

**THE FLAMING APRON WOMEN'S CRAFT STORE:
AN EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE COLLECTIVITY**

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"Abstract"

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The primary focus of the thesis is the idea that a woman faces herself in the objects she makes. It examines the concept of collectivity and its relation to the creativity of women. The paper presents written material and photographs which convey the images contained in the products made for sale in the Flaming Apron. It also presents statements made by craftswomen which show that the women had to face their inner selves in the objects they displayed. The first chapter records the personal involvement of a woman in the creative process. The second chapter contains a journal of the store and the women's statements about their work. The emphasis of the third chapter is on a women's group's collective experience of externalizing their inner selves, and examines the store as an alternative educational structure. The conclusion raises questions about the meaning of the store for art education.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I.	
COLLECTIVITY: CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING THROUGH MAKING, AS A WOMAN.....	10
The House of a Woman.....	14
CHAPTER II.	
COLLECTIVITY: CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING THROUGH WORKING WITH WOMEN.....	19
Flaming Apron Journal.....	21
Working with Women.....	32
CHAPTER III.	
COLLECTIVITY: CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING THROUGH EDUCATING EACH OTHER.....	43
Our Clothes.....	46
Store.....	51
Sometime Near the End of the Year.....	54
CONCLUSION.....	61
APPENDIX.....	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	72

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Plate	Page
I. Shirt.....	16
II. Shirt (detail).....	17
III. Quilt (detail).....	30
IV. Wall Hanging.....	31
V. Working with Women - Meeting at the store....	49
VI. Living together: Firing Pottery	50

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE FLAMING APRON

In the summer of 1972 a group of people went to Nova Scotia for a period of relaxation and communal living, as well as to plan for the future. We had quit our jobs or professions because we were tired of working in isolated, individualistic ways and needed to find out what we could do together, and what commitment we were willing to make to each other. We spent two months on the Atlantic coast in a rented farmhouse.

It was an ideal situation; we could concentrate fully on enjoying ourselves and also on getting along together. For some of us it was our first attempt at communal living, and since we had no external pressure of jobs, we could work on the difficult adjustments of living with more than one other person. We also had two children, another new experience. Communal living gave each of us the confidence and the desire to continue such a lifestyle in the fall when we returned to the city.

We were in need of renewed energy after years of living in the city; therefore much of the first month was spent in trying to slow down our frantic search for activity. We took long walks, sunbathed, went to the beach, picked berries, ate good food, played volleyball, and read many books. At first we needed about ten activities to fill a day. Gradually we relaxed, until setting our minds to do one thing a day was hard to accomplish. We did spend time talking to each other and getting to know each other and we tried sharing jobs and attempted work that was contrary to stereotyped roles for men and women. In the back of each of our minds, however, was the fear of being left alone, as well as the fear of having no plans for the fall. We realized that we cared about each other and needed each other in order to live and work for another year. We did not want to go back to seeking individual solutions for work and living needs.

During this time it became clear that the women in the group were feeling a need to work together on some type of project. We wanted to gain a knowledge of our own abilities. Could we plan and accomplish a successful, exciting, necessary and complex project of our own? We were sure that we could and wanted to try. We wanted a completely women-run project; we felt that we would make

choices and decision that would be significantly different from those in a project which included men. We felt that we wanted to share the joy and excitement and pain of creating a new structure. A store that sought to provide a non-competitive method of passing women's products on to other people could be the basis for self-generating energy for other vital needs of women. We anticipated that the collective and egalitarian nature of such a project would definitely create a functionally unique statement about the ways in which women work together.

For a few days at the end of August the women took a camping trip together with the idea of accomplishing two things. First we wanted to visit craft stores throughout southern Nova Scotia. We came across one store; which suggested to us that women were grouping together to exhibit and sell their work, run by local women on a volunteer basis. They sold articles which were well made and not particularly trite or gimmicky such as we had seen in the commercial and exploitive stores we also visited. We were impressed with the pride and dignity of a store which displayed each person's name on their work and accepted all crafts that were brought in. Our other accomplishment for the trip was to decide where we would go in the fall, what

4

we could do together, who would work on the project, and what the project would be. After much talk we came up with some definite, though vague, plans.

- We would return to Montreal.
- We would live together.
- We would work on a women's store.
- We would share in the financial burden of the store.

We were very happy to have settled these first few steps, which we all felt were rather large commitments and very new experiences.

After making these first steps things moved rapidly. We began to make more decisions, forming a philosophy for the store. First we decided that it would be a women's craft store. The crafts which we would accept would be made by women, and we would not make judgements on the articles women brought; any women could bring handmade items for sale in the Flaming Apron. We also felt that craftswomen should get a large share of the rewards for their work; so the store would take no profit, only a 10% commission to help pay the rent on the building. We also saw the store as an educational situation and would work to start groups such as consciousness-raising, women artists groups, and groups to exchange information and skills. The Flaming Apron would be completely created by women, including all planning, organizing, building, and

painting. Finally we agreed that we would start with a small, workable project and enlarge it and develop it as women found it useful or necessary.

We also made some plans about the policies of the store. We would seek any financial or moral support from women who believed in the philosophy of the store. In regard to decision-making we formed several policies which we hoped would help keep the store functioning in a vital manner. All decisions would be made by consensus of all store members. There would be no leaders; we would each learn to be more aggressive or less aggressive in group situations. We would have no rigid definition of roles, responsibilities, or jobs. Most important, however, was our commitment to bring out and deal with any problems which arose.

✓ What is it like to live an idea like the Flaming Apron? You work long hours. You go there because you want to, need to, for no money or only enough to survive. When you are at the store you build shelves, make signs, call

people, and hear about the lives and art of women who come to sell or come to buy. You hear from a woman who needs some friends because everyone in her neighborhood wants to talk about babies and clothes and she needs more than that. You have some tea and talk with a woman who is so nervous about bringing her work and talking with you that her hands shake and her voice trembles. You see an older woman whose three stops "downtown" are the thrift shop, the grocery store, and the Flaming Apron. (She brings you cookies on the day the store closes.) You overhear three woman customers who are strangers to each other begin to talk about what it means to have given up some work that interested them in order to get married. You give a woman the name of another woman who needs some curtains made. You arrange for ten women to meet on Tuesday night for the consciousness-raising group that they asked for. You tell a woman about a day-care centre for her child...And maybe you even sell some items!

Then you go home and the women there are your friends who also work at the store and therefore you have plenty of things to talk about that evening. Do we have enough money to pay the rent this month? Has anyone figured out how much we owe the craftswomen? What is our bank balance anyway? Does anyone want to speak on the

7

radio about women and exploitation by the fashion industry?
Should Carol take on another job in addition to the store?
Could the YWCA show some video-tapes about rape at the
store next Friday night? Should we participate in a
women's symposium which is likely to be irrelevant and
divisive to the women's movement? Every day we had to
deal with many questions which related to the functioning
of the store and to the philosophy which was the basis of
the Flaming Apron. We had returned to Montreal, moved
into a house together and made a store together. Women
came into the store as soon as it opened and were still
coming in the day it closed. We heard many things about
the lives of women, and we tried to find out what they
needed. We didn't know anything for certain; somehow we
found the courage to let things happen, to let events flow.
We tried out our ideas, talked about them, and saw what
happened to these ideas when they came up against reality.
The store had to close for some of us because we needed
to grow in new ways ourselves. The craftswomen were not
interested in taking on the administration of a store
which already met their needs as it was. The idea of the
store did not end. A store such as the Flaming Apron has
existed before and will probably exist again when women
need to make it for themselves. We could have continued

the store in a commercial, competitive manner, but we chose to close it rather than have it become a commercial venture.

As artists we are familiar with the creative process. We make a mark or a line or a brushstroke or a stitch. We stand back and look at what we have done. We may make another mark; or we may go away, remove ourselves from our object. We alternately go into our creation and come out again. We repeat our marks and we repeat our withdrawals from the objects we make. Each time we go into and away from a single object we change; each time we "finish" an object and withdraw to prepare ourselves for the next creation we also change. We never stop changing, but we do take what we have learned with us into our next creative act. For example, the image of a spiral seems to come back on itself, like a circle, but the line never quite touches the same place twice. We feel like we are back at the same starting point with each cycle but even though the line is similar, it is never the same.

We made a store. We stood back and observed it; we changed it and added new facets to it. We would remove ourselves from our creation and then come back with fresh visions. We went into the Flaming Apron as an educational

structure and came out again. We went into a situation where we would meet many women; we went into their familiar structure, the store. We closed the store and went back into our collective to try to understand the store and to choose those aspects of the "idea" of the store to take with us into society in our next creative act. We will repeat this going in and out. Our structures change. We can never stop with one institution, one "way," but we can take what we learn from each structure with us into our next creative act.

