



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Canadian Theses Service**

**Service des thèses canadiennes**

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

## **NOTICE**

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## **AVIS**

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Media Orientations of Four Women Artists:  
Questions and Implications for Teaching Art

Judith E. Buzzell

A thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education and Art Therapy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 1989

© Judith E. Buzzell, 1989.



National Library  
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service    Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-51385-3

## ABSTRACT

### Media Orientations of Four Women Artists: Questions and Implications for Teaching Art

Judith E. Buzzell

This study was motivated by a desire to understand two concerns: the relationship between women artists' professed ideologies and their use of media, and the relationship between their feminine practice and the context in which they work.

In preliminary studies, I explored key concepts and ideologies concerning women, media, and education to prepare myself for the central project of the thesis.

The study is based on interviews conducted with four women artists. Focal questions for the interviews pertained to each artist's media orientation. Each artist discussed her work, her art-making processes, her development, and her relationship to her audience. These are set forth in Chapters II through V.

Having formed a coherent picture of each of the four artists, I proceeded to look for patterns in their use of media and in written responses to their work. These are described in Chapter VI. I concluded by contextualizing their work and highlighting questions and implications for teaching art.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my family and friends for their encouragement and enduring support. I am particularly grateful to my son for his patience and technical assistance, in the early phases of the project.

My advisors, Dr. Elizabeth Sacca and Professor Stanley Horner, co-advisors, combined excellent guidance with dependability at many strategic and difficult stages of the thesis. I wish to express my gratitude for their help and insight. The learning gained through my association with these teachers has reached beyond the confines of the thesis problem.

To each of the artists who participated in the interview, and contributed follow-up information, I extend my appreciation and thanks.

I am obliged to Kathy Adams who, at all times, was reliable and cooperative in typing the various manuscripts.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Fine Paper Division of Domtar and their contribution of the quality paper on which the thesis was printed. I extend thanks to those directly involved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
List of Illustrations	vii
I INTRODUCTION	1
Two converging concerns	1
The research begins	6
II INTERVIEW 1 -- MARY PRATT	10
Introduction	11
An incident with a new material	15
Media specialization -- accuracy and permanence	17
A traditional medium and art education	19
The role of photography	22
Life-associated values	26
Endnotes	28
III INTERVIEW 2 - CORRINE CORRY	29
Introduction	30
"Thinking in a medium"	33
Media control	35
Medium as content	39
Other themes and values in The Palace of the Queen	40
Audience and response to her work	42
Endnotes	46
IV INTERVIEW 3 - MARION WAGSCHAL	47
Introduction	48
The medium is the vehicle	49
Selecting a particular medium	50
The pleasure of materials	53
Painting - history and tradition	54
V INTERVIEW 4 - JOYCE WIELAND	59
Introduction	60
Knowing her art - it's "in the pictures"	64
Media diversity and change	66
In relation to critics and the system	69
Reaction to theory	71
Women's concerns	74
Endnotes	76

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
VI SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS	77
Introduction	78
Four women artists' orientation to media	79
Response to the work	93
VII CONCLUSION	114
Adjusting to the process	114
Orientations	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124
Selected readings forming preliminary background research	124
References -- Books, articles and reviews	125
References -- Exhibition catalogues	126
APPENDIX	128
Re-entering studio study	128

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>Illustration</u>	<u>Page</u>
Barbie In The Dress She Made Herself - Mary Pratt	10
The Palace Of The Queen - Corrine Corry	29
Cyclorama - Marion Wagschal	47
The Artist On Fire - Joyce Wieland	59
Illustrations of other works by the artists in the study	77

### Note:

I have not attempted to include reproductions of the artists' work as a substitute for the original. For this reason I have deliberately decided to use a black and white reproduction as opposed to colour. In accord with the artists' points of view, my thinking is that the primary source of information is their work. The reproduction serves as a memory of the original which I experienced, and is intended only to provide a referent and accordingly to entice the reader to seek out the original.

I have selected images which I feel provide some insight into each artist's sense of self.



**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Two converging concerns

The central questions and interests of this thesis fell into place well before the formalized process of writing it. I was a high school teacher in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Montreal following my undergraduate training art at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick. Under very different circumstances, I resumed my role as a high school teacher in 1980. I struggled with many changes. I faced student groups unlike the ones I had worked with twenty years earlier. As a long-term substitute I was called upon to teach in a number of urban schools composed of students from diverse backgrounds and cultures. It was a situation calling out for new beginnings.

I surmised that television and rock music and the popular culture that these forms conveyed was what made the "world go round" for this generation. At any rate, it appeared to be a common bond for these young students, whatever their backgrounds. When I watched them pour out their energy dancing in the corridors, I wanted to see some of this carry over into the art room. Unfortunately, when I tried to capture the same kind of enthusiasm and involvement by, for example, showing them the paintings of Degas or Kandinski and

talking about movement, the active lines and shapes I saw in the works -- eyes glazed over. I was dissatisfied with the outcome. I was looking for ideas to invigorate my teaching-- to make it more central to the students' real concerns and interests.

I recognized that in the wider art world shifts were occurring. New technologies had become embedded in the arts. The students I observed had expertise in handling the mechanics of the audio and video forms they played with which far surpassed my own. In fact, I felt a sense of alienation and fear concerning these machines.

Simultaneous with these teaching experiences, when I went to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, I was beginning to see works which baffled me. I remember particularly the installations from the O Kanada exhibit, and the retrospective exhibit by Michael Snow. I could barely relate to any of this work. I had not thought I was an uninformed art viewer, but I was evidently a stranger to much of the contemporary dialogue. Some of the questions which concerned me related to media. Artists were using diversified media, and diversified methods. I remember asking myself, why is there no apparent heed to finish or the practice of craftsmanship in most of the objects I saw?

On the other hand, I noticed other developments that I was enthusiastic about. Certain forms, such as needlework, which I and my mother, and generations of women before her had worked in, were being discovered, even promoted, as art. I was pleased, but not altogether convinced about what made the work "art", or not art.

In one of the schools in which I worked, the teacher I was replacing "keyed me" in to her group. She told me that her students, mainly Greek, had a high degree of skill with needle, thread and fabric. She capitalized on these skills creating studio activities which used these tools and materials. I observed them constructing and costuming rockstar puppets. The boys in the group of grade ten and eleven students, were not at all embarrassed to use this media and, furthermore, controlled these materials with ease and dexterity. Even though I had given my own two sons and their friends these kinds of materials to use for their kitchen-table projects as youngsters, it would have been with some trepidation that I would have chosen them for a high school group. The gender connotations that they carried made that possibility seem a bit too risky for me at the time. In this situation, however, I continued my predecessor's practice with pleasure. I found it a positive exchange and a rewarding experience for all of us.

In 1983, I began graduate studies. I found myself in contact with other women, both young and mature students, who had shared life experiences similar to my own. The work of women artists was exhibited. I was exhilarated with what I identified as a higher profile of women in the arts in the university milieu. I was very impressed with their ideas. The same sources of anger and frustration that I had felt were being voiced. For the purpose of updating my knowledge concerning contemporary art I attended a series of art history lectures. I discovered that there was a focus on women's art. This course as well as other lectures and seminars which I followed, put me in touch with feminist literature. Here cool heads prevailed, defining issues, making analysis, pointing out patterns, and planning strategies in scholarly ways.

Through this reading I discovered many intricate ways in which art and teaching connects to everyday life -- studies about the way art becomes valued, and how values can be transmitted. Among other things it erased my lingering illusions that 'good' art and 'good' teaching were above the fray of politics, as I then defined the word. I began to recognize how fundamentally inseparable were my daily decisions and operations as an artist and teacher were to the prevailing ideologies of the society and culture I was enveloped in. In short, I became more conscious.

