a grandmother to Saar. With her death Saar felt a resurfacing of feelings of pain and sadness similar to those she had felt at the loss of her father. This inspired a new body of work based in private, intimate memories. From Aunt Hattie she inherited drawers and closets full of her great-aunts belongings, "objects encrusted with the significance of that life."[104] These belongings were just like the ones Saar had been collecting from thrift stores and sales, but these had direct relevance to her life as she knew her Aunt Hattie intimately. This "memorabilia sparked the realization that all 'ordinary' people - but specifically black Americans - could garner great personal power and magic, even celebration, from their own existences, and, by extension from those who survived oppression to create a black heritage."[105] Many of these works were boxes filled with Aunt Hattie's personal belongings such as gloves, and calling cards. These works were inspired by Aunt Hattie's vanity which Saar identifies as an early influence for her accumulative sensibility.

The works inspired by Saar's Aunt Hattie, such as The Time Inbetween, 1974 (slide 6) are full of a nostalgic vision of time past. By using her aunt's actual belongings, Saar attests to her aunt's existence. Saar, discussing these works, states: "All the material, all those images, including her herself, are part of the past. And I, the artist, am now standing on the other side of it. The other side of the past."[106] This and others of her nostalgic works are a visual testament to the existence of one African- American woman whose life was filled with dignity. They give her a permanent historical significance that transcends her death and gives visual proof of her existence. These works ultimately accomplish a similar effect as Saar's stereotype works in that they present the realities of African-American existence. They elicit moods of nostalgia as well as a ritual sensibility. At the same time that these

works are based in an autobiographical and personal realm, they evoke memories of a collective past in which many people share similar emotions.[107]

From boxes Saar moved into creating altars. Clothier states: "It's the difference, perhaps, between a reliquary and a shrine. The reliquary is a little coffin. It commemorates a death. The shrine is open. It partakes of its environment. It is a place for the renewal of life."[108] Through the altars Saar's work enters a new rapport with her viewer who can physically participate in the work. In Saar's first altar Mti, 1973 (slide 7), the viewer is invited to contribute to the work by leaving offerings or exchanging them. Saar states that from her nostalgia phase her work again returned to the mystical.[109] Altars were a further development in Saar's pursuit of expressing how the collective emerges from the realm of the personal. In moving out of the confines of the box and the window frame, Saar expands on the notion of accumulation by eliciting power from the blending of spirits from sources outside her own manipulation of materials.[110] Her role as shaman expands as she invites the viewer to take part in the ritual, to interact.[111] Mti, meaning wood in swahili, centers around a black doll with a halo around its head. The objects around the doll are from Mexico and India. The base of the work is made from a gypsy table whose legs are palm fronds. Saar says that it has an Indonesian feel and that it was made before she ever traveled to Africa.[112]

Saar's altars are transitions to yet another realm in which the contained breaks apart and expands into installations.[113] Up to this point Saar's work involved an act of resurrection and renewal as she garnered the residual power of old and discarded objects.[114] In 1987 she did an artist-in-residence at MIT. From this experience she produced the large work, Mojotech, 24' x 8', and her work began incorporating elements of the computer age. In these later works influenced by the MIT experience, she integrates circuit board with Mexican charms, called milagros. Although her work began to change, she continued to produce work that emerged from a mystical, magic realm. She says that she saw the components of technology as a form

of magic; they have a spiritual essence.[115] Working with technology opened up a new direction and presented a new challenge. She states: "How can I take technology and reserve objects that are so far away from spirit and emotion and give them that feeling. . .It's just another way of expressing it. . . .anything can be magic."[116] The MIT inspired works investigate the possibility of magic and ritual within technology.[117]

Mojotech is large and impacting. It commands close inspection yet exists as a whole. It is a large charm made up of smaller components, all of which are essential to the vital force of the whole work. From far away, the work is dominated by muted blues and reds with a symmetrical presentation. The larger central portion is the main focal point which is flanked on either side by smaller components which are no less awe-inspiring. The work, as a whole, seems to emulate a futuristic image of a computer whose energy and power comes from the minute micro-chips situated within the mainframe.

As Saar's installations expanded in dimension, she maintained the "intimacy and concentrated energy" of her boxes. She "has never lost her primary connection with the object. . .Saar engaged her audience in a direct way."[118] The installations are magnifications of the boxes and altars, and she often incorporates her altars into her sites.[119] Her installations are a natural outgrowth of her smaller works but they have another impetus. As Saar says, she has escaped the commercial aspect and commodification of art because her installations are not for sale. "You still reach audiences with your work, but the critics have less influence over its value."[120] Her sites often dictate the character of her installations. The installations may change a bit in each new site but the basic elements are the same. The installations evolve as ritual with the gathering, manipulating, installing and sharing all as part of the final work. There are four elements common to all her installations: "an emotional engagement, some trace of nature, evidence of her personal presence and energy. These in turn encompass nostalgia, shamanism, autobiography and reconstruction,"[121] once again emphasizing Saar's consistent focus throughout her career. Her installations open up the

vision of her boxes into the viewer's own space without destroying the feeling of intimacy that she created in those earlier works. She sees them as walk-in versions. "Saar may have found a way to get past the alienation that the arts and artists in contemporary society experience in relation to the audience."[122] She expands the area to include the viewer in the art environment.[123] Through the same technique of utilizing old and familiar objects, she continues to play on human emotions and shared experience to interact with and relate to her viewer.

The installation, In My Solitude, 1983 (slide 8), is a very personal work in that it exposes a deeply private space. This work was inspired by the Duke Ellington song of the same title. The words to the song state: "In my solitude you haunt me with reveries of days gone by. In my solitude you taunt me with memories that never die."[124] In this work, Saar uses her silhouette to represent her presence. The silhouette, merely a suggestion of Saar, retains a sense privacy in that the viewer cannot disturb Saar's security and comfort with herself. She writes: "The installations are autobiographical as I am participating yet I am elsewhere."[125] This work plays with presence and absence and privacy and exposure. She invites her viewer into her space with confidence. "The concepts of power and display still prevail but now become interchangeable. Display/decoration also serve as power/mystery and the reverse. I am interested in the interplay of concealing and revealing the many layers of reality and involving the viewer beyond the physical domain."[126] Also in the space is a chair, covered with moss and surrounded by dried moss and petals covering the floor. The chair holds candles, thereby creating a standing altar. Behind the chair is a fragile black net dress, hanging from the ceiling. This garment becomes a third shadow, in between the two shadowy silhouettes of Saar reading and an empty chair. Amidst the flower petals are a pair of floral evening slippers. On the walls are scattered collages, and photos of Saar's feet in different places all over the world.[127] These images attest to her existence. They are her mark, as if to say I was here and I still am. Most things in the work suggest a

presence but also an absence, which relates to the concept of duality. On one side Saar is there reading, on the other the chair is empty. The leaves scattered on the floor will decompose, the candles will burn down and the dress , which is made of a sheer fabric, seems as if it might blow away in the lightest breeze or simply disintegrate where it is hanging. The tactile quality of the objects seem to be as elusive as Saar's physical presence since their tentative placement might be disturbed by the lightest air current. Yet, the whole composition remains balanced as if nothing could disturb its tranquillity. The result is an ephemeral, ethereal presence as well as a nostalgic effect. It promotes a celebration of the 'ordinary', an act of personal validation, especially of her existence as a Black woman.

In Saar's most recent works, she continues to carry on the same themes as her earlier trends with perhaps a little more subtlety. These works are much smaller and are placed in frames although they are still three-dimensional. She classifies these as her "Nostalgic Series" containing old photographs, fabrics and historical objects that are indicative of the past histories and lives of those in the photographs.[128] A glove or a momento recalls Saar's objective of chronicling the presence of 'ordinary' individuals. Each work is covered by a veil. The objects placed around the photographs were chosen by Saar for their symbolic value as they relate to the identities of those being portrayed. The people in the photographs are unknown to Saar but she reconstructs a sensitive interpretation of them from what she sees in the photograph. She says: "Many of the times the materials are not personal, like I might use a photograph,. . . things that a person might think of as personal, but a lot of it is just material, gloves or handkerchiefs or a personal object that belonged to a stranger. But when it's put in that context. . .then it feels personal."[129] Here she pursues further her desire to express the personal as part of a collective identity in which there is a shared emotional space.