CHAPTER I

COLLECTIVITY - CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING THROUGH MAKING, AS A WOMAN

An artist is not special. She is just not afraid of her internal self and she tries to describe that self.

Suddenly the world seemed to get lighter; it appeared that the sun was going to shine again. All Lise had known for many years was twilight, or haze, or grayish sky...for there had been no complete darkness either. So she went outside, wanting to be happy, wanting to be free again. As she walked through lanes she saw a woman in a garden; she called out to her, hoping to share her happiness. Instead the woman replied, "No, things are not going to be all right again. This is only a brief time of brightness, of clarity, before the storm."

So Lise decided to try to make it to her house before the storm. She could see the sky come closer and

¹Anais Nin. From a lecture delivered at McGill University, Montreal. March 7, 1973.

closer to earth; and in the distance clouds were forming into a funnel, a tornado. She was afraid and ran. Just as she reached the building where she lived the rain began, hard pellets of rain, and the lights in the building went dark. There was still some faint light from beneath the lowered sky, and she found her way inside.

As Lise entered the rooms where she lived her feelings were ambivalent. She was glad to see that her husband and child were safe, although they were sitting quietly, afraid of the storm. Lise saw another woman with her family, and she was relieved for the presence of this woman allowed Lise to remove her concern to other events.

Lise could then go to the window and watch the course of the storm.

She saw the wind stir, rush, and finally uproot the trees. She saw the clouds forming, foaming, building their terror. She watched the tornado.

It swept across the land, terrorizing the earth, but causing no real damage. Then suddenly it lowered, to clear a bridge filled with people. On that bridge rode a woman on horseback. The tornado lifted her with the animal and hurled her into the swirling river beneath. As she fell she lost her horse and was thrown alone into the

water. The force of the river and the strength of the wind carried her, struggling, to a distant bank where a woman's arms helped pull her to shore.

This same storm took on a new and benevolent nature. Again the woman was washed into the water, this time not alone, but with the woman who had saved her. Now the river became a sea, rolling and much deeper yet with a less frightening, more secure rhythmic intensity. The two women who recognized each other, and called each other by name, were carried along by a waving current, their arms holding each other loosely and supportively. One woman was naked, one was clothed in silk.

Lise watched all of this from her window. She knew that although the storm still raged for the husband and child, a new kind of world was being created for her, by her, with her.

Lise tried to go back to live with her husband but she couldn't stay in his house; she knew that staying with him and the child would destroy her. She felt that she must escape. Before she left, however, she went to the basement of her home to find what she needed among the family's belongings.

In the cellar she found only two things which were hers, a suitcase and a shirt. The case was dusty and worn,

covered with a layer of old paper, much like a thin layer of parchment. She knew that it could not be used as it was, so she took it out of the house and dragged it behind her down the street, down a hill. When Lise reached the bottom of the hill she saw that her suitcase was cleared of the restrictive covering and could be used again.

Again she went to the basement. Amid the clutter of forgotten items she saw a shirt she once wore. She was happy to have come across the shirt and took it up for a closer look. It was worn and ragged, a whitish color. Lise looked at the front of the shirt and saw a design; a piece of string had been woven into the shirt, in the form of a large crescent. Between the warp of the cloth she could see thistles, dry and dangerous. She must remove these burrs. She pulled out the string which held the thistles in the cloth and quickly pulled it through her fingers, tearing off the burrs.

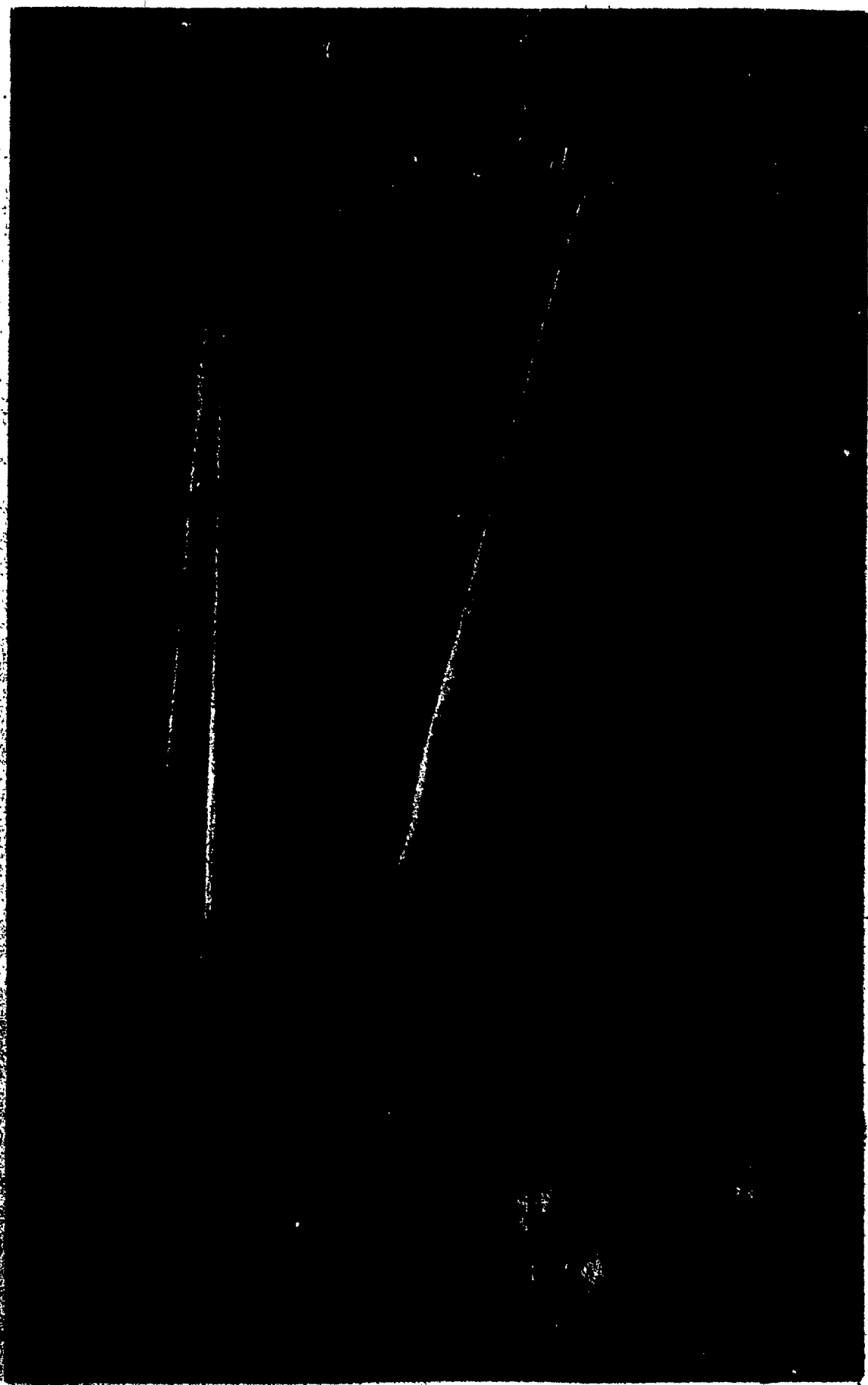
Next Lise decided to put the empty string back into the cloth of her shirt. This time instead of one crescent design she made two smaller ones. She wondered if this form of the shirt would have as powerful an impact upon her senses as the original one did. Lise took her clothing and her suitcase and left the house.

The House of a Woman

One night after a major upheaval in my life I had a dream which re-phrased old information into a new way of knowing. This knowledge I accepted as valid and even vital. Then I made the dream into a story. I felt that I must carry the image further, make it visible. So I made a shirt. The dream, the story, the shirt all had a common symbol, the image of protection. The handsewn shirt became a visible realization of covering, protecting, holding within. This objectification of a dream, of a manifestation of the unconscious, is my own particular statement, but the symbols of protection and containment are not uncommon. The Flaming Apron crafts store held many examples of these images, all in the crafts made by women. The Flaming Apron, because it had chosen to accept all women's crafts, also held examples of crafts which demonstrated the strangling effect of the inability of some women to communicate with their inner selves. In the differences between these two types of women's creations lie the questions and answers of art education.

PLATE I. Shirt (approximately 14" x 24")

PLATE II. Shirt (detail)





I am the dwelling place of a woman. I call to women to see themselves in me, and I ask them to come to me.

When I look at the object I have called a shirt I see a container for a body, a person, for me, for my self. I see crescent forms at the area of the breasts; they are breasts. I see a veil or tissue over coarse fabric; I feel the layers and sense another skin. I know the hair, in knots and tangles, of a woman.