I thought a lot about the issues discussed in the feminist literature in relation to my own education, background and role as a teacher. It was true that I too had seen no women's art among the pages of my art history textbooks, and few works in the great museums of the world. The awesome thought was, however, that I had, along the way, accepted these omissions quite passively -- benignly. At this stage of planning for my thesis, I knew it was important to take into account women's work and ideas.

Running parallel to my encounter with feminist ideas, I was challenged in my studio courses. Many of the same questions and concerns I had encountered in previous situations were raised there. These revolved around media. My instructor introduced herself as a "multi-media artist", which included "performance art" she said. These were a mystery to me!

I have included a short description of one of my first studio classes as an appendix. It may serve to illustrate the position I was in at the time -- my expectations, the dilemma and confusion I felt, and the questions the situation raised for me as a student, teacher and artist.

The two main interests which I had borne along with me for the past five years or more, began to converge.

### The research begins

As these two interests centered, I began to focus my research on the links between them, seeking to identify broad issues. I studied the changing role of media in this century and the relationship of these changes to women and women's art. I reviewed articles by 20th century artists, critics and historians, as well as teaching texts to ascertain the authors' ideas concerning artists' choices of media, and what they said about the relationship of media to social issues. In feminist literature there was one particular issue that concerned me and that kept surfacing. This concerned the hierarchical classification of art media and methods. In a chapter entitled Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts (1981, pp. 50-81), Rozika Parker and Grizelda Pollack demonstrated how this practice has been discriminatory to women and their work. This was a topic I wanted to trace through the thesis. However, even though issues emerged out of feminist literature, I began to realize they were questions in their own right -- larger than gender.

I have included at the beginning of the bibliography selected readings which formed my background thinking before I began my principal project.

In order to explore these questions more deeply I wanted to talk directly with women artists. I had several artists in mind to approach. My choice would be based on what I knew of their media orientations, and what I had heard of their ideas regarding topics relevant to my inquiry.

Almost a year before I finalized interview arrangements with the artists, I conducted a pilot interview with Corrine Corry. Originally this interview was done for the purpose of exploring interview techniques and to assist in planning a questioning strategy. However, the contents of this conversation yielded relevant material that helped me to focus my thesis orientations. When Corrine agreed later to be one of the participants, I decided to include information from both the pilot interview, and the one conducted (along with the others) a year later, in the thesis.

At various points in the process I was finding the concept of 'ideology' to be an illusive one. I was beginning to identify various ideologies as they applied to the collective ideas of a group. I was still unsure of how ideology manifested itself in an individual. This was important to define for my study project where I wanted to help each artist to express the ideology that underlies her practice. The following by Mary Poovey (1983, Heilbrun C., and Higonnet M., Eds., p.178) served as a working definition.

Ideology is a dynamic system of values and priorities, conscious and unconscious, by which men and women organize their actions and expectations, and explain their choices.

The four interviewees who agreed to participate were Mary Pratt, Corrine Corry, Marion Wagschal, and Joyce Wieland. My conversations with these women took place within a period of four months (November 1987 to February 1988). For two of the interviews I travelled to Toronto and the remaining two took place in Montreal at Concordia University.

It was fortunate that each artist in the group under study had a solo exhibit of her work within the time frame of my thesis. I attended all of them. Along with a study of their work, I researched each artist's background. For the most part I found this information in books, articles, exhibition catalogues, and reviews of their work.

In preparation for each interview I designed questions appropriate to the artist I would meet. I attempted to keep the questions and dialogue 'open ended' in order to obtain comprehensive and descriptive stories about their experiences. I focused on their choices of media, and how they made decisions about selections in their work both present and past. As a related line of inquiry I attempted to introduce gender questions and issues into the discussion.



Following the interviews, and over the period of several months, I worked with the material (the interviews and background research) attempting to understand each artist's perceptions, attitudes and responses to the questions involved in my inquiry. In the process, I edited, juxtaposed sequences and drew out particular themes which I began to identify with each woman. I also left intact large parts of the transcribed interviews in order not to jeopardize the overall sense of each artist's story. Finally, I organized each original taped interview into an essay-type format presenting a profile of each artist and her orientation to the broadly-based questions of my inquiry. These interview-essays are arranged in the order in which they were conducted. They form the core of the thesis.

MARY PRATT



Barbie In The Dress She Made Herself  
1986, Oil on masonite, 90.8 x 60 .3 cm.

CHAPTER II  
INTERVIEW I -- MARY PRATT

Introduction

Mary Pratt and I attended Mount Allison University in the 1950s. Though one year apart, we both studied and trained in the four-year Fine Arts Program. Also, as neighbours for two years in Allison Hall Women's Residence, we became friends through shared activities. Mary, whose maiden name was Mary West, was from the city of Fredricton, New Brunswick, while I was from Montreal.

Mary married Christopher Pratt, who was also studying at Mount Allison. Before my graduation in 1958, they left the university.<sup>1</sup> Our paths separated at that time and it was through other alumni, as well as the growing notoriety of Chris, Mary's artist-husband, that I learned a little about their life in rural Newfoundland and their family of four children.

In the mid 1970's I discovered that Mary Pratt was painting seriously again and in 1975 I travelled to Ottawa to see the exhibition called Some Canadian Women Artists in which Mary was participating. I was exceedingly interested in this show and looked forward particularly to seeing Mary's work.

Following the event I wrote to Mary to congratulate her, and also to convey how meaningful it was to me that she was working at her art again. We have continued since then, from time to time, to correspond with one another. It was with great pleasure that I anticipated our meeting again in order to conduct an interview for my thesis.

In view of our friendship, and because the name Pratt can be associated with Mary's husband Christopher, I have chosen to use the first name (Mary), or first and last name together (Mary Pratt) in the interview description.

At the time of the Some Canadian Women Artists show, Mary Pratt said of her work, "The work that I do is involved with the superficial. I paint objects that are symbolic of nothing except a very mundane life -- I simply copy the coating because I like the look of it" (Catalogue statement, 1975, p.55).

Some of the titles of her paintings at this period were Salmon On Saran, Red Current Jelly, Baked Apples On Tin Foil, Eggs In An Egg Crate, Eviscerated Chickens, and Fredricton. For most of these works Mary worked with oil paint on a wood panel or masonite. She had several shows at Aggregation Gallery in Toronto between 1976 and 1981. In 1981, a

fourteen-year survey of Mary Pratt's work was organized by The London Regional Art Gallery and circulated to nine other galleries and museums across Canada. There were forty-seven works in this show. The majority were paintings in oil on board or panel.

For the catalogue for this exhibit, Joan Murray wrote an essay called The Skin of Things. In it she compared Mary Pratt's work to certain American photo-realists, but added that Mary Pratt perceives a realm of objects uniquely her own. "They are visual icons of her own life", said Murray.

In our recent interview, Mary herself referred to the 'icon' quality of her work during that period. At the time she had also begun a series of nudes. Those included in the survey were Girl In A Wicker Chair (1978) and Nude On A Kitchen Chair (1979).

In 1985, a book entitled Across the Table -- An Indulgent Look at Food in Canada, was published. The author was Cynthia Wine, and for this project Mary did a great many watercolour paintings on the subject of food. Once again I wrote to Mary conveying my pleasure in seeing the book, and the fact that these were the first illustrations I had seen of her work in the medium of watercolour.

In her reply to my letter, Mary said that her life had changed, and since she was not in the kitchen as much, she seldom saw or looked at food anymore. She felt that that period was over. However she commented that she had found food and its preparation, was very compelling as a subject matter, "so lovely to consider, full of symbols, and so much of our religious life revolves around these edibles," she wrote.<sup>2</sup> In the same letter Mary spoke of her new orientations. "Situations, the tough interactions of people, and the places they inhabit, strike me as fascinating, more appealing and important subjects now." She described her preparation for the show on 'weddings' to be held at Equinox Gallery in Vancouver in 1986. The title of this show was Aspects of a Ceremony. Both of Mary's daughters were married in 1984. This was her first thematic show.