Of particular interest in this group of works is a piece titled Our Lady of the Shadows, 1989 (slide 9). It contains a small, blurry photograph of a young Black woman seated on a porch. The woman's

clothing and hat indicate a time period that is probably 1920s or 30s. This work deals again with the image of Black women, and if not Saar's personally, then Black women's identity in general. In discussing this work Saar explains: "I used these pieces of cardboard with thread wrapped around them to show class distinctions, or how people are judged by their skin color from black to brown, to gray".[130] She also explains her symbols which are common to many of her works; the heart, among other things, is romance love or a broken heart, the fan is concealment and also one of her female symbols, the fish is her male symbol, and the veil covers it all because it's "veiled information".[131] She uses a watch face to express time and history. The palm relates to fortune and destiny and to the spiritual hand of the gods of various religious philosophies from Buddhism to Christianity. Perhaps the most revealing is the image that is perhaps the most difficult to see. In the lower right hand corner of the work is an image of "mammy". This composition is a most recent example of Saar's focus on the images of Black women. Again she returns to the damaging portrayal of Black women through derogatory images, yet she places it in the context of a real-type Black woman who is an individual with a distinct identity.

Saar's philosophical content is consistent throughout her body of work. With each progression her ideas become more intricate and informed. Her resourcefulness is unceasing in her quest for personal expression. Her work returns again and again to her underlying quest for exposing a collective consciousness as an extension of personal identity and memory. In exploring this realm, Saar's work never stagnates and is continuously changing with the influence of events in her life. Through her work it is possible to gain some insight into her life and through her into both familiar and unfamiliar realms. Her art projects her identity as a Black woman and contributes to a deeper understanding of the issues she confronts daily as a Black woman artist.

NOTES

[1]Eleanor Munro, Originals: American Women Artists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 357.

[2]Peter Clothier, Betye Saar (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 15.

[3]Ishmael Reed, "Betye Saar, Artist," in Shrovetide in Old New Orleans (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 151-2.

[4]Munro, 356.

[5]Clothier,15.

[6]Ishmael Reed, "Saar Dust: An Interview with Betye Saar," in Secrets, Dialogues and Revelations (Los Angeles, CA: Wight art gallery, 1990), 41.

[7]Munro, 356.

[8]Ibid., 356.

[9]Betye Saar, interviewed by Camille Billops, Hatch-Billops Archives, c.1970.

[10]Munro, 356.

[11]Ibid., 357.

[12]Cindy Nemser, "Conversations with Betye Saar," The Feminist Art Journal, Vol. 4, # 4 (Winter 1975-6), 22.

[13]Saar's achievements and prominence can be recognized through exhibitions, awards, commissions and films. Some of these are as follows:

Saar was awarded two Fellowships from the National Endowment for the arts, one in 1974 and one in 1984.
Her work has been included in some major exhibitions; such as, the "Whitney Sculpture Annual in 1970, "Collage and Assemblage" at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in 1975, "Tradition and Conflict: Images of a Turbulent Decade" at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1985, and "Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream" which toured Cincinnati, New Orleans, Denver and Philadelphia in 1989.
In 1989, Saar was awarded a Women's Caucus for Art Honor Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Visual Arts.
She is the subject of the film "Spirit Catcher: The Art of Betye Saar", produced for WNET, New York and she was featured in "Six L.A. Artists", produced for KHJ-TV, Los Angeles.
She was commissioned to do public murals in Los Angeles in 1982 and Newark in 1984.

[14]Vivian Mayer, "UCLA's Wight Gallery Presents First Exhibition of Works of Betye and Alison Saar," Press Release, (12/15/89), 2.

[15]Mary Schmidt Campbell, Rituals: The Art of Betye Saar (New York: Studio Museum, 1980), 4.

[16]Clothier, 7.

[17]Saar, interview, c. 1970.

[18]Eleanore Welles, "Continuing Generations," Art Week, Vol. 14, # 4 (April 9, 1983), 4.

[19]Betye Saar, interview by author, Tape recording, Los Angeles, CA, 1990.

[20]Reed, "Saar Dust," 41.

[21]Clothier, 14.

[22]Ibid., 15.

[23]Mayer, 1.

[24]Ibid., 2.

[25]Ibid., 3.

[26]Maudette Ball, "Betye Saar, Spirit Catcher," Artweek, Vol. 10, # 17 (April 28, 1979), 5.

[27]Munro, 358.

[28]Reed, "Betye Saar, artist," 151.

[29]Clothier, 16.

[30]Nemser, 23.

[31]Campbell, 4.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Saar, interview, 1990.

[34]Lucy Lippard, "Sapphire and Ruby in the Indigo Gardens," Secrets, Dialogues and Revelations (Los Angeles, CA: Wight art gallery, 1990), 10.

[35]Beryl Wright, The Appropriate Object (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1989), 54.

[36]Ibid., 58.

[37]Saar, interview, 1990.

[38]Reed, "Saar Dust," 44.

[39]Ibid., 38.

[40]Campbell, 60.

[41]Munro, 358.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Clothier, 11.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Munro, 358.

[46]Reed, "Betye Saar, Artist," 149.

[47]Clothier, 25.

[48]Arnold Rubin, "Accumulation: Power and Display in African Sculpture," Artforum, Vol. 13, #9 (May 1975), 37.

[49]Mary Schmidt Campbell, ed., Tradition and Conflict: Images of A Turbulent Decade (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1985), 60.

[50]Reed, "Saar, Artist," 148.

[51]Reed, "Saar Dust," 34.

[52]Saar, interview, 1990.

[53]Reed, "Saar Dust," 49.

[54]Wright, 51.

[55]Ibid., 57.

[56]Lowery Sims, "Betye Saar," WCA Honor Awards Bulletin (Philadelphia, PA: WCA, 1989), 7.

[57]Wright, 53.

[58]Ibid., 54.

[59]Clothier, 40.

[60]Saar, interview, 1990.

[61]Lippard, 20.

[62]Welles, 5.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Peter Clothier, "Betye Saar: New Energy and Expanded Drama," Artweek, Vol. 12, # 12 (July 6, 1981), 1.

[65]Carolyn Burke, "Images From Dream and Memory," Artweek, Vol. 15, # 2 (January 14, 1984), 4.

[66]Clothier, Betye Saar, 40.

[67]Janice Edwards, Betye Saar: Collages and Assemblages.

[68]Ball, 5.

[69]Lippard, 13-4.

[70]Reed, "Saar, Artist," 147.

[71]Saar, interview, 1990.

[72]Burke, 4.

[73]Clothier, Betye Saar, 7.

[74]Wright, 54.

[75]Clothier, Betye Saar, 8.

[76]Tim Behrens, "Betye Saar Turns Old Articles into Art," The Spokesman-Review (Sunday, February 10, 1985), E10.

[77]Munro, 358.

[78]Clothier, Betye Saar, 8.

[79]Munro, 355.

[80]Campbell, Rituals, 3.

[81]Clothier, Betye Saar, 24.

[82]Reed, "Saar, Artist," 15.

[83]Munro, 356.

[84]Wright, 58.

[85]Campbell, Rituals, 1.

[86]Nemser, 21.

[87]Joan Hugo, "The Enduring Object: From Anecdote to Myth," Artweek, Vol. 15, #21 (May 26, 1984), 1.

[88]Munro, 359.

[89]Lippard, 10.

[90]Samella Lewis, Art: African-American (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1978), 173.