My shirt is the dwelling place of a woman. I am protecting myself, containing myself, within my self. I am also reflecting myself back to me and I am choosing to be a reflection to other women by taking a woman's body, in the form of a shirt, as my protection. If a woman can see herself in me, then my shirt can be her dwelling, her house.

I am the house of a woman.

I am the house of a sister.

CHAPTER II

COLLECTIVITY - CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING THROUGH WORKING WITH WOMEN

Eight women organized the Flaming Apron. We came from a variety of backgrounds and each had unique areas of interest in addition to a common interest in collectivity and feminism.

Carol: Social worker, community organizer, craftswoman
Dian: Organizer, business person, craftswoman
Billie: Craftswoman, art educator
Stangje: Artist, craftswoman
Yvonne: Writer, professor, craftswoman
Jessie: Business person, secretary
Claire: Student, secretary
Johanne: Student, craftswoman

The Flaming Apron touched the lives of many woman. Although it was a place for selling women's crafts, the store also facilitated women's involvement in other activities.

WOMEN VOLUNTEERS: 20 - 30 women

These women worked in the store on a regular basis or contributed certain skills as well as some of their time.

Some were craftswomen, others were involved in the women's movement, community groups, women working at home, etc. They came to the store originally as craftswomen, as customers, or for other interests.

CRAFTSWOMEN:

150 - 200 women

Approximately 20 women made a fair income from the sale of their work. The large majority of women seemed to bring their work to the store for other reasons than large-scale economic gain.

**CONSCIOUSNESS-
RAISING
GROUPS:**

120 women

The Flaming Apron started twelve leaderless groups intent on meeting together to share in the struggle to become self-actualizing creative women within oppressive contemporary society.

**OTHER ORGANIZATIONS
PARTICIPATING
WITH
THE FLAMING APRON:**

YWCA Women's Centre
Women's Information and
Referral Centre
Powerhouse Gallery
Sororite
Montreal Association for
the Blind
Creative Leisure
Atelier Communautaire
Women's Place Women's Centre.

Flaming Apron Journal

Thursday, 19 October 1972.

Dian and Carol showed me some of the possible places to rent - the rents were from \$125-\$150 and leases are usually one year. Dian has been checking on permits and all kinds of legal matters. It's not simply a matter of opening the doors!

Monday, 23 October.

We looked at the small import store again - the rent is good but it is only a four month sublet. We had a meeting though and decided to rent it if the city inspector approves the building.

Tuesday, 24 October.

We signed the lease today. Rent is \$125 per month.

Saturday, 28 October.

We had a long meeting to decide on how to fix up the store. We are going to paint one wall dark yellow. Also had to decide about shelves - we didn't want to build anything so we will use boxes from Chinatown. Also decided to register the store as a company rather than incorporate.

Tuesday, 31 October.

Tonight after three hours we finally came up with a name. After "A Woman's Place," "The Diana Prince Memorial Store," "Women's International Food and Crafts Conspiracy," etc., we finally chose "The Flaming Apron."

Wednesday, 1 November.

We painted all day. Women finally started bringing some of their crafts to the store. We had been afraid that we would have to have the opening night party with no work displayed.

Thursday, 2 November.

Finished the painting, covered boards with cloth, put up the bulletin board, and tried to figure out cash and business details before we opened up. Yvonne wrote a

beautiful statement of our aims and purposes in starting the store.

Friday, 3 November.

Tonight we had the opening night party and had to have the store all fixed up and the crafts displayed. Stansje and I had a disagreement about the display of work. I hurt her feelings and wasn't as aware of it as I should have been. I did not consult her before changing something which she had done, and I didn't explain my reasons for it very well. We finally talked about it later and I realized how important it is to work things out with each other, no matter how hard it may seem to do.

The party went very well, Sue, Anu, Cerise and Johanne pledged some money to the store for the rent. It was good to see all the women who came...it seems like we'll have a lot of moral support.

Friday, 10 November.

I went to see a woman at Manpower about a LIP grant. I showed her our proposal and budget, which she told me to rework, so that settles my weekend activities. When I got back to the store Ann was doing a video-tape of a group discussion about the store. It went o.k. Yvonne and Stansje bought some of Margaret's pottery. Carol and I stayed at the store through the dinner hour. Then Dian came with some food and we finished off last week's wine. We talked about mothers, our house, and getting a little happiness and warmth and joy into our relationships. We closed the store at 10:00 and went to Dunn's for some latkes and blintzes.

Tuesday, 14 November.

Mrs. Kelly who makes all the beautiful crocheted scarves and shawls finally came into the store. She brought some more of her work and stayed to talk for quite awhile. We also made a lot of calls to women with cars to get someone to take Dian to Chinatown for more wooden boxes to use for display shelves.

Friday, 17 November.

Very busy day. I opened the store at noon and a woman came in with some free office supplies. Freda brought some prints which she donated to the store... quotations from Simone de Beauvoir. Then Joan came by and stayed a long time - she wants to help at the store.

She has a six year old child and is not working - says she is bored, etc. Carol came in to work so I went to the grocery store and then lugged a ton of food home. Carol opened some wine and Jessie and Janice from our consciousness-raising group came in so we all talked and ate sandwiches.

Tuesday, 21 November.

Mrs. MacDonald came in today...she's the very old lady with a heart condition who isn't supposed to go outside or climb stairs, but she had seen our ad and had to come with some of her work. She was very shy - she had never sold anything. Some women brought in handmade toys from a group of former hospital patients. The front room is getting filled!

Wednesday, 22 November.

Barbara called instead of coming to the store to see me today. We talked about how our friendship was ending. She doesn't want to join a women's group. She doesn't like feeling demands made on her by anyone. She wants to watch and comment but not become personally involved or be committed to anyone.

Shelly came into the store and we talked about art, women, clothes, fashion and about handmade things. I told her how I had felt in university and graduate school. I had always thought that I wanted to be a painter, but in reality was easily bored or else I had to push myself to work on anything. Finally I realized that I always had time for sewing and crocheting. I decided that the things I loved to make could also be considered "art," and also that my situation was not necessarily unique. Other women probably had not been allowed, or allowed themselves, to see their work as art.

Saturday, 25 November.

Today Carol, Stansje and I went to the Women's Information Exchange at the University Settlement. It was a dull sort of meeting - groups telling what they are doing; a lot of talk and not much getting to know each other. Went out after the meeting with about ten other women and this was more exciting than the actual meeting. I spoke with Clara, a photographer, about forming a group of women artists. She is also anxious to do it and has ideas for things that we could do together. We will try to get some more women together so

we can get the group going soon.

Thursday, 30 November.

On Tuesday we got all the money figured out that will be paid to craftswomen. It came to \$186.00 for the month of November. The highest amount was \$44.00 to Mrs. Kelly.

Today we gave out money to the craftswomen. I also spent time talking with Ara, who teaches Batik courses. We have decided that we want to help women who are trying to make their living from their art, so we will try to help her get students. A lot of women I have spoken to recently are very upset about the Visual Arts Centre, which should be the natural place for community women to learn crafts. The fees are high, much too high to let that institution have any far-reaching value to the women of the community. The only ones who can afford to attend the Visual Arts are the wealthy women of the area.

We are becoming known for forming consciousness-raising groups. We have helped to start two groups and there are three more beginning this week. We send two women from our group to the first two meetings of groups, so that if they have problems getting started someone is there to help out.

Gervaise from Sororite called for help finding someone to stay with a welfare mother's two children while she is in the hospital. I like the reaching-out feeling that we are getting from so many woman lately.

Sue said she would do an article for the Star about the store. Also Hannah Gardiner from CJAD came and talked to us; she will talk about the Flaming Apron on her programme.

Tuesday, 26 December.

Throughout December it was impossible to write about the store. Thinking back now, I feel that we were having to be too much like a store and our idealism went by the wayside much of the time. We sold over \$1,000 worth of women's crafts in December and the craftswomen will be getting a lot of money for the month. We also received a lot of new articles, so that the store is just filled with things.

The bookkeeping is quite hard for us - we have no adding machine and could certainly use one. It is always a big production to figure out the books at the end of the day, not to mention at the end of the month!

We have been getting involved in a co-ordinating effort for all women's groups in the city. It could get quite heavy though, because some women are trying to get things too organized. They want to do a very political thing, with all the factionalism and divisiveness which that includes. We seem to be doing all right as scattered groups, each with a definite, concrete need to fulfill. We could use some form of information exchange, but we must be careful not to get too organized and planned - we don't need an imposed structure. The great possibility of the women's movement comes from the ability to create organic, functional groups and then be able to recognize that a theory may have evolved from personal experience. We must be so careful not to determine a philosophy, or theory and then try to fit ourselves and other women to that theory.