Mary Pratt's latest show opened at the Mira Godard Gallery (Toronto) on Friday evening, November 13, 1987. I was able to attend the opening and view her work. There were about fifteen works shown and the majority were paintings. Some were very large and almost all of them were produced in 1987. It struck me that this was a staggering amount of work for one year, considering her methods. The show did not follow a single theme. There was a variety of subject matter including several female nudes, portraits, still-life paintings of fish, fruit and flowers, one interior study, and

a painting of a large stone church entitled Fredricton.

I met Mary at 9:00 on the following Monday morning at her hotel room for the interview. In response to my first questions, in which I outlined what I thought to be Mary Pratt's preferred media, she confirmed that oil painting was her primary medium. She worked in watercolour and drawing materials as well, but rarely engaged in print making, she said. I was aware that photography played an important role in the process of her work, and was looking forward to a discussion concerning this medium.

Then I asked Mary to choose a work from the current show and to talk about the medium she used. I invited her to expand on her choice by describing situations and decisions she could recall regarding that particular medium.

#### An incident with a new material

Mary chose to talk about the large painting in the show entitled This Is Donna (73" x 42" oil on canvas). The choice of this work was based on the fact that it was painted on canvas. She related that she had rarely painted on canvas "since I left Mount Allison, so I feel this painting is different", she explained.

Mary discussed the Donna piece saying that she did not anticipate having difficulties with the canvas and was dismayed with the problem she encountered. She exclaimed:

It was just ordinary old oil paint that I was using! When I started to work on the thing I found that every line I made took. I couldn't rub it out. I put the image on with viridian green I think, and I got it crooked on the canvas, I didn't get it plumb.

I interrupted here to inquire -- "You were working the way you have done in the past -- that is, working with a photo-slide?" She replied:

Yes, I project it, the image, on the canvas and I sort of draw a map, but I didn't have it plumb. My eye doesn't see a vertical line. I see horizontal lines, but I have an astigmatism that tricks me every time, unless I use a plumb-bob. I thought everything was fine and right, but my dear, I found I had it crooked! I had to turn it upside down eventually and put the image on again, because I couldn't get that image off. No matter how much turps and scrubbin' and rubbin' I did, that viridian stuck, and the lines were there, and that was it. So I turned the canvas upside down and started again, and this time I got it on right, but of course I was confused by the afterimage of the first drawing. This was a bit of a drag because I figured this was going to be a major painting and I didn't want this confusion, but I had it.

Fortunately, the face was not in an area where there was an afterimage. In the first painting you could see lines, except in the face. When I do a face in a painting I make sure nobody's home, that I'm not expecting company, and I just pray! I mean, oh god, doing a face to me is very, very, hard because absolutely every little thing is important -- the stroke that you might put on a lip -- and that particular model had six surfaces to her mouth. Her lips were so defined that she had the top lip, the straight part, and the underpart and then, in the lower lip, she had the inside part of the lip, the front part, and underpart, so that there were six surfaces to get right.

Her eyes, as well, were deep-set and hard to find and usually one eye is not there at all -- it is in such deep shadow. That's always very tricky because you have got to have the expression in an area where there is nothing, and so the way you put the paint on, and the tiny, tiny



detail you might find in that eye, has to be exactly right and it's (sigh), you know, it's really hard-- nerve wracking.

I always do that at the beginning. I establish the eyes first, and then I get on with it. Once I know the eyes are looking at me, and looking around the room, and doing all the things they are supposed to do, then I figure that I'm safe. But you know, to do the whole body and then to find you couldn't do the eyes right would be ridiculous! It's almost as if the person then is alive. I feel a responsibility to that person once the eyes are looking at me.

So anyway, I did that, and then I got the whole painting underpainted, and I gave myself as much information as I thought I needed with that underpainting. With that painting I was very particular, because I wanted it to be a major image. I felt it ought to be, and there was no point in doing it if it wasn't going to be, so I spent a lot of time trying to get that right.<sup>3</sup>

Mary's frustration was evident, and as she told her story, I became aware of the importance of the role of the materials she uses in achieving the correct image.

#### Media specialization -- accuracy and permanence

Rightness, properness, correctness, and control were words frequently used by Mary in our conversation that morning. For instance, our conversation had begun with my inquiring about a back problem she appeared to have. She responded by saying that she connected her difficulties with many years of using muscles she was not supposed to use, while painting. "The problem is," she said, "that paint brush just has to be in the right place. You have to have complete control over the brush."

In a review in Vanguard Magazine on Mary's show entitled Aspects of a Ceremony, one critic wrote, "Technique is a priority for Mary Pratt who chooses to work in a realistic style" (Fee, 1987 p.38).

The discipline and skill involved in rendering her subjects accurately appeared very important, even dangerous, to Mary in her description of the Donna painting. Other insights concerning these values and her meticulous ideals and methods emerged as well. An example was her frequent comments, reiterating the quality she demands in materials. "All the paints I use are Winsor and Newton oil. I never use anything else." A little later when we talked about watercolour painting she said:

I mean my idea of 'true' colour is Winsor and Newton. I find with other brands that the paint is muddy -- colours mediocre. Generally speaking, I like good-old clear, innocent, Winsor and Newton.

My brushes are Winsor and Newton series #7 sable. For the big canvases I use hog's hair, but when it comes down to detail I use sable. Those brushes are horrendously expensive. You pay two or three thousand dollars for a few cards of brushes. One #7 series -- the round water colour type that I use -- costs something like \$75.00. But, I've always found the quality of Winsor and Newton brushes to be much higher than anything else. I sound like a salesman, but there is absolutely no point in skimping on your materials. The problem is, sometimes you get a bit mean and you worry about it. If I find myself worrying about spending money, I know that I'm not going to do a good job. You can't worry, you have to feel absolutely free to use as much as you need.

It became apparent that the quality and dependability of materials which Mary had come to know well, along with

techniques with which she was completely familiar, were absolutely essential in the realization of an accurate image.

I felt that Mary's description of her watercolour painting process was another illustration of this. She said:

I pull down the blinds, turn on the machine and I work directly on the paper. I don't draw or anything, I've got the projector running, and I know my paint colours so well that I don't really have to see them, I don't have a light on my paint -- I'm almost working in the dark.

Mary had mentioned her colour selection at another point when she said, "I mean I have a palette, and I have never, never varied from it. I always use the same palette."

To an inquiry I made earlier in the interview concerning the "staying-power" of her materials, Mary said that it was important to her that her oil paintings "age properly and mature well". She told of painting everything three times. "There is an initial underpainting, then another, and another. The final has a lot more oil in it and finishes things up", she explained.

#### A traditional medium and art education

I asked Mary when she began working seriously in the medium of oil paint. "Mount Allison," she replied, "and I never figured that I wanted to change."

In the introduction to this essay, I mentioned that I had undertaken the Fine Arts Program at Mount Allison at roughly the same time as Mary. Generally speaking, as we followed the same course of study, worked on similar projects, and learned the same methods, I was aware of the rigorous technical training that was involved, as well as the overall classical quality of the program. The procedures and techniques that Mary described were the ones I recognized from my own studies there. There was a strong emphasis in the curriculum on observation, and drawing from nature.

Alex Colville was one of the three men we had as teachers in the Fine Arts Department at Mount Allison. Since that time his work has attained international recognition. For this reason, the work of Mary Pratt, as well as other artists from this Maritime school, is often compared to that of Alex Colville.