[91]Campbell, Tradition and Conflict, 5.

[92]Joanne Burstein, "Developing Personal Myths," Artweek, Vol. 13, # 20 (March 22, 1982), 6.

[93]Sims, 7.

[94]Wright, 57.

[95]Michelle Cliff, "Object Into Subject: Some Thoughts on the Work of Black Women Artists," in Visibly Female (New York: Universe Books, 1987), 156.

[96]Judith E. Stein and Ann Sargent Wooster, "Making Their Mark," in Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move Into the Mainstream, 1970-85 (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989), 126.

[97]Nemser, 20.

[98]Sims, 7.

[99]Saar, interview, 1990.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Elaine Hedges and Ingrid Wendt, In Her Own Images: Women Working in the Arts (New York: The Feminist Press, 1980), 288.

[102]Munro, 359.

[103]Wright, 57.

[104]Clothier, Betye Saar, 26.

[105]Sims, 7.

[106]Munro, 361.

[107]Nemser, 20-1.

[108]Clothier, Betye Saar, 34.

[109]Nemser, 24.

[110]Clothier, Betye Saar, 36.

[111]Lippard, 14.

[112]Reed, "Saar Dust," 44.

[113]Lippard, 14.

[114]Reed, "Saar Dust," 32.

[115]Ibid., 47.

[116]Saar, interview, 1990.

[117]Mojotech: Betye Saar at MIT (Cambridge, MA: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1987).

[118]Sims, 7.

[119]Wright, 53.

[120]Evette Porter, "Betye Saar: Building Art," Essence, Vol. 21, # 1 (May 1990), 80.

[121]Lowery Sims, Betye Saar: Connections, 1.

[122]Ibid., 5.

[123]Betye Saar, "Installation as Sculpture," The International Review of African-American Art, Vol. 6, # 1 (1984), 44.

[124]The Great Music of Duke Ellington (Melville, NY: Belsin Mills pub co., 1973), 52-3.

[125]Clothier, Betye Saar, 45.

[126]Saar, "Installation," 48.

[127]Ibid.

[128]Reed, "Saar Dust," 42.

[129]Saar, interview, 1990.

[130]Reed, "Saar Dust," 49.

[131]Ibid., 48-9.

CHAPTER IV

The Life and Work of Howardena Pindell

The previous chapter made clear one artist's personal search for self-expression through art. This chapter on Howardena Pindell will aid in demonstrating the diversity of vision within the context of Black women's artistic production. As with Saar, an understanding of Pindell's personal history is a starting point in revealing the underlying meaning of her oeuvre. Pindell, like Saar, has developed her artistic pursuits within the context of her personal experience in which a series of events led to her desire to self-define explicitly in visual terms using her own image. By becoming familiar with these events, one can have insight into elements contained in her work which are inspired by her personal experience, history and consciousness. The interrelationship between her identity and her body of work deals with the multiplicity of her experience as a Black woman artist. She "makes note of the world around her and very courageously speaks her mind. She understands that it is the artist's duty to function as reporter, as conscience, as teacher, as mirror held up to society."[1] Her art product, therefore, is very personal.

The work of Pindell substantiates the fact that Black women artists use personal language, which is inspired by personal experience, to create unique and diverse methods of self-definition in their art. A development of the progression of her life and work will demonstrate the individual quality of the act of self-definition within the context and experience of being Black and female. It will also shed light on the similarities and differences between the work of Saar and Pindell who share in the effects of this existence. The objective of developing each artists' search for identity and self-definition is to clarify, ultimately, that it is imperative that there be a critical dialectic which encompasses the works of a diversified body of artists, and that this process may require a restructuring of the existing critical canon in order to accept diversification of vision without limiting or categorizing the meaning of what it is to be Black and female. These chapters demonstrate the

need to understand and accept the diversity of individual thought and expression within the context of unique personal history.

Howardena Pindell was born on April 14, 1943 in Philadelphia. She remembers having knowledge of Black artists while growing up. One reason for this is because of the high visibility of the work of Henry O. Tanner who studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. She was also acquainted with successful artists who were women, thus signifying that art was not an exclusively male realm.[2] Pindell's own training in art began in third grade, at the age of eight, when a teacher named Ms. Osser informed her parents that she had a special talent for art. So she was enrolled in free Saturday morning classes at the Fleischer School.[3] Her academic training began at Boston University's School of Fine and Applied Arts where she received a BFA in 1965. She then went to Yale University's School of Art and Architecture where she got her MFA two years later. [4]

Pindell's life experiences are significant to her development as an artist ,and to the choices she made for her art because her work often reflects how certain situations effected her. One primary theme that is evident throughout much of her life is isolation which was often a result of such factors as her race, class, gender or a combination of these or other significant variables. She felt this isolation throughout her education because she went to schools where she was often the only black student. Often, she felt that she was constantly being watched because she looked different and she had to set a good example.[5] Lubaina Himid, another Black woman artist, attests to the common occurence of this type of experience when she explains: "In art schools black women are usually separated from each other, one for every two or three years' worth of fine art students. There are then three main methods of teaching: an insistence that, as a black woman, the artist has something to be angry about and should express it; an insistence that angry or political statements are not art; a complete lack of any tuition at all. The instructions are always opposite to the artist's own mode of working. She therefore has little idea whether she is a victim of racism, of boredom, or is just a lousy artist."[6]

Pindell relates particular incidents of racism that she has experienced earlier in her life, in her innovative video work, Free, White And 21, done in 1980. For example, she explains that a teacher at the Philadelphia High School for girls would not put her in an accelerated course when she let other girls, who were white and had lower grades, into the same class. Or there was the time she ran for office as a liaison at Boston University and her house mother informed her that she had removed Pindell's name from the ballot explaining that she did not feel that she would work out in that type of position. These are only a small sampling of the many isolating situations which Pindell has experienced throughout her life. She explains: "When I went to Boston U., there were maybe four blacks in the whole dormitory, and there were about a thousand people. Then at Yale! I just remember tremendous isolation".[7] At Yale she was one of three black students in the Art Department and the only Black woman.

Upon finishing her education, she experienced further racism and sexism when she applied for 500 teaching positions and got 500 rejections because they would not hire blacks or women. She moved to New York and had little success finding work until she lucked into a job at the Museum of Modern Art as an exhibition assistant in the Department of National and International Circulating Exhibitions. This was in 1967 and in 1969 her title changed to curatorial assistant in the Department of Drawings and Prints. In 1971 she became Assistant Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books and in 1977, she was promoted to Associate Curator of the same department. From these positions in the art world, she had a first hand perspective of the racism and sexism that existed there. In 1978 she left the Museum of Modern Art and became an Associate Professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook[8] where she is presently a Professor.

Pindell was trained as a figurative painter.[9] At Yale she was painting urban landscapes and figurative works in which she studied skeletal forms[10] but when she arrived in New York in 1967, she no longer had time to work on her art during the day because of her full-time work at the museum. She states that "by the time I got home at

night there was no more natural light available. So I started turning to my imagination for light and color and realized that I wanted to work with very small points of color and light."[11] Thus began the inspiration for her abstract works of the 1970's which consisted of studies in color, light and texture through the use of dots and grids.

She began by making stencils or templates by punching out holes and then using these to spray paint through. She accumulated bags and bags of tiny dots. She played with the color of these dots and then began numbering others as in this untitled work of 1973-74 (slide 10). The randomly numbered dots are regimented "by following the orderly format of the underlying graph paper. The serendipitous positioning of sparse and dense numbers mottles the surface with subtle lights and shadows".[12] The numbering was a result of various influences. She was fascinated by numbers because her father had worked a lot with numbers and she remembered from her childhood that he used to keep odometer books in which he would keep track of mileage on family road trips. She equates numbers with distance, size, mass, quantity and identification.[13] The numbering was also a "dig at the conceptual stuff that was going on then, especially at those people utilizing structural psychology."[14] Her numbering is completely random. "She is not concerned with the conceptual possibilities of working with numbers, and finds amusing those who attempt to decode her work in this way."[15] She preferred to use numbers instead of letters because it was harder to associate a number with some kind of interpretive meaning. The numbers were meant to be a visual issue and not a philosophical venture.