What should happen with the store in the future months?

CLASSES: Call all women interested in classes and arrange a meeting. Let them figure out how they can help each other learn what they need to know. Talk to Margaret about free pottery classes at Dawson.

EXHIBITION: Might arrange an exhibit of women's art. Maybe in combination with photographs of women making things. Could be at a church or storefront, or hall or YWCA. Why do we need it? To have others see what we are making and to get some comment on our work. Also to work collectively on a creative project.

POLICIES: I think these have worked out fairly well. All of the decisions we made at the outset of the project have been workable. For example: no judgements about the work we accept - this one has been very successful...the work is generally of very high quality, although tastes vary. 10% commission - craftswomen like it, and we are able to manage with donations and pledges. Specialization - works fairly well and we are all trying to learn all aspects of running the store.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO WORK WITH WOMEN?

It seems easy to get things done. There is a lot of consideration for each other. No decisions are taken

individually; consensus for all important ones. There has not been a fight or serious disagreement. I feel very good about all the women I work with; I trust their plans for the project and have no feeling that anyone is trying for power or personal advancement. There is a commitment to working as a group and we each derive a great deal of support and energy from the group experience. Each person seems committed to the goals we started with and each works in her own way to achieve them.

The store was an object made by a small group of women which had an effect on a larger group, the crafts-women and the customers of the store. In making the store, or in the symbolic sense a container or a house, we also created a social reality. The store would be a part of society, a part of the world. As the shirt was an individual expression of the collective internal reality of women, the store was a group expression of the collective reality of women.

The diary was a method of reflecting back to the members of the group the meaning of the store. The diary, like the shirt, brought the unconscious to consciousness thereby helping to clarify the process of making the store. When looking at the diary, and through the diary, at the store, what can we see?

We see the symbolic house, containing within its walls the things we need to be able to live...clothing to shelter and protect us...vessels to hold many things, many secrets...other women to share their lives with us and to support us in what we do. We see the objects which we have made, and through these objects we see something of ourselves.

A store holds many things. Within the walls of the Flaming Apron were images made by many individuals, the collective dreams of many women. The objects often signified containment and protection. Some of the creations can be given names which call to mind other events, forgotten times, and familiar places for each of us.

Cup, bowl, pitcher, box, basket, goblet.

Pouch, purse, bag, sachet, pillow.

Quilt, bedspread, afgan, blanket, tablecloth.

Bottle, jar, kettle, planter.

Shirt, jacket, vest, poncho, shawl, dress, apron.

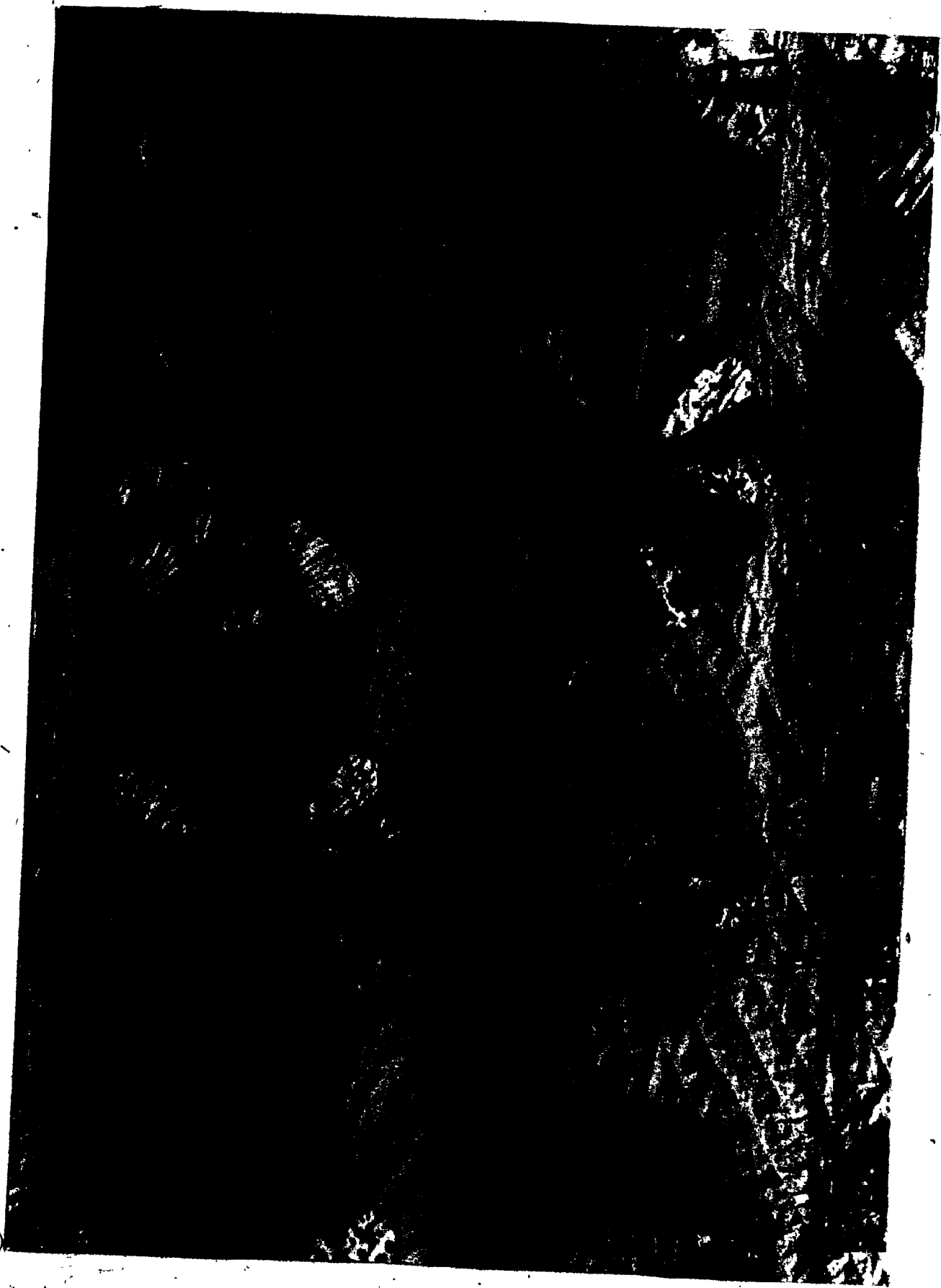
Hat, headband, scarf, sash, belt.

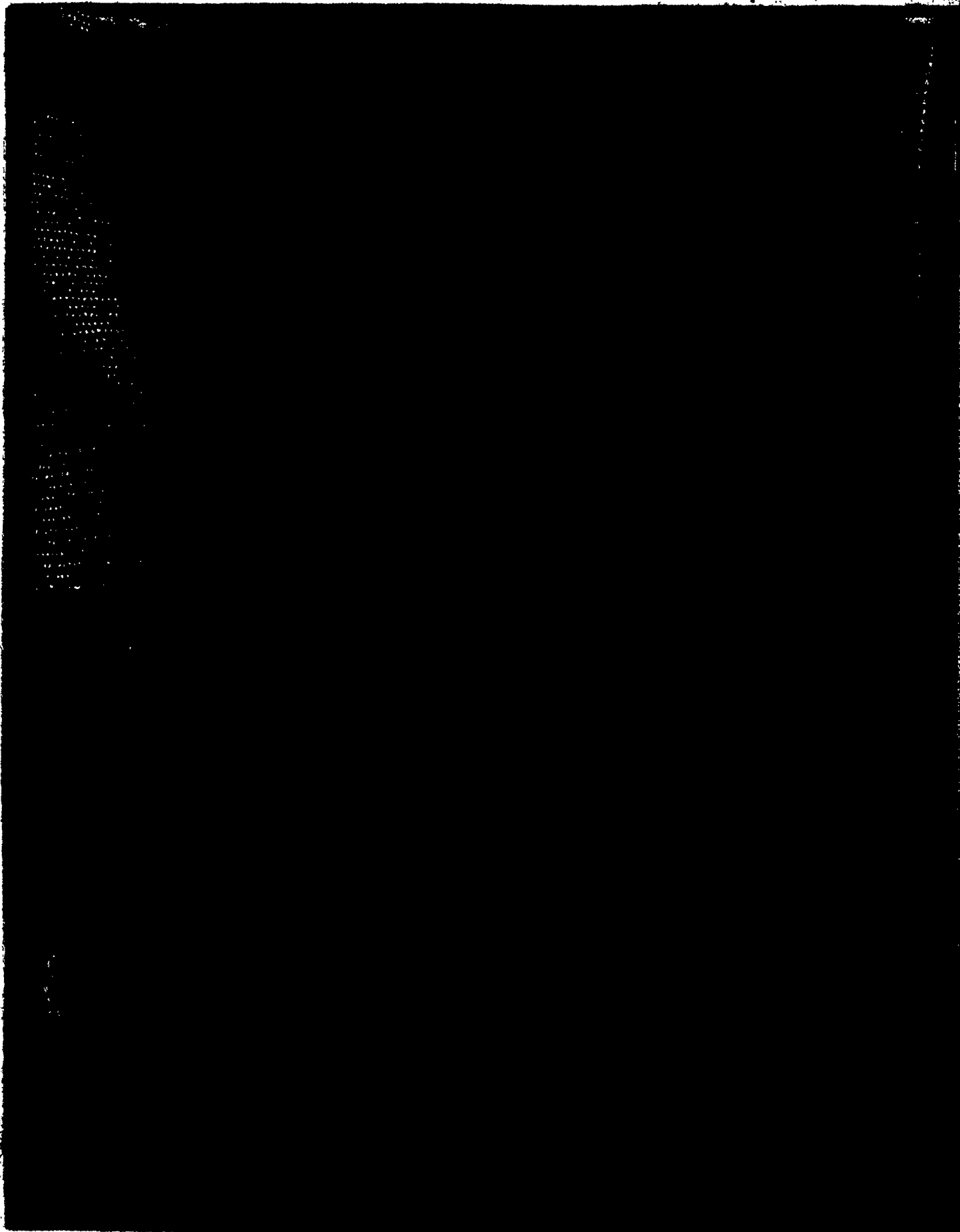
Apple doll, stuffed animal.