I feel it is appropriate to describe another feature of Mount Allison art studies at that time, for it relates to a question which I posed to Mary.

There were two distinct programs offered. The first was a Fine Arts program, which included in the course of study, painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking, and design. Art history and other academic subjects were required, and four

years of study lead to a B.F.A. The second program offered was called Applied Arts. This program required three years of study to achieve a diploma. The diploma course included drawing and design, pottery, weaving, needlework, jewelry-making (ie. required skills in fine metal work), art history and some academic subjects. Both programs were housed in the same building -- the Fine Arts studios located upstairs, and the Applied Arts workshops in the basement. Inherent in the distinctions between these two programs was the notion of a hierarchy that could be associated, among other things, with media.

Since the women artists' movement in the early 1970s, sociologists, artists, and feminists have written on the issue of media hierarchy. These studies often associate gender with media, the male dominated fine arts having more status than those used in the female dominated crafts.

I inquired, by way of a confusing double-barreled question about Mary's feeling, or attitude concerning gender connotations which have been associated with the tradition of oil painting. I also asked whether she had ever considered using so-called "women's media".<sup>4</sup>

Mary appeared to ignore the first part of my question. Responding to the second, she asked, "Do you mean quilting,

video, etc.?" She then went on to consider these ideas and explained:

I think about them, of course, and I don't disregard them, because I can't disregard anything, but for me, the two-dimensional restriction is important, and you've got to have some restriction. I have thought about working in film. I have done some animated film, but it's really come to nothing, partly because of the mess Telefilm Canada is in at the moment. I have some stuff that's been accepted by them, but I think probably lost in the labyrinth of their 'who/ha'. As in my lithograph drawings I would collaborate with somebody else. I would contribute the ideas and images. I think film is a wonderful medium, but I still think that for me, the contemplative thing that a two-dimensional painting offers is more important.

#### The role of photography

I was fascinated to hear Mary talk about her explorations into the medium of photography, its affect on her vision of reality, and the variety of purposes it has served in her art production. Her story on the topic of photography began, I discovered, when she was a child, when she was already experimenting. She recalled attempting to do a portrait drawing of a county judge, at the request of her father. Working from a coloured negative she found she had difficulties. "At that time, I had thought the photograph gave you everything." Mary said:

From a very, very early age I was used to looking at photography, and comparing it always to reality, and to the painted image, or the drawn image. I knew from the age of nine, I suppose, that a photograph really had nothing at all to do with realism because it was a bunch of shapes produced by light and dark, and the perspective

seemed to be not quite what I expected it to be. Of course, it's not the perspective you see with two eyes. It's a different kind of thing. It is not the same information as reality.

In an interview with Robert Fulford, co-host of T.V. Ontario Realities program, Mary said that she did not date her professional career until she began using photography in her work, "The committment came then", she said (Realities, TV Ontario, November, 1987).

I read several articles where Mary indicated that the painting Supper Table (1969), was a pivotal work in this regard. It was the first painting in which she made use of a coloured slide. In our interview, this is how she described her process --a procedure which she continues to use:

At first, I thought I would just put the slide in the light-box and work from the slide as if it was a real image. And then I thought, don't be so foolish, it would be so much easier if you would place these things -- the top of the ketchup bottle and the side of the spoon, so that at least when you started you would have a kind of accurate placement of objects. That's how I started to use the slide -- to look in the light-box, and to somehow place the objects with a projector.

Following the explanation of the way she uses a projector, a light-box, and a coloured slide as tools to transfer some aspects of the reality she desires to the painting, Mary went on to tell an amusing story about one of her paintings:

When I began to work with images where some things were out of focus and some in focus, I began to find that the slide was giving me 'abstracty' shapes that were truly

interesting, and really beautiful. They had very little to do with what you would see if you looked with your own eyes, but more to do with what the camera would see with one eye focusing on one particular thing. But then, in the background would be all these wonderful amorphous shapes. In a painting called June Geranium (1976, 16" x 24" oil on panel) I began to use these amorphous shapes, not self-consciously thinking that they weren't as good as the perfect image, but simply as indications of what was going on in the background. What was going on in the background was a river, and a stretch of flowers, and trees in the distance.

My father said, "You're going to have to paint those daisies again because no one is going to know what they are." And I said: Well, you did! And he looked a bit peculiar, and I said, I think there's enough information. I think that people know enough about them. It's the geraniums that I want in focus.

When you look at something, the rest of the world is out of focus. You've got to shift your eyes to focus. So anyway, the background was out of focus and, to me, it was better because it was more, in fact, what you do see. Not only that, it allowed the background to be somehow magic. Looking back at Stieglitz and all those old photographers, you will find a real interest in sky and water and amorphous imagery.

Mary spoke in a detailed, animated fashion concerning qualities and features of the paintings of Munch, and even Bougereau, in which she believed photography informed their work.

Joan Murray wrote, "Pratt's paintings recall good photographs, objects are in the centre, in focus, boundaries separate them from the background, and images have weight and seem tangible because of Pratt's attention to surface" (Catalogue, 1981, p.1).

I asked Mary if she could discuss other qualities derived



from the coloured slide which she integrates into her paintings at the present time. She told me the following:

In a lot of work I did early in my career, and still, but certainly then, the light was very centered, like those tin-foil things. Those early paintings I thought of as 'icons'. I tried to make them look almost as if you could use them for prayer or contemplation. They seem to glow and the reason they do, is the light comes from the back, and hits the center of the painting. Just looking casually at a coloured slide in a light-box one would think the light even, general illumination, but, if you're being picky, as you are when you work with it, you find that the light really is in the center, and the outside is rather dark. It's an odd thing, because the light on the object when you photograph it, is from one side or another. When you're painting the thing, the light is coming from the back, and it sets up a glow or sparkle. I used to be very careful to retain that, but not now. I don't have that preoccupation so much. I'm working now on painting that requires an overall design, and figure work, and not thought of as an icon -- the painting of the girl in the water, for instance.

The painting mentioned by Mary is entitled Venus From A Northern Pond (1987, 25" x 32" oil on masonite). It was shown at the exhibition at the Mira Godard Gallery (Fall, 1987). In our discussion this piece appeared to be representative of a new approach she was taking.

The subject, as described by Mary, "is of a woman disappearing into the water." It was the first work in which she contemplated the subject for a couple of years, and then set it up. She told me in some detail of her arrangements-- her search for the right woman to model for her -- the construction of a platform that she was able to stand on in the pond, and she said laughing: "I even had to learn to

row."

Following this description, she said:

You see, it was a much different kind of painting. In this case, I was using the camera to establish something -- to save something that I had set up for myself and that I eventually would look at again and try to be objective about. But, it's an entirely different way of working, and the thing looks different, and it has a different quality about it, and that quality is not as it used to be. It's because I'm trying the intellect over the gut. As a younger painter I always felt you had to have this gut reaction to everything -- that that was what should inform me. My gut reaction and senses had to be tuned almost to the breaking point, so that every day when I ran into my world I would be able to be like a harp, so strung-up that what I saw, could play on those strings, and inform me what I should paint.<sup>5</sup>

I think now, having done that for 20 years, I should be able to use what I've learned, use my intellect and my imagination and so on, to go at the world in a rather different way. But, I don't really trust it -- I'm not really sure of it yet.

#### Life-associated values

At the conclusion of the interview, I asked Mary to talk about her views on life-associated values of her work as distinct from formal and sensuous values. I had derived these categories from an encyclopedia article on aesthetics, that I had read prior to the interview. I failed to convey the definitions of the terms adequately, and more importantly the relationship to a medium as discussed in the article. I elaborated a meaning for life-associated values in this way: I had with me a reproduction of a painting done by Mary, which

had been published in the Fall 1987 issue of Canadian Art. The painting was called Child With Two Adults (1983) and underneath the reproduction was Mary's comments about the work. They began, "This is Katherine, my first grandchild."