The un-numbered dot works became studies in accumulation of color, space and surface texture. The effects are very sculptural. "Intricate sculptural effects are generated. . .but the way Pindell plays grids off against 'paper drifts' suggests that her interest is less in the qualities of matter than in exemplifying certain formal contrasts: clarity/elusiveness, the predictable/the accidental, confinement/overflow."[16] At the same time she was focusing on surface quality, she was also using the underlying elements of the grid.

The surface of these works may seem random but underlying it is the grid, an ultimately rigid structure. The grid was her impression of technological society. She states: "When I think of America, I think of a grid; I think of computers and square TV screens. And when I worked out of a European format, everything had a square format, a very decided vertical and horizontal."[17] In this work Untitled #27 of 1974 (slide 11) her attention to surface quality and to the grid is readily recognizable.

Untitled #27 is an example of her early abstract works. It demonstrates the polyrythmic quality of the works of this period. Its color is muted, mostly dusty blues and reds. The punched out dots assemble themselves in clumps that rise above the canvas and obscure the underlying rigidity of the grid. In other parts they lie flat, almost blending with the murky layer of paint, but creating a similar textured quality. Some of the dots seem to spill out beyond the confines of the canvas as if they are disposable and could be merely brushed away.

Around this time Pindell started sewing her canvases as she began to move away from the strict confines of the stretched canvas. Her works were very ordered and controlled. She states: "The work was to be enjoyed for its physicality. . . .Perhaps I was a bit maniacal about the tedious aspect of my work, such as the numbering and sewing for example, but I enjoyed the physical labor and the craftsmanship and the sense of adornment".[18] She used sewing because it gave the works an internal geometry and added the character of terrain. It varied the surface quality and added a complex tension.[19]

These early works were created within the context of Pindell's immediate experience and projected that experience. As a Black abstract artist, Pindell was faced with a perplexing dilemma. Jacobs explains: "Abstraction is one area that black artists could not move into without experiencing some kind of discomfort. . . The continuous presence of racism made it difficult for them to pursue such a seemingly frivolous past time. . .(and) a large segment of the white art world expected black artists to stay with socially oriented work."[20]

Although these early works of the 1970s do not use explicit reference to identity and self-imagery, it is apparent that they deal directly with issues of identity. They demonstrate how outside factors effected her choices for personal expression. In a 1980 interview Pindell remarked: "Being Black in this country, you have to cover up your identity. You have to whitewash everything in order to make it palatable."[21] Frank Bowling writes: "The game of white-face is not the same as black-face. Desperation takes on the image of survival and makes for grim touching irony in the face of extinction."[22] Working on the pieces of that period was a form of meditation for Pindell.[23] "She was desperately trying to make everything beautiful."[24] They gave her a sense of abandonment and non-decision[25] and like novocaine[26] helped her escape and deal with the rage she felt as a result of the hardships that she encountered because of racism, sexism and discrimination.[27]

During this time, in the 1970s, Pindell found doors closed to her and her work everywhere, for various reasons. Depending upon the institution, it may have been for any of the following reasons: Because she was black, because she was a woman, because she worked in abstraction, because she had been trained at upper class institutions or for all of these reasons. She states:

> *I was first told that my work wasn't black because it wasn't showing a certain type of imagery, and then I was put down a bit for being a woman. So the first place I really made an effort to show my work was a black institution, and I was told to go away. That meant I had to show in a white context, and that was a problem because they were basically saying go away as well. The only other approach was the women's movement.*[28]

Pindell was faced with frustration at every turn. Because of the political climate of the 1970s, black art institutions felt that images which were not directly relevant to the cause of liberation were invalid.[29] Driskell states: "Art that emphasized formal concerns was

generally ridiculed by black leaders who knew little about aesthetic issues."[30]

Since Pindell's symbols were not valid in the black art communities, and since the Black shows were only showing the work of male artists,[31] this led her searching for acceptance in the white world in the form of the women's movement. Pindell helped found a collective alternative exhibition space for women artists called A.I.R. gallery. This was in the early 1970's. The space was named by Pindell as a play on the character Jane Eyre and came to stand for Artists-In-Residence.[32] Participating in a predominantly white women's organization caused problems for Pindell as well because she was the only black member of A.I.R. and she became a sort of token symbol for the white women involved. Here too she experienced rejection and unsympathetic reactions to her personal issues as a black woman. She states: "When it came to black issues, or. . .problems related to you as a black woman, they just weren't interested because it wasn't their problem."[33] This group also had its symbols, which if not contained in the art, were not accepted as valid to the cause. Pindell eventually moved away from this group as well, in the late 1970s, realizing that the white women's movement could not address issues that were directly relevant to her situation as a black woman.[34] She was also tired of being the token Black woman artists and wanted to explore her artistic ideas on her own.[35] She also left because of sheer exhaustion and at the time felt that she had to focus her energies elsewhere.[36]

Almost simultaneously, circumstances caused Pindell to become more involved in political activism both in her work and in her personal life. The main instigator in this change was a show at Artists Space in New York, in 1979, entitled "Nigger Drawings". This outraged the black art community and immediately a protest ensued. The climate at the Museum of Modern Art began to change for her, because of racial tensions, and even though she had experienced racism before from her white colleagues, Feinberg explains: "They had never invited her to the all important social dinners after work, but now they began to ignore her at work as well."[37] Her position there was also frustrating

because she found that she was still powerless to help other black artists and women artists. She states: "being black cancels out any of the so-called advantages that a white would have had in my position. . .I did my job-I tried to do it well-but I didn't have the social entree a white person would."[38] She was left out of many decisions so she left her position there.

In 1980 Pindell made the video work, Free, White and 21, which was definitely inspired by her experience with the women's movement. This 12 minute work seems to mark the beginning of a change in Pindell's work. From this point she begins to use more explicit political imagery and content. In this video Pindell focuses on the image of herself as she recounts experiences in her life which clearly demonstrate racial prejudice and reactions to skin color.[39] She plays herself as well as a white woman who throws out comments such as "you really must be paranoid", "your art isn't political either, it's got to be in her art - that's the only way we'll validate you. If the symbols aren't in her art, it's not valid!", "You ungrateful little. . .after all we've done for you" and "Don't worry, we'll find other tokens." These statements are ones that Pindell heard especially from white women in the movement. Through the direct use of self, Pindell's message penetrates the foundations of racism.

Free, White and 21 (slide 12), according to Ned Rifkin, "comes across as both a confession and a denunciation. . . .(which) is actually quite self-critical inasmuch as Pindell's works with canvas and on paper are not, in fact, overtly political, moral, or social in nature."[40] In talking about this work, Pindell states: "People assume that I will not have certain experiences , because I am middle class and I am educated and I have had certain advantages working at a high-class job. Like these things don't touch me. And they don't understand why I am so angry. So that's what the tape is about."[41] In other segments of the video, Pindell wraps and unwraps her head with white gauze (slide 13) or peels away a layer of white skin-like material, while recounting cruel incidents or simply sitting in silence. Juxtaposed with these scenes are the constant assaults of her white character stating,

"Don't worry; we'll find other tokens." The tape testifies to her perception of expectations placed upon her, and to the inability of certain institutions to accept her choices for personal expression as a Black woman artist. In creating this extremely personal piece, Pindell exposes her own identity as well as racist attitudes in the world at large and in the art world in particular.[42] Lowery Sims analyzes the use of video to challenge and confront the status quo.[43] Since video is basically an art form that cannot easily be considered a commodity, it is therefore useful as a vehicle for political action and "serves as a bridge to the 'real' world, the street. It also reclaims. . .a connection with the traditional African. . .ritual that addressed the need of an entire community, rather than serving as some kind of trophy for a privileged, elite, art-consuming class."[44]

Free, White And 21 was made at a turning point in Pindell's career. In a 1980 interview, Pindell discussed her dissatisfaction with her lack of explicit political content in her earlier works:

> *I do work that tends to be very beautiful, and physical: There's texture , color, even smell. . .people who see my work find it soothing. I want to start confronting people with having to change their attitudes. It's not that I feel I should do that: I physically must do that or I'll get ill from not doing it.*[45]

Many of her works from this point on deal with explicit political imagery and much of her work is based on her extensive travel and personal
experience.