Pendant, ring, necklace, bracelet.

PLATE III. Quilt (detail) made by a
craftswoman from the community

PLATE IV. Wall hanging made by a
craftswoman from the community





Working with Women

A woman makes an object. She brings her creation to the Flaming Apron and makes a statement, "Please accept what I make, please accept this part of me that I am showing you."

Any kind of growth or education, including creative growth, must come from a personal need to grow. We felt that there could be no growth, either for ourselves or the women we dealt with, unless we gave each woman the understanding that we accepted her with whatever she brought us, physically or spiritually. This resulted in our acceptance of any work made by women. This brought the Flaming Apron a wide range of crafts, from the most cliché, or contentless, to work with great depth of imagery.

Generally speaking the majority of buyers were also women, and they seemed to set up a new kind of bartering system. It was obvious that money, although it was exchanged, was not a correct measure of the value or worth of an object. The objects containing a significant image were grasped and held by women who could respond to their meaning, and this had little to do with economic or educational background.

A 'personal problem' may well be but an individual version of a general or collective one.¹

I Have Made So Many Things

I WANT TO SELL THESE GLOVES.

I am reaching out for the first time in a long while.

I MAKE SO MANY THINGS.

I keep on searching for a purpose.

I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN HOW TO CROCHET.

Is there another woman who can help me?

I MAKE QUILTS TO KEEP MY MIND OFF MY PROBLEMS.

I am trying to get in touch with myself.

I CAN ONLY SEW WHEN I HAVE SOME FREE TIME.

I am angry that much of my life is meaningless.

I WOULD LIKE TO GET TOGETHER WITH SOME OTHER WOMEN.

I need to have some exciting, creative, sharing experience.

LOOK AT WHAT I HAVE MADE.

Look at what I have made.

¹M. Esther Harding, Woman's Mysteries (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1971), p. 13.

Often what a woman says about her work has many meanings. She speaks about the object she has made, and through that object she also speaks about herself.

CRAFTSWOMAN: I brought this bedspread that my sister made. She's made a lot of them and we just thought that maybe someone would like to see one and maybe buy it. It is double-bed size.

BILLIE: It is beautiful. So much work has gone into this crocheting - can you tell me how it was made?

CRAFTSWOMAN: Well, it's all filet crochet. My sister made six panels first - you see - the parts with the horses. Then she crocheted them together and did all the other designs and symbols all around.

BILLIE: How long did it take?

CRAFTSWOMAN: It takes about two years to make one of these. I have one going now and we have made several others.

BILLIE: What price would you like for the bedspread?

CRAFTSWOMAN: Well I was going to ask \$100, but I figured that might not be enough so I thought may-

be \$125. What do you think, is that too much?

BILLIE: No, I certainly think that is a low price for all the work your sister has done. I am just sorry we probably couldn't get a lot more for it.

CRAFTSWOMAN: I know, we can maybe get the money back we spend for our supplies. But then we don't make things for money, do we? We love to do it and that's why we work so long on things. We like to give our work to our relatives and friends, but pretty soon everyone we know has the things we make and then we just have to keep our work or put it away in a trunk somewhere.

For a customer, looking at the work displayed in the Flaming Apron may call up many questions, fears, and often misunderstandings about our creativity.

One day a woman came into the Flaming Apron and said to me, "I want to ask you some questions." I answered that I would try to help her if I could.

So she walked around the store, looking at everything and then, looking at some crocheted doilies which were displayed on the wall, she said, "Do you ever tell the women what to make?"

I answered, "Of course not," thinking she was probably surprised at the high quality of work she was seeing and had assumed that we were telling women what to make.

She then remarked, "You really have some high quality work here."

I thanked her and agreed with her, still thinking that she was having a positive reaction to the store. So I was amazed to find that she was having just the opposite reaction.

"It looks like a church bazaar - all pastel colours, little doilies and doo-dads, no awareness of new design ideas or colour, very traditional, no experimentation, etc., etc." She was shaking and obviously very upset by this experience. She said that she was shocked by what she had seen and said that she was angry that the store had such poor examples of women's art. "It's no wonder that women artists aren't taken seriously!"

I wanted her to understand what the store was trying to do. I told her that we felt that art must come from a person's experience, and a woman comes from a completely different heritage than a man, and therefore her work will express its source. I told her that women have been told what to do for too long and we are trying to find our way back to our own creativity. I explained that we would not tell a woman what to make or infringe on her right to work as she pleased. We had decided that in making the store we would not set ourselves up as judges of taste or quality.

What do we do with the things we make?

CRAFTSWOMAN: I was wondering, ah, I heard that you, ah, buy stuff here and sell it...

BILLIE: We can't afford to buy anything...but we do keep your things here and try to sell them for you. If you work is sold you get most of the money back, except 10% which we keep to help pay our rent.

CRAFTSWOMAN: Yes, that's O.K. Could you look at

these things I brought?

BILLIE: We accept all crafts made by women.

CRAFTSWOMAN: Well, I make these hats. I usually give them away or make them for the church bazaar. I have hundreds of things packed away in boxes at home. I just read about this place in the paper, so I thought I'd come by with a few things.

Sometimes when a woman looks at her object she sees nothing. But she must have the opportunity to see that meaningless object before she can move along to the next mirror.

BILLIE: Yes, we would like to take your things.

We accept all crafts that are made by women; we try not to judge anything - or else we'd have a store filled with only the things we like!

CRAFTSWOMAN: I have these stuffed poodles here - a very good item, sells well in all the stores where I take them. You see, children like them - also girls want one for their room. All colours - I have twenty here - eighteen different colours and kinds of fur.

BILLIE: O.K. I have to write your name and phone number in this book. What prices would you like?

CRAFTSWOMAN: Well, I sell them for \$2.75 in all the shops. That's a good price. I want to tell you how to display them though. You put them in a good place and they'll go very fast, very fast. I don't mean to criticize, but you girls don't display things too well. If a person can't see the item it just doesn't get sold!

Women came to the store for different reasons, but many came again and again to bring their work or sit and talk. This woman came regularly from Quebec City to see how the store was doing and to stay for hours talking about her life and the objects she makes.

Hi. I'm the girl who talked to you on the phone yesterday. I'm making patchwork quilts. I don't do it for money - just to keep my hands busy. I have arthritis and I need something to keep my hands moving. I also made this afganI had one hand in a cast...and I only knew this one stitch.

I have more of these quilts at home. I only brought one to give you an idea. See, you have to cut all the pieces, then you pin them all down in an eighteen-inch square, then you baste them, and then you make your cross-stitches all around each piece and then trim it exactly twelve inches.

I'd really like to take orders...I can make any colours. I'm working on one here in reds; look at the pieces I have here.

A woman artist was showing her work to a group of women. She spoke of her incapacitating fears of facing her self, or objectifying herself. She was not alone - each of the other woman artists spoke of having similar feelings at some periods of their lives.

"I just don't show my work to anybody.
Nobody.
Ever."

"I'm so nervous about my work.
I'm so precious about it."