"It occurred to me," I said, "that the emphasis in both the painting, and in your accompanying remarks, concern life-associated values. The dialogue is not 'art about art', or formal values." Mary took up the discussion in this way:

I believe that, for myself, design, and colours etc. have to be intuitive. The kind of values that I bring to painting to me are the values of real life, my own sense of order and excitement, and what is right. When I look at real life I hope it restrains me, and acts as my guide for design and colour and all those things.

I've never bothered with what people said about paintings from a formal point of view, and I also don't need some idiot person that thinks they know all about design and colour, but nothing else, to inform me.

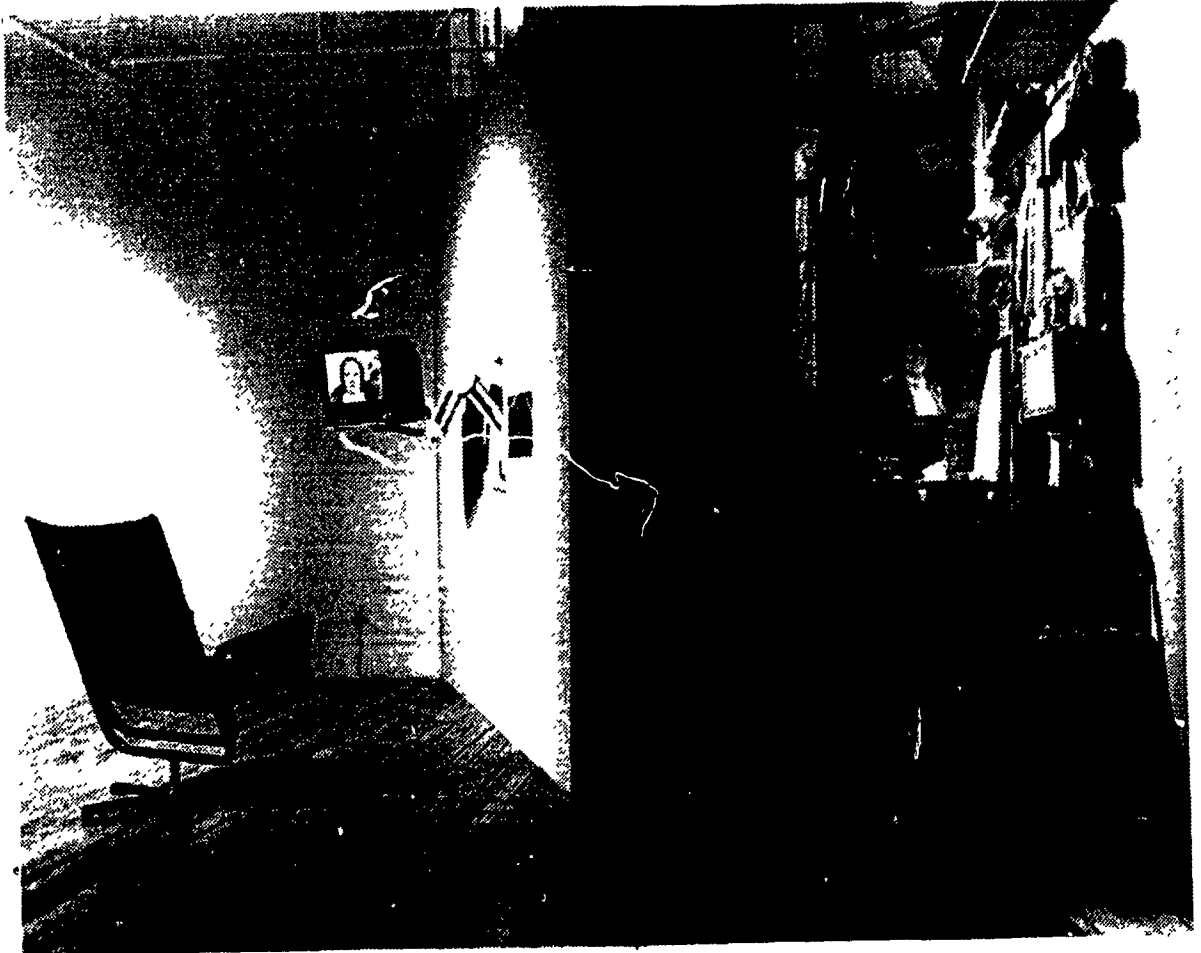
Mary went on to say that she reads a great deal of philosophy, and good literature. Alice Munro and Agatha Christie are favourites among many authors she cited, and she said:

I also like to talk and correspond with people whose ideas I respect, and about things that concern me -- perhaps about relations woman to woman. But, I don't try to bring those ideas to my work, not in a direct sense. I assume they inform me, improve my filter, my sieve.

## REFERENCE NOTES

1. Mary Pratt returned to Mount Allison, graduating in 1961.
2. It is interesting that ten years previous she had stated that her work was symbolic of nothing but a "mundane life" (Catalogue statement, 1975, p.55).
3. Mary added, "I'm not always wise when it comes to these things. Sometimes I'm very slap-dash about an underpainting and think phoey, I'll get it right the next time. I'm just going to fill in -- I'm too tired now."
4. I believe that female gender association can be made by a viewer in terms of her subject matter (often domestic) more than the oil medium in which she specializes.
5. Another portrayal of Mary Pratt's earlier approach is contained in this quote from a conversation with Sandra Gwyn in 1976. "I look at the cod fillets spread out on tin foil and I think that's gorgeous, that's absolutely beautiful, and I take a photograph right away and then I work from the slide" (Gwyn, 1975, p.40).

CORRINE CORRY



The Palace Of The Queen  
1987, Installation documentation: the video setting, the closet  
area, and the bookwork in the pocket of the chair.  
Powerhouse Gallery, Montreal.

## CHAPTER III

### INTERVIEW 2 -- CORRINE CORRY

#### Introduction

Corrine Corry is a "multi-media" artist with experience working in the media of film, video, photography, installation, and performance. She has exhibited her work across Canada since the late 1970s.

Since 1983, she has been an instructor at Concordia University teaching studio groups at the graduate and undergraduate levels, and in continuing education. She has team-taught a women's studio course in the visual and performing arts at Concordia. Her teaching activities have also included special workshops on particular aspects of her wide-ranging media experience -- for example, workshops on TV production and performance art.

Corrine was the instructor for the Graduate Studio/Seminar in the Department of Art Education between 1983 and 1985. I participated in this group for the two successive Fall-Winter sessions under her leadership. I have already described in the thesis introduction and in Appendix 1, the initial disorientation I felt in this course. Corrine acquainted me with the work of a number of contemporary artists working in less traditional media and styles. She

introduced me to new approaches and technologies, and helped me to focus and relate elements in my own art to these orientations.

I feel that it was important for me to have had a woman instructor for this course. I found I could relate to her teaching and anecdotes from her experience in different and valuable ways, either that I had not hitherto been open to, or had not been conveyed by the male teachers I had had from high school onwards. Also significant was the fact that our studio group during the first year was comprised of women students only. Ideas were raised and shared in that class on such questions as -- Is there a woman's art? At that time, I began to assimilate questions concerning the relationship of art to ideology and politics. Corrine and I became friends during the two year period in which she was my instructor for the studio course. We have maintained that friendship and I continue to regard her as a model and mentor in certain respects. We are also colleagues and teachers in the Art Education Department. I have chosen to address Corrine by her first name throughout the description of our conversation.

In 1987, Corrine agreed to allow me to interview her in a pilot study preceding my thesis proposal. She was also one of the four artists I later selected to interview for my thesis. The second interview, held in January, 1988, centered on her

recent show entitled The Palace of the Queen (1987).