Memory becomes a big issue for Pindell after 1979 because that year she was in a serious car accident in which she was a passenger, and from which she experienced memory loss. This experience inspired her to use artistic production as an exercise in memory. For example, she began to use the postcards and photographs she had collected in her extensive travels to recreate her impressions of a place or the essence of a country she had visited. The experience of various

places and the memories and impressions of these places began to play a big part in the continuous formulation of her personal consciousness and thus in her work. These works show her impressions of the places where she has been.[46] Of the many countries Pindell has experienced, each has affected work aesthetically, stylistically and in terms of subject matter. According to Judith Wilson, "They reveal the prismatic vision of an artist who refuses to limit her cultural landscapes.[47] They merge personal memories with the surface impression that a tourist might get of a place. The use of photographs seems to suggest the ephemeral quality of traveling memories, captured in photographs. Pindell herself claims that most of her work is based on memory, traveling and personal experience.

In 1982 Pindell traveled to Japan on a U.S.-Japan Friendship Commission Creative Artist Grant for about eight months. The Japan inspired works are more circular and organic in shape than her earlier works and they tend to focus on nature and landscape. An example of her work from this period is Hiroshima Disguised: Japan (1982) (slide 14). This work mixes her personal experience in Japan with her desire to use explicit political imagery. She explains that when she returned from Japan her work became asymmetrical and oddly shaped. It became more organic, circular and maze-like which she considers to be Japanese aesthetics. Many of her works became triangular which were inspired by Mount Fuji and the Zen gardens.[48] The build up of paint on the surfaces creates a texture that resembles the Japanese dry gardens in which dirt or sand is raked into ornamental designs.[49] This quality is reminiscent of her earlier dot works in which texture and ornament were inherent in the surface quality.

Hiroshima Disguised: Japan consists of ten separate canvases which are positioned to give the viewer an impression of islands. It has a pale lavender tone that resembles ash imbedded with shattered metal and cut glass. The work deals with the devastating effects of the bomb and war in general.[50] From a distance one gets the impression that this work is similar to her abstract works of the 1970's but on closer

scrutiny one sees disturbing images of war such as mutilated human bodies, helicopters and broken glass. Hidden in these smaller images is an upside down view of New York city which makes reference to the likelihood of a coastal city coming under attack in the event of a nuclear war. This work was a result of Pindell's visit to the Peace Museum, in Japan, where she saw the ceremonial lighting of incense for the dead.[51]

In 1984 Pindell's work began to change again as a result of traveling to India on a National Endowment for the Arts Painting Fellowship. She says that these works became more sinuous and S-shaped like coiled snakes or flowing rivers.[52] Lakshmi: India, (1984) (slide 15) is a work that is inspired by this period. Lakshmi is the Hindu Goddess of prosperity and benevolence. Pindell was "attracted to the meditative quality of India's cultures and religions. India's spiritually uplifting culture coincides with Pindell's desire to have her work be uplifting."[53] When discussing these works, Pindell states that they "seem to flicker as the eye moves back and forth between the image and the surface, as though there's a contest for which section is more important. Working on these pieces was almost a form of meditation for me, because I would do them for long periods of time."[54]

The India works, like those inspired by her experience in Japan address culture, spirituality and memory. The India works elicit feelings of eternal life, of meditation and soul searching. They might appear as fragments of dreams. The works from both series have been "described as topographies, cosmologies and travelogues,. . . .The individual tourist image assumes a transcendent, collective magnitude."[55] Michael Brenson sees them as personal narratives that are international in scope.[56] It is interesting to note, however, that not all of Pindell's experiences in Japan and India were positive. In Japan she found a stiflingly rigid culture that was very racist. And in India she was amazed at the desire for spiritual enlightenment amidst so much poverty and suffering.

Although the works from the Japan and India series do not utilize self-image they emerge from a personal realm which led Pindell into

her present body of work from the late 1980s. Her most recent series, Autobiography, presents a coming together of a number of key issues relevant to her identity. The majority of these works focus on herself as subject as well as her own memory and experiences. While developing this series she came up with a list of ideas she wanted to focus on in her work. Some of these are:

1. Definition of self in a siege euroethnically-biased culture.
2. Miscegenation: Hidden United States History.
3. The legacy of my mixed heritage: African, Native American, European: Enslaver and enslaved.
4. Which women of color do I identify with for my standard of appearance: women of color from the United States; European identified women of color; women of color from other cultures?

4a. As I grew up, what were the pressures concerning hair, skin, eye color, texture of hair, body type and conformity?

5. Hierarchy and the use of images of people of color in the media and their placement on the page.

5a. What kind of social interaction are they portrayed as having with other people of color and people of European descent? . . .

6. The brutality of omission and appropriation.
7. Use of omission as a form of censorship; First Amendment rights for whom?
8. Critique of criticism: When and if our work is written about, what type of words are selected to describe our work?

8a. Psychological assault and stereotyping through language and visual juxtapositions in the news.[57]

These works address the multiple aspects of her identity and experience. They deal with issues of racism, sexism, classicism and so on. They demonstrate clearly a coming together of her quest for beauty and political activism and the "double-edged message of beauty and cruelty she exploits in her new work."[58]

The Autobiography series is made up of two types of work. One type is her free-form, unstretched, tactile canvases. Pindell stopped using a stretcher around 1977. She says that this was partly because of storage problems and partly because she "liked the idea of rolling the painting up like a rug and being able to carry it out of the house."[59] The other works in the series are fan-like photocollages similar to those from her Japan and India series. These appear almost sculptural, encased in plexiglass boxes. Both types of works utilize these two techniques "within their respective borders".[60] In the collages she takes photographs from her travels, cuts them into strips and laboriously paints in between them to extend the image. This technique adds energy and a vibrating rythm to the surface. The texture of the paint juxtaposes the gloss of the photograph. These textual works are types of scrolls that synthesize her extensive travels to Europe, South America, Asia, Africa and India. "The repetition accentuates certain images while abstracting others beyond recognition."[61]

In both the canvas and photographic works, Pindell uses the same near-far contrast as she used in earlier works to draw the viewer into the work. From afar they shimmer, but up close there is a whole new message to uncover. This technique reflects Pindell's whole way of looking at the world. In an interview with Sally Swenson she explains: "When I was a kid, I would look in the other direction instead of the heavens. My parents bought me a little microscope. I was forever looking at a microcosm like drinking water. . . .One can look at. . .(my) work and see the minute quality about it even though it's on a large scale."[62] Her process in both styles utilizes the combination of surface, support and medium. Pindell's photo collages do not use her own image but as Judith Wilson explains: They "telescope farflung fragments of the world in a magic act of self-assertion."[63]

Overall Pindell's work deals with public and private issues such as history, culture and politics, but the majority of her canvas works in the Autobiography series emerge directly from a private sphere. These works deal with issues and incidents from her own personal experience such as her car accident, her realizations about the

potential damaging effects of meditation and her own identity. In these works she uses the silhouette of her own body, outlined in canvas, cut out and sewn back into the canvas. John Russell states that this series "relates to the journeys in space and time that have helped her come to terms with her situation as a Black woman artist."[64]