Craftswomen speak to us in many ways, the most significant being through the objects they make. They also say many things to us verbally, and through their statements we can understand two important things. First, these women were not passive in their involvement with the Flaming Apron. They brought their work to the store, and in their own particular ways, participated in the creation of the store. They spoke to us of their needs and of what they could do to keep the store functioning. The store was not created for them, so much as by them. The women decided how much of themselves they could contribute to the idea of the store, and they were active participants in the Flaming Apron.

Secondly, the statements of the craftswomen and customers show that in bringing objects to the store the women were bringing themselves. In order to exhibit her work the woman had to be willing to face her self in that object. When a woman makes an object and then places it out for others to see, she is objectifying her inner self and must look at the object and see that self. If she sees an object with no meaning, as the woman who made the poodles may have, she may be able to go back into herself and re-examine her creativity. She may begin a form of

self-education, which is the basis for each of our creative acts.

CHAPTER III

COLLECTIVITY - CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

THROUGH EDUCATING EACH OTHER

"We realized that, never before had women been asked to work from their female experience. Women are taught to move outside of female experience when creating."¹

Having been involved in a women's consciousness-raising group for two years and also finding that we could work together on a project, some of us felt that we would like to live together as well. We came together with several things in common.

First, we were committed to learning and growing; we wanted to share a living experience that would change our lives in some way. We agreed to attempt to deal supportively and collectively with problems that faced us.

¹ Priscilla English, "An Interview with Two Artists From Womanhouse," Statement by Judy Chicago, New Woman, (April/May, 1972), 36-43.

We would try to work through our difficulties rather than treat situations superficially or ignore them completely. For example, when questions arose regarding the raising of the children, we attempted to share in the decision making. Since each of us had different feelings about living with children we tried to listen to and understand each woman's ways of dealing with her feelings. We also attempted to work collectively on our problems in separating our identity from that of our children. We wanted to learn and grow from the experience of living with children, rather than leave the entire responsibility for the children entirely with the mother, thereby ignoring the commonality of women's experiences.

Secondly, we each had experience teaching in traditional educational systems as well as our common experience of creating the Flaming Apron. We could bring to our living situation, as well as to the craft store, a certain awareness about how people learn. We could ask ourselves, as well as the women who came into the store, certain questions. What is creativity? What effect does collectivity have on our creativity? What kind of education is happening at the store? How are we growing ourselves?

The most important thing we had in common was the

desire to externalize in some manner our inner, creative selves. For some this was a new experience, for others it was a previously unrecognized experience. This creativity took many forms, such as yoga, writing, dance, and music. The activity which related to the Flaming Apron, and the one which we gave considerable thought and work was the making of objects. Each of us, as individuals and as members of the collective, experienced growth in our chosen creative form. We discussed for many hours the questions which arose when we tried to objectify our dreams, ideas, and unconscious realities. As crafts-women/women artists we brought forth many objects. We wrote plays and acted them. We made music and danced. We made photographs and drawings. We made endless varieties of clothing - hats, shawls, shirts, scarves, vests, bags, headdresses, beaded shirts and jackets, dresses and robes. We gathered other women to us and gave and received energy from our activities together. The collective living experience was a vital part of the total experience of the Flaming Apron.

We often asked ourselves, what do the objects we make mean to us?

OUR CLOTHES

Dark, warm, intertwining
Melting, molding

Silk of silk, silk of skin

Our clothes are us; another skin, another layer.

Hair	Nests
Filaments	Webbs, Nets
Fibers	Lines
Threads	Branches

Giving away the things we make.

Sharing what we create.

Making something for a reason, a purpose, a necessity.

Helping each other; asking for help.

Trusting each other, trusting our feelings once again.

Inside
Interior
Hidden
Necessary, Vital
Touching

We feel the objects and people we care for.

We touch our friends.

We must consciously touch, rather than wait or talk.

Sensation affects us more than words, even after all this time.

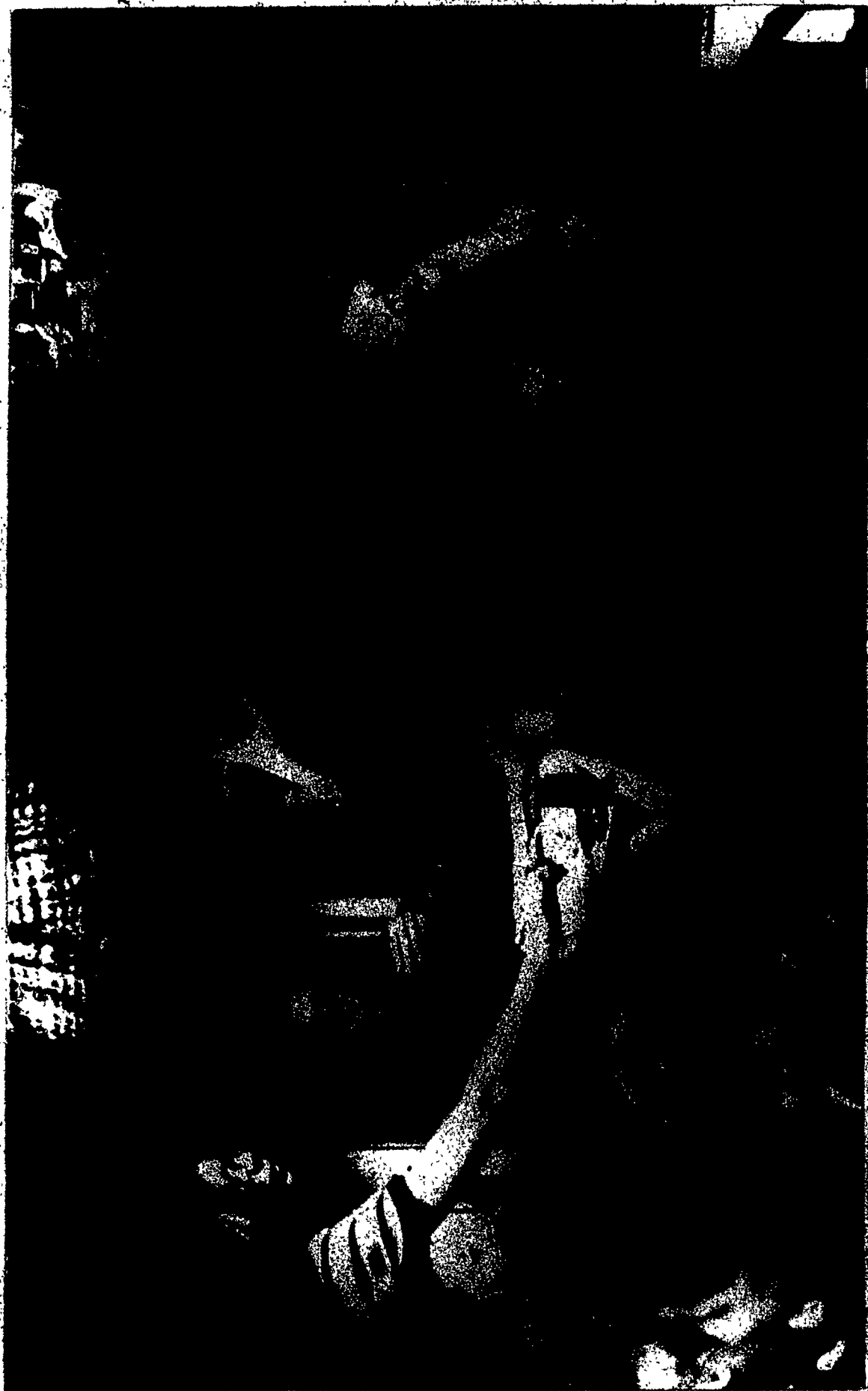
"Our modern, twentieth-century attitude is the result of this shift in emphasis from the values symbolized by the moon to those represented by the sun. It has resulted in a conviction that intellect is the greatest spiritual power and that everything could be ordered rightly if only people would use their intelligence. The majority of people even believe that the difficulties of our present-day world could be solved simply by the right application of economic laws, or by some other rational system, and that people can be made good by some educational technique. We hold, in fact, that God is intelligence and that he is incarnate in man's rational intellect."¹

Art comes from the experiences of people. In its most meaningful form art education must approach and deal with the creative problems which arise out of people's most vital needs and experiences. While the schools serve certain purposes for education they certainly cannot be said to supply the best, or only, means of encouraging creative growth. In forming the Flaming Apron we were creating an alternate educational structure. We were attempting to relate in a new way to women who create; we wanted to deal with the questions of education, or growth, in a structure which differed from traditional educational institutions. We were attempting to meet a specific need of women to grow from that need.

¹Harding, Woman's Mysteries, p. 35.