In the pilot interview, the questioning strategy, which I was to later follow for the thesis, was not fully in place. The approach that I took for the discussion was to inquire about ideas concerning her choice of media during her development as an artist. At my suggestion, she followed a loosely chronological sequence, beginning with her post high-school art training, to the present. She talked about the various media in which she had worked and those for which she had developed a preference. Corrine also described, at various points in the discussion, her life and situation in relation to an art community on the West Coast of Canada.

At the end of the pilot interview, Corrine concluded, "I think artists think in a medium, and I think it's like a language. What I've really been doing is finding out what my language is." She also remarked that she felt her work in the last few years had reached a maturity. She regarded much of the work she had discussed in our first meeting as representing a "pre-formed or pubescent stage". She also described the work as "idiosyncratic" during this period, but "very necessary for me to do, in order to define my own limits," she added.



### "Thinking in a medium"

I found it interesting that Corrine began the pilot interview and ended the second interview, by recalling the Roxy, an antique and old clothing store, which she opened in Vancouver (circa 1972). She was working with film at the time she explained, but felt she needed an economic support that working as a full-time artist could not provide. She said:

I think that shop was the beginning of my art work. I was responding to a need for costume and a use of performance. Though I never would have said it then, I think it was the beginning of my present media.

Following her secondary school education, Corrine's first media studies were mainly in film and animation at the Vancouver School of Art. Concerning the medium of film, Corrine commented that she felt more affinity towards the 'moving' image than the 'static image' -- "The transition that happens in a motion, the fact that I can move something and there is that flow of information, this is really important in my work." It appeared that the element of motion fascinated Corrine early in her career and continued to be an area of major interest and influence in her media selections.

In 1974, after her art school training, Corrine was sponsored by the National Film Board to do a super-eight film workshop in the Northwest Territories. The project evolved into much more use of video and lasted for three years.

Corrine was a producer and worked for NFB/CBC Nunatsiakmiut, Frobisher Bay, N.W.T. from 1974-1977. She said she eventually felt limited in the situation and in our conversation said:

When I came out of there I wanted to reintegrate into my own culture and reintegrate into my own art work. At the time, my immediate response to doing my own art work, with a capital 'A', was to paint.

Corrine described getting a cabin away from everything and with the earnings from her job in the North, she painted for a year. She said that, at the time, painting for her was the equivalent of what art was. "Kind of a naive understanding of art," she added.

Corrine subsequently said that she has found that she has great difficulty with painting as an art form. "I take a long time to understand, or think I understand, what's involved with painting. I have found that two-dimensional still form is not a means of thinking for me."

After a year of solitude producing her own art, Corrine said she felt the need to have someone responding to her work. This was instrumental in her decision to apply to the B.F.A. program at U.B.C. She was accepted as a senior and placed in the third year. She described the event where recognition took place of her orientation to performance art. Corrine told of packing her paintings (small watercolours) for her entrance portfolio presentation. Along with these paintings

she told of including the objects she had painted, as well, in her portfolio, "That manner of presentation pushed me into more direct use of objects in the work I think. Six months later," she continued:

I had to do another presentation for critique. I packed up my objects again into a suitcase and brought them over to the building where everyone was present and I sat there with everyone presenting and having critiques. My name was called and I went over to a table that was in the area and unpacked the work. As I was doing this, I realized I didn't want to tell anyone about this work. I just wanted to unpack and leave it there. So carefully I unpacked, put it on the table, and then sat down beside the table. As I had done that, a kind of -- the room was noisy and crowded, but as I unpacked, a quiet came over the crowd, and they came around the table. I had done a performance without even realizing that I was doing one! In fact, one of the teachers was astute enough to say, "You've done a performance".

A lot of women, then and now, respond to unpacking, taking care, putting it away, taking it out and looking at it. It's something we women do in our lives. I think I was responding to that known activity, and I realized then that performance was the element I wanted to work with.

Corrine went on to say that folding up clothes became an activity she wanted to incorporate and she began taking things in her everyday life that she understood well, and using them as an art form.

### Media control

For a short time at U.B.C., and later at Simon Fraser where she worked with Bruce Baker, Corrine found the freedom to explore this new art form. She had returned to University as a mature student and her attitude as she described it was:

I didn't really care about getting ahead. I didn't necessarily want to be a famous artist. I was there to define myself and my limits, so I could do things like pack up my linen in front of everybody and not care if they liked it or not.

I think it was a political thing to do, though I did not realize it then and I did not, for example, bring household objects to the gallery as a political action. Ideas concerning this art form were in the air at the time coming up the West Coast to Vancouver. We had people like Yvonne Rainer visiting and talking about this form.

Responding to a question concerning the influence of the women artists' movement, Corrine replied that her first contact was as an undergraduate when she realized that there was a movement going on. She did not, however, become actively involved. Documentation and information concerning women's art reached her, she said, especially from California. Corrine described how she was struck by the similarity to her own work of the imagery these women were producing. She said:

I found it reassuring that others were in the same circumstances that I was in. I also read From the Center. In fact, I couldn't put the book down; it was so good to hear someone talking about it. But, I was also very interested in the work. I remember Adrian Piper-- I read her chapter over and over. Boy! she's doing something interesting and exciting, I thought. It relates to me; it's talking about my experience. Yeah, it was great! (Lippard, 1967, p.167)

Corrine told me that later, when attending graduate school at Concordia University, she took the stance 'the personal is the political'. "I felt that saying personal things out loud was a political act," she said.

In our conversations, Corrine's point of view concerning control of the medium emerged on several occasions. During the period she worked for National Film Board, Corrine recognized her desire to make her own decisions regarding the medium. She said:

My work was being defined from outside. I was working with National Film Board's idea of what good film or television is. My work was heavily influenced by their aesthetics and requirements. I was taught their aesthetic -- how a good edit is made, what shot to go to and from, and implicitly making something that could be aired on T.V. and was suitable for a mass audience. The medium talks about specific things as soon as it does that.

Following this experience Corrine said that for some time she resisted using video. "I wanted to stay away from that medium" she said, "because I had all these preconceived notions of what the medium was supposed to do". Nevertheless, she did return to working in video, realizing she said, "It was a vocabulary I knew how to use."

Early in the 1980's, she recounted:

I finally pushed myself free of that N.F.B. influence. I spent a lot of time working alone in a room with a video camera -- for days, months, just myself, a camera, and a monitor in a room. I got to know my tool.

At the time of the pilot interview, Corrine's show entitled, The Palace of the Queen (1987), was about to open in Toronto. While she did not elaborate on the work then, she did say, "The piece I'm doing now is about the kinds of information a medium can carry." She also said:

I think it is a political kind of a statement to say-- Look this is what we can talk about when we use this medium. I think it is a very political act to understand what we can in media. If, for example, we understand how the form, through which the news is delivered, shapes the information, then we have a way of critiquing the news.

Corrine spoke about another occurrence of the problem concerning the kinds of information contained, or embedded, in a medium. She said:

I received a photograph from my sister after my mother died, and I thought it was a photograph of myself. It took a little while to realize that it wasn't a photograph of me, but of my mother. That instance made me aware that this medium that we call photography, that we believe in so completely as telling us the truth, as being evidence of something, had lied to me. It had completely convinced me in a lie!

Corrine incorporated this problem as a central issue in The Palace of the Queen piece, where she explored the limitations of a particular medium, or the kinds of information some media could not carry.

A year later following her exhibit at Powerhouse Gallery, she said in our second interview:

In The Palace of the Queen I was concerned about our need to represent ourselves, but I was also concerned about what that representation then dictates to us. I was concerned that we still have the authority to say, yes I like it, no I don't like it, yes, it's true, no, it's not true -- to control that representation.