The work Autobiography: Water/Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts (1988) (slide 16) is influenced by Pindell's identity and personal experience. It represents her family's multicultural heritage and displays symbols which relate to the many aspects which make up her identity along with some historical information about her ancestry. This work is large and impacting. It consists of an unstretched canvas layered with heavy acrylic paint, cattle marker, oil stick, polymer-photo transfers and vinyl lettering. She uses templates of heavy acrylic to create a rich, dense surface that adds texture and dimension to her charged content. It is significant to discuss here the influence of Africa on her work. Pindell traveled to Africa in 1973 in order to conduct research on an overseas library program for the Museum of Modern Art. But it was in 1980, when she saw a show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art called "Treasures of Ancient Nigeria", that she noticed some similarities between the surface tension of her work and some 9th and 10th century work of the Igbo-Ukwu culture. But she did not remember having ever seen this Igbo-Ukwu work before. She writes: "I. . .did a catalogue essay on African adornment, and I discussed the sense of aggregation you find in some African art due to the use of a lot of different materials. . . .Maybe that sort of thing is 'genetically remembered' in my work."[65]

In parts of Autobiography: Water/Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts, the canvas is sewn together. Pindell's own figure is cut out and the form is then sewn back into the canvas. Pindell has painted her portrait as the figure's face. Extending out and above her figure are multiple arms in varying shades of brown. "The large outline of her body suggests a swimmer floating through the flotsam of her heritage, suspended between an insistent present and the legacy of the past."[66] Margaret Sheffield explains that the

influence of Egyptian bas relief is apparent in this work. She states that the kaleidoscopic effect resembles hieroglyphs and that the central figure is reminiscent of the multi-armed goddesses in Buddhist art.[67] The use of multiple appendages also resembles a metaphor for the family tree.

There are so many images in this work that without up close scrutiny they are hard to identify. This work requires the viewer to spend time contemplating its content. From far away it shimmers, its lyrical aesthetic beauty juxtaposing the intense emotional content. Up close, the viewer is drawn into the underlying message of pain mixed with pride in heritage. Pindell seems to be suggesting that there is a thin line between beauty and cruelty. Trinkett Clark writes: "Pindell's work is ethereal and lyrical. But beneath the beauty there is a powerful statement of the artist's identity".[68] He establishes that her identity reflects her spiritual endeavors as well as her anger as she experiences and views racism, sexism and classism as an African-American woman, artist, traveller and teacher.[69]

This work contains images that refer to Africa, Trinidad and the U.S. It is dominated by the color blue which makes reference to the passage of the slave ships over the oceans to far off continents. Another common image is the eye which represents Pindell's memories of always being watched especially in the many situations where she was the only African-American as in her experiences in school and at work. Eyes also symbolize gateways to the soul[70] and make reference to her car accident in which Pindell recalls that onlookers refused to rescue her from being trapped in the vehicle for fear that it might explode.[71]

Pindell's use of multiple rhythms, textures and media to create a visually exciting piece that requires the viewer to get lost in the over-abundant imagery. The central figure, is Pindell herself, standing on a small pedestal of jumbled heads, faces and masks. These small details are only discernible upon close scrutiny. These might make reference to her ancestry but she is also poking fun at the New Age focus on reincarnation and past lives.[72] At the other end of the figure a

silhouette emerges above Pindell's head as a reference to a spiritual entity. The spiritual entity and Pindell's body appear to be united but yet are severed and stitched back together. The images surrounding Pindell's body include members of her own family as well as important historic figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. To one side is an image of a slave ship which is placed next to a photograph that makes reference to the common occurrence of twins in Pindell's own family, as well as in some African ethnic groups. Her photographic images employ the same technique as her smaller works in which she cuts them into strips and extends the image by painting in between the strips.

Pindell adds further tension to the work by adding vinyl lettering that spells out harsh, literal reality amidst the surface beauty. The phrase "separate but equal", placed within a grey square, creates an unnerving blemish on the tranquil blue surface. Just above it, in barely distinguishable blue lettering, is a narrative that relates an example of the harsh treatment of slaves. This statement represents the hidden, or unspoken history of this country:

> *Or if the slave owner attempts the violation of the slave's wife and the enslaved ressit (sic) his attempts without the least effort to injure but merely to shield his wife from his assaults this law does not merely permit but authorizes the slave owner to murder the enslaved on the spot.*

This statement relates to Pindells' existence as a Black woman because it makes reference to the legacy of sexual abuse of slave women as well as to the general persecution experienced by all African-Americans in slavery.

These most recent works are perhaps best analyzed through the words of the artist herself. In Pindell's artist's statement of 1989, she explains that her Autobiography series addresses multifaceted aspects of her being and experience. She states that she chose to focus on

spirituality and journey along with issues of her multiple consciousness as a Black woman. She writes:

> *The thick paint strokes in the large paintings represent both notes and sounds of a mantra as well as scarring echoing both a rupture and a healing. The strokes are also symbolic of ritual scarification in Africa for beauty, knitting together keloids, fusing into a whole fabric, skin or canvas. In this series I wanted to reflect the horror of some of my experiences and my struggles to over come their effects by traditional, spiritual as well as non-traditional means.*[73]

These works can be interpreted in many ways but it is important to note that the analysis of these works is greatly enhanced by an understanding of the motivations and inspirations that went into their production. Mel McCombie raises this issue when he writes: "This work raises a question central to her (Pindell's) exhibitions: Should art require a biography to be decoded?"[74] There may be no easy answer for this question but the necessity for a critical dialectic that is relevant to black art is readily apparent. It is crucial that the critical process be actively involved in promoting contextual interpretations of works by Black artists in order to discourage potentially harmful interpretation or evaluation. Therefore, it is imperative that a critical dialectic be established in which art can be interpreted contextually in order to combat being automatically labeled and forced out of a racist, sexist mainstream structure which refuses to understand or accept it.

Being both black and female, Howardena Pindell is able to see first hand the multiple jeopardy which exists for her in the "mainstream" art world. The difficulty she experienced in various realms of art world is proof that labels, whether self-imposed or not, are limiting due to discriminating practices of the art world. It further shows that there has been little attention given to the personal expressions of women of color. The art world tends to ignore the fact that black women define themselves differently and quite diversely. As

Barbara Chase Riboud stated: "Nobody should attempt to limit artists in their response to their world."[75] In the search for a critical dialectic, it is imperative that the elements which comprise personal vision are exposed and accepted.

Howardena Pindell is presently active in exposing art world racism and has written several articles and created some works related to this topic. From past personal experience to present, she can attest to the existence of racism in the art world. Pindell can recall many examples from the past, such as when Rosa Esman refused to list her among those being represented by the Rosa Esman gallery.[76] A more contemporary example of racist attitudes can be seen in a 1989 review of the video work Free, White and 21 in which Amei Wallach, a white critic writes: "Like the white lady in the video, you want to say, 'You must be paranoid.'. . . .You want to sympathize; you don't understand how anyone can be so focused a grievance collector. It's a vicious cycle and it gets your stomach going."[77] The battle against racism is not easily won because, as Mark Feinberg attests, "discrimination in the art world can always be passed off as aesthetic taste."[78] Yet in spite of these practices, Pindell has achieved great visibility, including a recent award from the College Art Association in 1990 in recognition of her most recent body of work and her artistic achievements throughout her career. But she is dedicated to exposing art world racism because of the on going censorship of artists of color through omission and exclusion,[79] and because she has herself experienced the damaging effects of tokenism. In sum, she is trying to fight against the ultimate silencing of people of color. She is not only forging this battle through her articles and reports, but has ultimately broken the silence through her visual art in which she clearly proclaims and projects her identity as a Black woman.

Pindell worked through the 1960s, 70s and 80s during which time she began to realize the importance of projecting her own identity, explicitly, through her art. It is clear from the development of her styles, mediums and subject matter that her work projects her existence as a Black woman artist. Her agenda for promoting an

inclusive ideology in the art world directly relates to her experiences inside and outside of the "mainstream".