PLATE V. Working with Woman -
a meeting at the store

PLATE VI. Living together:
Firing pottery





STORE: Shopping, bartering, exchange, meeting, examining, considering, evaluating, trading, money.

A woman is responsible for the needs of her family, both in a real sense and a symbolic sense. She must search for the things she needs, and since she is familiar with stores, she might go to a store to satisfy her personal growth needs more readily than she would go to an educational institution. Because she is used to "shopping" she is familiar with the choices and decisions inherent in the process of selecting the things she requires. This method of "shopping" can carry over into her selection of those activities which affect her creativity and self-fulfillment. She is in control of her situation and is able to participate in those activities she chooses, for as long and to the depth she chooses. The Flaming Apron, as a store, could allow her this freedom to enter and leave situations at her choice.

Craftswomen, as well as the women who buy, are aware of the idea of necessity. Most women, while they are in control of the family's money, are filled with the responsibility of managing this money wisely. The Flaming Apron contained essential items, functional items. A woman feels she can make or buy functional items. As well as exchanging money women take advantage of the custom of

bartering and trading to get what they need. Women are familiar with co-operation, with exchanging a service, a technique, a handmade object, some knowledge, for what they want. A store is the obvious place for this bartering and exchanging of needs.

The store, in the historical sense, has traditionally been a meeting place. The most important concerns of the day were discussed and often resolved in an atmosphere of exchange and evaluation. The Flaming Apron provided a similar experience for women. It was more than a store; the vital concerns of women were often discussed and dealt with. Women met each other, talked, made friends, helped each other with common problems, formed groups, and in significant ways, changed their lives.

"When a woman artist positively identifies herself to us through her work, she commits a courageous and daring act of self exposure, because her contribution has neither spoken to nor been understood by the mainstream of the culture, and the content of her art has been bypassed by interpretations which could not reveal it. Thus a woman's saying, 'I am, I know myself, and I feel a fundamental optimism - a grasp upon my own survival as a model for human survival', is saying something which challenges the prevailing world view. If consciousness is the content of feminist art, this level of human responsibility and hope is the content of consciousness."¹

¹ Arlene Raven, from a brochure for Feminist Studio Workshop, Picoima, California, 1973.

I make a drawing of them....

And it looks like me.

I touch them.....

And I touch myself.

Then I get so frightened
when I think they don't
understand me.....

Themselves.

But slowly, slowly we come together.

Sometime Near the End of the Year

We are learning to trust each other, to know that we share so much, to see ourselves when we look at other women. We are easily frightened away from relationships with women, but we are learning to give each other the strength we need. We are learning that our fear of being alone can lead us to women. We know that we can depend on ourselves and each other for security and freedom.

As art educators we have three choices regarding the use of our abilities as creators and facilitators of creativity. We can work within existing educational structures, attempting to utilize the institution to reach and meet people who want to develop their creative and academic abilities. We can also go into existing educational structures with the idea of changing the actual structure so that it can deal with people and subject matter more effectively, or more humanely, or more realistically, or less oppressively, or less repressively, and on and on. We also have the choice of moving away from existing institutions to create new structures with a significant meaning for art education. We learned, through the Flaming Apron, that the choice to create an alternate structure was a real and viable choice. We learned that a meaningful and useful structure can be created with little or no economic resources, with a small group of people to organize it, and with no guarantee in advance that people would actually use it.

"We hate to see our work die. We tend to identify ourselves with our creations and feel that anything which threatens that strikes subtly at our being.

It is difficult to realize that the importance of a work is not comprised in the value of the finished product but in the psychological development which was achieved as gradually there came into being a real, an actual, entity, which formerly had no existence, and whose conception, whose birth, arose out of the hidden depths of the psyche....

Our works may die, while we live on, changed by the fact of having created.

Alternative structures have been known to end within a relatively short period of time. If we are familiar with institutions which continue for years we may be a bit nervous or frightened when we decide that the best choice is to close a project soon, in the traditional sense, after its creation. Questions arise regarding our responsibility to the people we worked with, and the ideas with which we began. We must be certain that we are aware of our responsibilities and that we are still committed to the ideas which led to the creation of the project. Any structure that has not had a substantial amount of time to develop certainly cannot have worked out completely the concepts of art education. However, the number of hours logged as an institution is hardly a qualitative judgment of that institution's success with

¹Harding, Woman's Mysteries, p. 251-251.

the people who use it. The commitment to the structure of an institution is not as important as the commitment to the ideas behind that structure. Certain accomplishments can be made in a short-term project. As an alternative structure, the Flaming Apron was able to accomplish some things which are difficult, if not impossible, to do in a traditional educational structure.

The Flaming Apron was able to do a lot within a relatively short period of time, since the store was available to women in a more complete sense than a school could be. The store spoke to many needs of women; it was not education in the same sense that a university or school is education. When a woman begins to be aware of herself as a creative, necessary person, things can move quite quickly in her life. When she becomes involved with other women in a consciousness-raising group her whole life begins to change very fast, perhaps more rapidly than if she were taking a class in a narrow, specific subject. Her subject is very broad and she is an expert on the subject, herself. She can grow quite rapidly and the objects she makes reflect these changes.

The Flaming Apron was not doing traditional art education, and our structure was quite different as a result. We are dealing with a far-reaching concept of

feminism - that of becoming aware of ourselves as women, and through that awareness, making objects which speak to others of our situation and experiences. The store did not offer formal classes or instruction in techniques of art production. These matters would come up, but mainly the store was there to generate a response, to allow the craftswomen to take control of their own learning situation and not be dependent upon others to do everything for them. The groups which formed and then removed themselves from the Flaming Apron can attest to this. The store was a first step in the theory that women can change as a result of the ideas behind a structure, grow through association with that structure, and then grow away from it. Consciousness-raising groups began, became independent of the store, and continue to function after the store closed. A women artists' group began at the store, became a separate group with its own interests and then formed their own project, a women's gallery. A women social workers group formed through the Flaming Apron and continues to meet a year later.

If a person or group were going to do a creative act they would not be likely to want to maintain an already functioning institution, unless the possibility for complete change were available. When we decided that we wanted to

leave the store we realized that it would probably develop in a very different direction, but we also felt that we had to keep in mind our responsibility to the craftswomen and our commitment to the idea of a non-competitive, egalitarian structure. We called a meeting. We wrote letters to over 200 women telling them the situation and asking them to come to a meeting to decide the fate of the store. We received many calls from women saying they felt very sad that the store was in trouble but that they could not take on the hours of work and the responsibility which would be necessary to keep the store functioning. At the meeting it was clear that the store would have to close; however, we decided to speak to the craftswomen personally and refer them to other services, such as the women who wanted to make a commercial store, the women's centre, the women's gallery and individual women who were working in feminist programs. Because a similar store has existed before and because the Flaming Apron has existed successfully, we are certain that when women need to make a store for their own creative reasons, the idea of the Flaming Apron will appear again. We began the Flaming Apron with the idea that if we made an object which women needed they would find us and use that object, the store. We still feel this way and we are searching for a new and meaningful

creative act. So, we are back close to the beginning, having learned much from the experience of making a women's craft store. We must go back into ourselves and prepare to go into society, into the world, one more time.

CONCLUSION

What is the idea of the Flaming Apron which does not end with the store's closing? The most important idea is that women can see themselves in the objects they make. If a woman makes an object, then stands back and looks at it she will grow in her understanding of the world. If she then attempts to describe what she sees she will have clarified her ideas about herself and her experiences and therefore will be ready to move along, to create another object, to go through the creative process again. Her self-education begins to unfold. As women, if we can understand this process, this externalizing of our inner selves, then perhaps we will be able to facilitate this growth in others. There is a need for art educators who can identify with, and be involved with, this process of creativity.

In this paper I have attempted to deal with the idea of seeing ourselves in the objects we make in each of the chapters. I described the process as it happened to me personally. I had a dream, a manifestation of uncon-

scious; I made this dream into an object in the form of a shirt; and then I described the object and its meaning. This personal part of the idea of the Flaming Apron focused upon the individual in relation to the collectivity, or the individual and her use of the symbols of the collectivity.

The second chapter, with its journal and statements from craftswomen, again dealt with the idea of objectifying ourselves in our creations. The journal, like the shirt, brought the unconscious to consciousness, thereby helping to clarify the process of making a store. The women's statements show us that these women are not passive in their involvement with the Flaming Apron and were able to face themselves in the objects they displayed. This aspect of the idea of the Flaming Apron found its form in the group, or collective, making of an object, a store.

The third part of the paper again looks into the idea of objectifying and learning from those objects, and in this chapter a group of women may be seen to be living this experience. We helped each other to learn about ourselves, and in the experience of living and working with a group of women we experienced collectively the process of externalizing our inner selves.