## Medium as content

As previously described, a family photograph, which caused Corrine some confusion, was the impetus for her study and comparison of various photographic processes in relation to portrait images of herself and her mother. Corrine explained:

That untruth in a medium that we believe is true, taking the representation to be the truth automatically, brought into question all those family photographs that we have. In The Palace of the Queen, I wanted to question the medium and I wanted to pose the question to a wider audience than just myself.

In addition to the photographic medium, Corrine confronted video and super-eight film, and their technologies, in The Palace of the Queen installation. She scrutinized these three mediums in order to ascertain the reliability of each for representation.

In our long discussion of The Palace of the Queen, it became apparent that Corrine placed much value on this component of the piece. At my request she elaborated on certain technical processes involved with the media forms in which she was working. She also described many of the choices and decisions she made during the conception and production of the installation. I remarked that I was astonished at the depth and detail involved in her procedures concerning the work and added that, unfortunately, there were areas of content, especially pertaining to the video tape and film,

that had escaped me completely. I said that I found her explanations both fascinating and helpful in understanding the exhibit which I had seen at Powerhouse Gallery.

Responding to these remarks, Corrine said that while she had been pleased that people seeing her exhibit were enthusiastic about the piece, she had noticed that they identified and responded most often to aspects concerning the death of her mother, or the emotional content of the work. She said:

They were enchanted and involved in the installation but I became aware that the issue concerning the media was not understood. They were not recognizing the concerns that I was addressing. There were very few people who were 'getting' it.

#### Other themes and values in The Palace of the Queen

As a result of a question in which I asked Corrine to comment on life-associated values of the media selections in her piece, as distinguished from formal and sensuous values, Corrine referred to the following statement by artist, Liz Magor. Magor curated The Palace of the Queen, exhibit and wrote in the catalogue essay:

Having boxes and albums of photographs is not only a condition of being a member of a family, they represent our inexhaustible desire to represent and identify ourselves through technical and material means. The nature and consequence of this encounter is the subject of The Palace of the Queen (Catalogue essay, 1987).



Corrine went on to explain this saying:

Where Magor says, what this work is about is our desperate need to identify and represent ourselves -- I think those are 'life' values which are very specifically talked about through the formal values in the work, and that relates to the testing of truth that goes on in the work. Because everyone, artist or not, well pretty well everyone, represents themselves, and everyone has a need to represent themselves and identify themselves. That identification happens in many ways in our life, and one of the ways it happens, is through a photograph-- through those collections of photographs that we keep.

I built that closet because I think that it was a representation of my mother, or a life value that I know from my mother. It became a common denominator of sorts, for a group of people I knew -- so a representation again. On the other side of the wall, in opposition to that, I set up a more contemporary space that was intended to be representative of my age and generation.

On the topic of the many ways identification happens, Corrine said that at the same time as she received the photograph, she inherited from her mother a "great deal of stuff which I attempted to come to terms with." <sup>1</sup> And, in the communiqué for The Palace of the Queen exhibition in Montreal she wrote, "In this work I also attempt to research identity through objects, through our habitual accumulation of objects that takes place as we furnish our 'palace'."

The closet which Corrine constructed, and which she mentions above as representing her Mother, was crammed with objects. It recalled for me the pantry of the home in which I grew up. An image of Corrine's mother was projected onto a screen, which was positioned amongst the array of 'stuff'.

The contrasting larger room was bare, containing simply a high-tech design chair and video equipment. A tape deck was recessed, and the monitor held out from a wall by an arm. The monitor ran a twenty-minute videotape portrait of Corrine. The scale of the room, the green-grey walls, with a column as a distinctive architectural feature, all seemed appropriate to what Corrine described as the contemporary, technological decor that she desired.

Another part of this installation was an entrance passage leading to the two rooms just described. One wall of this space held photographs of Corrine and her mother.

A bookwork accompanying the exhibition was another form in which Corrine explored, in image and text, various kinds of representation.

#### Audience and response to her work

As told previously, Corrine commented in our pilot interview on a conversation she had read between artist Adrian Piper and author/critic Lucy Lippard (Lippard, 1981, p.167). In the piece, Piper talked about the relationship of her early performance activities (circa 1971), to art, and to traditional notions of audience. She described feelings of being "unanchored", of not feeling certain of what her frame

of reference was. She knew with certainty, only that it was necessary for her that she do it. Corrine remarked that the Piper essay had been very meaningful in terms of her own art at the time.

After the pilot interview, I selected some of Corrine's comments which I thought relevant to the topic of audience. The following are some of them:

I've kept my art very separate. It was, I feel, idiosyncratic work, and it has been necessary for me to define my own limits. I don't regret it at all, but I think it's why it's taking me a long time to be recognized.

At another point she said:

I don't think I want to have a large audience, in fact. This show in Toronto scares me a bit, because it will open my audience a lot. I have questions about whether I should be doing it.

In our second interview I asked Corrine if she would talk more about her feelings and views on this subject, now that The Palace of the Queen had been presented. I preceded the question by reading the above comments to her.

Corrine obliged by responding that yes, the issue of an expanded audience is an ongoing problem to her, and that having exhibitions in galleries, and getting reviews, does broaden the audience. She said:

The Palace of the Queen has allowed me to meet people that I would not have met otherwise and allowed a dialogue to grow between the work and that audience. I

think that's how work grows, you know, through a dialogue and, for that reason, I'm looking forward to the Michelle Waquant article on aspects of The Palace of the Queen in Vanguard Magazine, because I think it will help me understand my work (Waquant, 1988, p.35).

On the other hand, I'm disappointed because I find many people are responding strongly to the work, but not responding about things that I'm concerned with. So, I don't like that, and I feel it's a problem I've got to solve in some way. Actually, I've offered to do a job at Powerhouse Gallery acting as a kind of liaison between artist and audience in an attempt to broaden contact, to widen their approach, not just to my art, but anyone's art. I think it is very important to do this.

Other factors which bear on her career growth also seem to cause Corrine some anxiety. One of these is her slow rate of production, about one piece a year. She said:

I can feel comfortable about this at times, because I know it is my mode of working, and my art work. But, it does mean that many people do not know the work, and it is slow to be recognized. That is going to slow down any money I receive, and slow down my career advancement both in teaching and art production.

I think my work is good work, I think it's important work, and I think it is articulate work. I feel a discrimination against the work because -- well, there is this art world context that it is not produced inside of.

Although Corrine appeared to have ambivalent feelings regarding her work in relation to an audience, she was clear concerning the importance to her of expanding recognition and understanding of her work at least in some sectors. She did not seem to desire a mass audience, perhaps preferring to allow for some intimacy between the work, those who view it, and herself.

As our conversation drew to a close, Corrine remarked

merrily:

Maybe, in a way I'm guilty of even enjoying that smaller audience -- in fact, not wanting a larger audience. It's like my old clothing store, you know, it was nice to have a small clientele that you have direct contact with-- Come on in, and you can adapt a costume to an expression that you would like to make -- and there were two people involved, and finally there was an exchange between the patron, and whatever I would have been called!

#### REFERENCE NOTES

1. In this regard, another comment from Liz Magor's essay seems relevant to the concern Corrine was feeling. Magor said, "Objects bear an identity and to discard the material is to discard the identity."

MARION WAGSCHAL



Cyclorama

1988, Oil on canvas, 244 x 289.5 cm.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERVIEW 3 -- MARION WAGSCHAL

#### Introduction

Marion Wagschal is a Montreal artist who also teaches in the Department of Painting and Drawing at Concordia University. Her work was exhibited at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in the Spring of 1988. The show was entitled Accounts, and consisted of fifteen drawings and thirteen large-scale oil paintings.