The development of a contextual approach to the works of both Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell demonstrates diversity of vision within common experience. Like Betye Saar, Pindell often uses her own image to promote her identity in her art. The specific works mentioned exemplify each artists act of self-defining and the individual processes of pursuing personal vision. It is important to discuss these works within their social, cultural and political contexts because of their content and aesthetic choices, which project references which are specific to each artists' personal identity. Beyond self-imaging, both artists explore the notion of identity and the expression of that identity through art as it emerges from social, cultural, historical and political sources.

NOTES

[1]Gilda Snowden, "Reviews: Howardena Pindell," Detroit Focus Quarterly (Winter 1988), 9.

[2]Howardena Pindell, interview by author, Tape recording, New York, 1989.

[3]Ibid.

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[13]Corinne Robins, The Pluralist Era (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 65.

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[15]Madeline Burnside, "New York Reviews," Art News, Vol. 77, # 1 (January 1978), 147.

[16]Carter Ratcliff, "Howardena Pindell at Just Above Midtown," Art in America, Vol. 66, #2 (March/April 1978), 140.

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[19]Ibid., 34.

[20]Ibid., 106.

[21]Judith Wilson, "Howardena Pindell Makes Art That Winks at You," Ms., (May 1980), 67.

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[43]Lowery Sims, "Aspects of Performance in the Work of Black American Women artists," in Feminist Art Criticism (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research press,1988), 208.

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[46]Snowden, 9.

[47]Judith Wilson, "Private Commentary Goes Public," Village Voice, (April 15-21, 1981), p. 84.

[48]Jacobs, 34.

[49]James Nelson, "Pindell Art has Vitality in Imagery," The Birmingham News (Sunday, February 10, 1985), 9G.

[50]Ellen Elsas, Howardena Pindell: Traveler's Memories (Birmingham Museum of Art, 1985).

[51]Rouse, 9.

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[56]Michael Brenson, "Going Beyond Slickness: Sculptors Get Back to Basics," New York Times (Friday, March 3, 1989), C40.

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[58]Margaret Sheffield, Howardena Pindell: Autobiography (New York: Cyrus gallery, 1989), 3.

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[61]Verre, 43.

[62]Sally S. Swenson, "Howardena Pindell" in Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1981), p. 137.

[63]Wilson, "Private Commentary Goes Public," 84.

[64]John Russell, "Howardena Pindell," New York Times (October 20, 1989), C26.

[65]Jacobs, 35.

[66]Mel McCombie, "Howardena Pindell," Arts Magazine (September 1989), 77.

[67]Sheffield, 2-3.

[68]Trinkett Clark, "Prophets and Translators," The Chrysler Museum Monthly Bulletin, Vol. 20, # 1 (February 1990), 3.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid., 2.

[71]Liz Harris Gallery News Release, "'Howardena Pindell: Autobiography' Launches Spring Season at Liz Harris Gallery," (Boston, MA, 1989), 3.

[72]Pindell, interview, 1989.

[73]Howardena Pindell, "Artist's Statement," (1989).

[74]McCombie, 77.

[75]Robert Doty, Contemporary Black Artists in America (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971), 11.

[76]Swenson, 140.

[77]Amei Wallach, "Exhibiting a Conscience," New York Newsday (November 3, 1989), 17.

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[79]Howardena Pindell, "Breaking the Silence," New Art Examiner, Vol. 18, # 2 (October 1990), 18-9.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

This work demonstrates the importance of history and culture in the study of art. It also shows interrelationship that exists between the identity of the artists and art production. As it investigates the lives and works of two prominent Black women artists, Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell, it presents an opportunity for exploring an approach that takes into consideration the historical, political and socio-cultural contexts effecting the creation of works of art. By contextualizing the works of these two significant Black women artists, it further makes possible an investigation of the effects of the intersection of gender, race and class on their lives and work. This contextual approach is presented as a possibility for promoting an inclusive critical structure that attempts to resist the racism and sexism of the existing art establishment. The (re)-structuring of the established critical canon is necessary for achieving an analytical awareness of the diversity of artistic expression. Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell express their existence as Black women through their art. Their choices for styles of presentation of their personal visions are unique and diverse within the context of their common experience as Black women.

Through studying the work of Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell, it is clear that there are issues specifically related to Black women's identity and existence, and that while Saar and Pindell both confront these issues, they do so in similar yet diverse ways. In examining commonalities in the lives and works of these two artists, it is possible to pinpoint similar influences that appear throughout both of their careers. Both artists clearly draw from their African ancestry and heritage whether consciously or through cultural memory. They are both deeply involved in and inspired by mysticism and spirituality, and their sources of inspiration are drawn from these realms. Memory is a key function in many of their works, if not all, as they present ideas that relate to their varying personal experiences such as death, children, family, travels and so on. Despite the variation in the scale, the works

Saar and Pindell are full of intimacy and vital force from the combination of various elements and mixed media. A feminist, or womanist stance emerges from their work as they express their selves as women. A vast array of world religions has inspired their works as has the influences of traveling and the exposure to many different cultures. Their use of video or installation demonstrates their concern that art should not be simply be a commodity but should reach as large an audience as possible. And perhaps the clearest demonstration that these artists are dealing with similar issues as Black women artists is their use of self-imaging and the influence of the personal in their art.

Both Saar and Pindell have achieved visibility despite an exclusive art environment that tends to deny their individuality and diversity. Because of the impact of their personal realities on their artistic vision, it is critical that their work be analyzed within the historical and cultural contexts within which it was produced. Historically, identity is a recognizable element in African-American artistic trends. This is in part due to the legacy of race consciousness, which became a significant social value during the 1920s and 30s. The agenda during the Harlem Renaissance emphasized the promotion of positive self-images in the visual arts and the recognition of Black identity within American culture. By identifying the significance of Black culture to the whole of American culture, African-Americans began to proclaim their contributions to the history of this country.

By identifying artistic traditions specific to Black Americans, some Black artists retrieved images from a rich visual vocabulary that emerged from a deeply imbedded cultural heritage and ancestry. The New Negro Movement of the 1920s emphasized pride in heritage and cultural practices. This legacy resurfaced with renewed energy in the 1960s and 70s within the political climate of the Civil Rights era and Black Nationalism. The Black Arts Movement designated a specific agenda to the visual arts - to promote revolutionary imagery and the cause of Black liberation. Artists of this era continued to investigate identity, as well as, aesthetics in their work.

Within these historical, political and cultural contexts, there exists a deeply imbedded African-American art history. In looking specifically at works by individual Black women artists, it is important to recognize the existence of African-American artistic traditions, as well as, the elements specific to Black women's consciousness, such as gender, race and class. It is also necessary to examine how individual artists express their identities given the personal experiences which contribute to the formulation of their artistic vision. Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell produce works that demonstrate diversity of vision among Black women artists. Although they both experience multiple consciousness and have had to deal with similar oppression and experiences, they each express their individual experiences in diverse manners.

By not recognizing the complexity and variety of artistic expression, the "mainstream" art movement rejects the notion of multiplicity of vision by perpetuating exclusionary practices. It is important to recognize that an informed critical process can promote an inclusive environment in which misconceptions are minimized and diversity of vision is accepted and encouraged. The proposed method of contextualization is a means by which to aid exposing the rich history of Black women's artistic production which has generally been denied its place in the existing literature, museum and gallery world, and "mainstream" establishment. It attempts to expose the complexities of Black women's multiple consciousness and existence. In so doing it further develops the necessity of recognizing the diversity of vision among Black women artists who are emphasizing the act of self-proclaiming and self-defining through the use of their own image. Through these actions, Black women artists proclaim their own particular histories as well as their own existence in those histories. The role of the critic is to enhance the understanding of the art work through an investigation and understanding of impacting events in the histories of the artists lives, within the context of the historical period within which the art was produced. Furthermore, the critic's investigation is greatly enhanced through dialogue with the artist.