The store has been a step, a first step, in the

ongoing struggle to find an alternative to the oppressive rationalism of our society. We feel that we do have a responsibility to the women who used the store to find other ways in which we can continue to work on the ideas generated by the Flaming Apron. This may take the form of another store, a co-operative, a school, a theatre, or any of hundreds of possibilities. The most important thing, however, is the knowledge that it can be done, that women are ready and anxious to face themselves in their relationships, in their concepts of themselves, and in the objects they create. The meaning of the Flaming Apron is that we can see ourselves and grow as a result of the objects we make, and it also means that we can make objects with life and soul as a result of seeing ourselves and growing. These are concepts which hold a significance for art education. These ideas are of the utmost importance for any art educational structure, whatever its size or the length of its duration, and are quite as important as the perpetuation of any institution.

I am the dwelling place of a woman. I call women to see themselves in me, and I ask them to come to me. When I look at the object which I have made and called a shirt, I see a container for a person, for me, for my self.

If a woman can see herself in me, then my object can be
her dwelling place.

I am the house of a woman.

I am the house of a sister.

APPENDIX

Included in this section are copies of newsletters given and sent to the women who used the services of the Flaming Apron.

THE FLAMING APRON
5108 Sherbrooke Street West
TELEPHONE: 481-7133

November 4, 1972.

"A MAN DOTH WORK FROM SUN TO SUN
BUT A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE"

And not just housework, either, but all the labour of sewing, knitting, crocheting, weaving which over the centuries women have developed into art while men, working in other media, developed into "artists."

Womens' work -- not just shit work, but the unpaid labour of hand and mind which transforms bare necessity into beauty and which has been traditionally the most available creative outlet for women denied access and training in the more formal arts.

The Flaming Apron exists to show and see this woman's work -- conceived and run by women who believe there exists a special value in work done by women because it is done by women. We seek to bring together the work of women who are highly conscious and developed artists with that of women working in a traditional way quietly at home. Because we are a non-profit enterprise we can afford not to demand commercial standards of polish and quick saleability from the work we show. We can afford to encourage women to solve their technical and aesthetic problems in their own particular ways.

But because we are a non-profit store, we need your help as women. We charge only 10% commission to help defray the cost of our overhead, but it is unlikely that our expenses will be completely covered by this. We have no foundation or government support; we are not rich ourselves. If the Flaming Apron can exist and continue to provide a source of income to women who might otherwise have no income of their own, it must depend on your help and support. You can help us in the following ways:

- 1) By donating money in the form of monthly pledges;
- 2) By bringing your work for sale;
- 3) By shopping often at the store; and
- 4) By volunteering to work with the store.

Unlike most small and hopeful boutiques, the Flaming Apron does not exist to serve the commercial dreams of its partners. From the very beginning we have imagined it as a modest but definite step toward the further liberation of women. We would like to become a centre for discussion and for change. We have already begun a number of consciousness-raising groups and hope to start more. We are planning a series of courses in which women can exchange their craft skills. We remain particularly interested in helping women organize any activity which suits their particular needs. Only through your resources and energy can we become what we hope to be. Please help us.

THE FLAMING APRON COMPANY
5108 Sherbrooke St. West
Montreal, PQ 481-7133

January 11, 1973.

Dear Sister:

The Flaming Apron Company wants to thank you for standing with us for the first two months of our endeavour. Your support, in whatever way you chose to show it, was what gave us the courage to begin. As we look forward to 1973 we feel a new sort of confidence in ourselves as women, and in our ability to make feminism work.

In the month of December 85 craftswomen sold their work at The Flaming Apron. We have started three consciousness-raising groups and a fourth is being formed soon. Women artists will soon be meeting once a week to discuss the role of the woman artist. Women in social work are holding a meeting January 18 at The Flaming Apron. Women who can teach a craft are organizing with women who want to learn. In addition, in the month of December we sold \$1,350 worth of merchandise.

Since health and nutrition is important to most women, the shop is considering carrying certain health foods for women who may need this service.

With the coming of the new year we are looking forward to more struggles, some hard work and a lot of love and affection from our sisters.

The Flaming Apron Co.
5108 Sherbrooke Street., Tel. 481-7133

March, 1973.

Dear Sisters;

This is the second report from the Flaming Apron. Since we last wrote to you, we have been continuing and expanding on the activities described in the last letter.

Since the store opened, we have organized between eighty and one hundred women into consciousness-raising groups, including one group on the Lakeshore. We continue to begin groups on the average of one a week. Other sorts of women's groups have also come out of the store--we held the first meeting of the Talent Exchange last week, in which women who sell their work through the store met with women who wanted to learn a particular craft in order to exchange skills and arrange lessons. A Women's Artists Group has been meeting regularly as has a group interested in Women and Social Work. Members of the store have also helped begin a Gay Women's consciousness-raising group. The store showed a series of video-tapes made by women on such subjects as abortion and rape. We have been meeting with a group of women who are trying to start a women's centre to give what help we can out of our experience toward getting so clearly necessary a project started.

As for the actual operation of the store itself, we continue to receive an increasing variety of work from an increasing number of women, to the degree that it occasionally threatens to overwhelm us. More than one woman has called to confess that she has been saving our phone number for weeks or even months, trying to get up the courage to bring her work in for sale, and when she finally arrives, the quality of her work is frequently extraordinary. In order to provide exhibition space for the many women artists who have nowhere to show their work, we have established an "Artist of the Week" policy, encouraging women to take over some of our wall space to show their picture. A number of women have begun to interest themselves in participating actively in the running of the store, something which we hoped from the beginning would occur, and we are running a regular series of open store meetings, usually on Friday nights, to encourage

-2-

more of this kind of participation.

But the financial side of all this is less rosy. Our policy of taking only a 10% commission dooms us, as we anticipated, to running usually in the red, deficits which are made up personally by the founding members of the store. When we thought about finances at the beginning, we were willing to underwrite the operation of the store for a period of time, in the hope that it would become of enough value to other women that they would want to accept part of the financial burden. To a degree this has happened, but not to the extent that we can be confident that the store can remain open indefinitely. A look at the financial statement for the month of February will give you some idea of the difficulties we face.

We are unwilling to raise our commission to the point where the store would become self-supporting because we feel that much of the money raised in that way would come out of the pockets of the women who sell through us, rather than from our customers. Furthermore, if the store is truly to become what we imagined it to be--a women's place in the fullest sense--it must have the support of concerned and caring women. If the store does in fact serve a need for the women of this community, we are certain that this support will be forthcoming. We are turning to you and to the women you know for help. If you can make a regular pledge in any amount, please do. Perhaps your consciousness-raising group can make a monthly group pledge. If you have any other ideas for ways to raise money for the store, please share them with us. We need you.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT- FEBRUARY

Income	Total Sales	\$449.26
	Sales Tax collected	\$ 35.07
	Don. & pledges	\$ 76.44
		<u>\$560.77</u>
OUTGO	Rent	\$125.00
	Phone	\$ 19.37
	Hydro	\$ 4.50
	Owe craftswomen	\$404.37
	Sales tax owed	<u>\$ 35.07</u>
		<u>\$588.28</u>

DEFICIT: \$27.51

THE FLAMING APRON
5108 SHERBROOKE STREET WEST
MONTREAL

September 1973.

Dear Sisters,

As you perhaps know, the Flaming Apron suffered a major disaster during the summer. In August the mains backed up, flooding the store and causing considerable damage to the stock. We were forced to close and have not been able as yet to re-open. This event has put us in a very serious financial bind. We owe water tax, rent, telephone bills and cleaning bills, and we have had no income from the store since the middle of August. We are suing the City of Montreal for damages, but may not collect, or may not collect for a long time.

Since the store closed, we have received a number of phone calls asking us when we will open it again. We can't answer that question. The fate of the Flaming Apron can no longer depend on the original women who started it, but must rest with the women of Montreal who use it. The store happened because several women were willing to live on unemployment insurance to devote their energies to it, while others donated substantial amounts from their salaries to support it. This method of financing is no longer possible for us. Another way must be found, involving many more women.

A lot of the women who have called have said, "But you can't close the store." We can. We have to. We can't keep it open. Only you can do that. If you would miss the Flaming Apron, if you have come to depend on it in some way, if you believe that it fills a need and should continue, please come to a meeting at 8:00 PM., WEDNESDAY, October 10, at 361 Clarke Avenue, Westmount, to discuss ways and means. If you can't come, or if you regret the store's passing without being in a position to help save it, please send us what money you can to pay our bills. We need it badly.

NB to Craftswomen: As soon as the fate of the store is decided we will be calling you about the disposition of your work.

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