The exclusionary practices of the art establishment are based in the devaluation of the voice of the "outsider" and the marginalization of the artwork of people of color and women of all ethnicities. This is damaging because it undermines the legitimacy of the process of self-definition. As Elizabeth Spelman states: "We can't separate lives from the accounts of them; the articulation of our experience is part of our existence. . . .Sometimes feminists have made even stronger claims about the importance of speaking about our own lives and the destructiveness of others presuming to speak about us or for us" or refusing to accept alternative visions.[1] Kristin Congdon, an art educator, sums up the negative effects of exclusion when she states: "In not availing ourselves of varying world views which influence organizational structures for learning and language systems as they relate to art criticism in educational settings, we fail our students and ourselves."[2] The practice of exclusion is the sole privilege of a predominantly white male establishment.[3] Given the rich histories and contexts in which art by people of all ethnicities is produced, it is necessary to investigate the mechanisms which perpetuate a racist, sexist art establishment and to explore how to promote an inclusive environment.

One of the first steps towards an inclusive art history is to recognize the significance of cultural context to the work of art and its reception. This concept calls to question the notion of "universal" criteria and aesthetics. The critic Keith Morrison challenges the notion of universality as a form of cultural dominance and explains that art criticism "is a culturally biased construct designed to elucidate points of view that are of central interest to the cultural values of its origin."[4] The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, points out that "to study an art form is to explore a sensibility. . .(which) is essentially a collective formation, and that the foundations of such a formation are as wide as social existence and as deep".[5] Aesthetic choice is a social construct that manifests itself in the elusive concept of taste.

The role of art criticism is to make an analytical judgement based on the "extent to which the artist's intentions should or should not enter

into one's interpretation, what constitutes artistic criteria, and other aesthetic issues".[6] But since art criticism is a learned process, and artistic expression is closely linked to the consequences of aesthetic choice, the analytical process requires skills in interpreting the specific visual language of the work in question in order to aid in making that message public.[7] Lucy Lippard discusses her pursuit of the critical process:

> *I know now that I have not only to analyze my own (acculturated) taste but also to translate it into a value system which can universalize the task. ((white) Male experience is already universal.) I have not only to re-examine the psychological and social motivations of myself and of the artists I write about, but also to find out what the prevalent metaphors refer to beyond themselves. I have to develop a temperamental consciousness into a cultural consciousness.*[8]

This process involves a dialogue between artist and critic as well as with the viewer. A contextual approach involves an investigation into the elements which contributed to the formulation of the artists' vision and ultimately their choices for visual language. The critical process is crucial to the acceptance and relevance of art works.

In developing an interpretive critical process which seeks to analyze an art product, it is necessary for the critic to be familiar with the sources which helped to form the artwork. This knowledge is then presented to the viewer so that he or she may assess the merits of the work based on the information given about that work. Criticism is an informative process that enables the art audience to experience a work with greater knowledge and understanding. In an essay on criticism in 1979 Howardena Pindell asks: "Is the critic a legitimator of values? The artist carries the burden of his/her own justification, but what is the role of the critic in this?"[9] She goes on to suggest that the structure of criticism is a power issue in which a hierarchical structure exists because of the business of making art as a marketable product. The

issue of art as a commodity is another issue in itself but in order to look at the racism and sexism of this structure, it is necessary to investigate the elements which make it an evaluative, elitist structure. Pindell continues her investigation by questioning the possibility of eliminating the hierarchical relationship between artist and critic. This relationship adds to the exclusive atmosphere of the establishment which thus limits the opportunities of those artists who are not white and male.[10]

There is no lack of evidence of art world racism. In a letter to the editor in a 1970 issue of the New York Times, Michele Wallace writes: "Let us hope that a climate can be created whereby an Afro-American may be free to work however he wishes and in whatever style he wishes, and that so-called critics will do their homework or admit lack of knowledge before hastily penning a review."[11] But twenty years later Howardena Pindell published statistics on New York city galleries which represented white artists, exclusively, along with other galleries and museums with a large percentage of white representation.[12] Pindell's statistics on art world racism are complimented by the exposure, by the Guerilla Girls, of art world sexism as well as racism. This evidence points to the necessity of promoting an inclusive art history.

The process of inclusion involves a critical process which utilizes a contextual approach. This work has presented a method by which the lives and works of two Black women artists have been examined and placed within the contexts of their culture and history. This approach not only analyzed art works and issues of identity but also utilized a methodology through which the works can be interpreted as they are produced within a deeply embedded cultural and social context. It is the desire of this work to add to the existing literature on Black women's artistic production. It has explored the relationship between identity and artistic production by investigating the sources which contributed to the choices each artist has made in producing work that emerges from her consciousness as a Black woman artist.

This study has demonstrated the diversity in visual expressions of two artists who create from within the experience of being Black

women artists. By promoting a contextual approach, this study has attempted to explore the identities of Black women artists through their experiences and choices for artistic expression. It has begun to explore the idea that the recognition of identity is crucial to the study of art, especially by Black women, and contributes to opening up the field to further question and investigate the assertion that identity is an essential component to the study of all visual art. It has also examined elements of identity within a range of artistic mediums and styles, including abstraction. This study proposes a contextual approach as one possible method for expanding the realm of theoretical possibilities beyond the present hierarchical structure to an all inclusive art history that respects and encourages diversity of vision.

NOTES

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[2]Kristin G. Congdon, "Multi-Cultural Approaches to Art Criticism," Studies in Art Education, Vol. 30, # 3 (Spring 1989), p. 176.

[3]Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Art History," Signs, Vol. 1, # 2 (Winter 1975), p. 505.

[4]Keith Morrison, " Art Criticism: A Pan-African Point of View," The New Art Examiner, Vol. 6, # 5 (February 1979), p. 4.

[5]Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," Modern Language Notes, (1976), p. 1478.

[6]Karen Hamblen, "Three Areas of Concern for Art Criticism Instruction," Studies in Art Education, (1986), p. 164.

[7]Ibid., p. 167.

[8]Lucy Lippard, "Projecting a Feminist Criticism," Art Journal, Vol. 35, # 4 (Summer 1976), p. 339.

[9]Howardena Pindell, "Criticism/Or/Between the Lines," Heresies, Vol. 2, # 4 (1979), p.2.

[10]Ibid., p. 4.

[11]Michele Wallace, "Does 'Massa' Still Live in the Art World?", New York Times, (July 26, 1970), p. 1.

[12]Howardena Pindell, "Art World Racism: A Documentation," The New Art Examiner, Vol. 16, # 7 (March 1989), pp. 32-6.

APPENDIX A

The following questions are a few of the many questions which were asked of each artist. The questions below were used in addition to many other questions which related specifically to the lives and work of each artist.

1. Can you discuss your development as an artist?

2. What is your formal art educaton? How has it affected your work?

3. Your works seem to be so much a part of you because they deal with memory and personal history. What do you classify as the different components of your identity?

4. Can you pinpoint certain events that changed or influenced the styles, mediums or subject matter of your works?

5. Do you see such issues as cullture, sexism or racism effecting your work?

6. How has your feminism or political activism effected your work?

7. How has your work been received by black art institutions? By white art institutions?

8. How would you identify or label yourself as an artist? Would you categorize your work? If so, how?

9. How has your art been effected by the art environment and art market where you live and work?

10. How has your personal vision been effected by your travel experiences? Do these translate into your work?

11. How have you funded your art production?

12. Do you feel it is necessary to understand your symbols in order

to understand your work?

13. Do you feel your art is influenced by cultural memory?

14. How did the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s effect your work?

15. Do you create work for a specific audience? Do you feel any audience can understand your work?

16. Do you feel your art reflects gender and race? As a Black woman artist is your work effected by multiple consciousness?

17. Could you explain some of your processes and techniques?

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December 21, 1990

Date