Greta Hoffman Nemiroff, writer and educator, wrote a review for the show, in which she said:

Marion Wagschal's current exhibition is about people. By rendering onto large canvases people whose social contexts she knows and understands, the artist sheds light on the complexity of their feelings about themselves and their lives. Wagschal identifies most of her subjects as "people like us".

As well as the character of her subjects, and the elaborate environments they occupy in her paintings, Nemiroff discussed the themes of Wagschal's current work. She described one theme as being the family, as in the painting Woman With Family, and also Artists. Sexual relationships are another theme, as in Summer Breeze, Possibilities, and Silent Night. "The theme of aloneness intrigues the artist as well as human relationships" said Nemiroff. She wrote:



The artist too is ultimately alone, and in her painting Cyclorama Marion portrays her struggle to find her own voice as a person and an artist through multifold disguises, persona, periods of life and possibilities accepted or rejected.

No one is completely free: history, social expectations and fantasy bedevil our search for voice. Nonetheless, like the artist astride her stallion, one can break out, nude-new-hopeful, and ride forth in compassion and curiosity to invent the world.

Marion Wagschal's work has been regularly exhibited in Canada since 1965. When we met in late January 1988, she was preparing for her Accounts exhibit. I was familiar at that time with only a few of her portrait paintings.

#### The medium is the vehicle

I had in my files an image of Marion Wagschal's work which had been reproduced as the cover of an invitation card for an exhibition held in 1984. The photograph contained a portrait painting, which sat on a draped piece of furniture-- the drapes suspended from ceiling to floor. It was entitled Avocat. The piece appeared to me from the reproduction to have qualities of installation sculpture. Early in the interview I inquired from Wagschal if this were the case. She replied that no, she was intending to depict the idea that artists photograph images of their work. As it turned out, the card had conveyed a similar impression to others Wagschal told me. I followed this question by asking her if the work in the upcoming show were all wall works. She replied:

Yes, the paintings are canvas on stretchers, and they are very big.

Its odd, because in my classes I do a lot around alternative media, juxtaposing things in a different kind of spatial system. But, it doesn't really have anything to do with what I want to communicate. I'm interested in people, and it just happens I can paint. That's my vehicle for what I want to say about people.

Further on in our conversation, after Wagschal had told me in detail about each of the painting media she has worked with extensively during her career, she reinforced this view concerning her media with these comments.

I heard John Cassavetes talking and I must say I identified with him a lot. He said: "I'm not interested in the film medium. I'm interested in capturing people, and what it feels like to be alive in America -- what it's like to be a person in America."

I feel the same way, and the way I can do it, to the best of my ability at the moment is in oil paint.

### Selecting a particular medium

Concerning her choices of media, Wagschal explained:

I think one reason that you choose a certain medium is that you are familiar with it -- it's what you have in your background.

As a child, I thought of art as painting. I remember having coloured pencils, and spitting on them. I also remember the day I found a huge box of maybe one hundred water colours under somebody's bed, and really, really wanting some of my own.

I was trained as a painter and that's what I love. We tend to like what we know, there's that aspect of it I'm sure.

Marion studied art at Concordia University, where she had her first experiences using the medium of oil paint. Oil

paint on canvas is her primary medium at the present time. The following statement conveys her estimation of oil painting in her student days:

My work was very linear and detailed, and it just kept me from being able to paint. It was too greasy-- everything was smearing around. I found the material to be a big impediment. I didn't know how to handle it, and did not enjoy it.

The moment I used acrylics, it was a big breakthrough, and I could really paint. It was a wonderful discovery.

Wagschal commented that because her style at that time was working in tight realism, she had enjoyed the fast-drying quality of acrylic paint. It allowed her to work in detail, using underpainting, without having to wait for glazes to dry. She said:

I was interested in the details of life processes, as reflected in people's skin, and faces, etc. Acrylic suited the image that I wanted to get across.

Wagschal changed her medium, (circa 1976) describing the reason as follows:

I changed from acrylic to egg tempera paint, partly because of the way egg tempera referenced to early paintings in the 1500s -- to Flemish painting. I liked the paintings to have a reference to time -- to call up references to Holbein or Van Eyck, connecting to my vision of portraits.

These particular paintings were about intimacy. They were of people who I knew, and was close to. Also, I did them small, so that people would have to go up to them and look at them very closely.

I found the quality of the surface in egg tempera painting very warm -- it's sort of waxy, instead of plastic-looking, as in acrylic. I liked the way the surface reflected light. I enjoyed the marble-like quality of the gesso, and loved the white underneath which comes through --like water colour.

The egg tempera medium was very appealing to me in a sensual way. It was also just right in terms of my

working process at the time, and the image I wanted to get across, so that's why I chose it.

Wagschal described the transition from egg tempera to oil painting. She said that she began to be interested in projecting the whole body and a person's gesture -- head to toe. She enjoyed the challenge of working large, and with more complexity of composition. She said:

The one-to-one closeness really changed. I thought I'd like to retain some singularity, but also have a more monumental and universal feeling to the image.

As I started painting strongly, and the paintings started to get 'brushy' in trying to do a large area in those tiny marks, the medium of egg tempera seemed to have reached the limits of possibility in terms of my imaging, and didn't seem to be about the beauty of the medium anymore. I was starting to get a texture, implying to me 'impasto', and the kind of brushwork I could enjoy with oil paint.

Wagschal began working primarily with oils around 1985. I noticed that she had overcome the difficulties she had previously mentioned in handling the medium as she commented:

An aspect of oil paint that I like is that you can put layer upon layer, and it always looks fresh. You can do anything with it. It can look like egg tempera if you want it to. It can look thick, or you can work in glazes. It's versatile and very free.

I was also interested in the following description of her process for producing the oil paintings. These works were exhibited a month after our conversation. She explained:

I don't necessarily fill in every single area with detail anymore -- there is a sort of 'bravura' painting in it. However, I always feel there have to be parts that are tightly detailed and linear. I can be interested in painstaking detail, because my mood changes a great deal.

I don't like to do the whole painting in the same mood.

Parts of the painting are for days when I'm really 'numbed-out' and can only work like a machine. Other parts are romantic in spirit, and yet other parts of it are in between those. I like to provide a framework formally that accommodates me as a person. I have a lot of moods, and I incorporate this into the process. I like to do painting over a long time, so I like to have these different fragmented areas that I can work with over time.

I also like to be able to leave the work and go to another one. Sometimes I don't come back to it for a year because I can't solve something, and then I can work it through because I'm in a more evolved place in terms of painting.

### The pleasure of materials

Marion remarked:

Even when I'm concerned with meaning and message, I like the feeling of pleasure I get from materials. I enjoy painting just on its sensual basis, and feel meaning comes through my pleasure in it.

She had already spoken about the "sensual appeal" of the egg tempera medium, and this factor was apparent in other selections. She made these remarks following her disclosure that she often uses gold leaf in her paintings. She said:

I find gold gorgeous. I really like using it -- it adds life. It also has symbolic and spiritual meanings for me.

She also spoke about her delight in using a canvas ground when she began to work in oil paint again. She elaborated this in the following account:

I began to get intrigued with the idea that I had a cloth that's like skin, and the feeling in the canvas that it's like pores. I was involved at that time with talking

about being alive through flesh, and portraits.

One canvas that I used, and loved, but I can't find it anymore, was Indian cotton. It had all these bumps and dark dots. In one figure, I just stained the canvas and played with all the pattern in the canvas, and made it into skin --I really enjoyed that.

Though I don't play it up very much, that aspect of canvas is sometimes there.

### Painting -- history and tradition

I became aware during the interview that history and established painting traditions were topics of interest to Wagschal. This revealed itself to me in remarks she made such as the following:

I can't help being reminded of all those other paintings -- those done before. I started doing oil painting for a number of different reasons but, as in egg tempera, I was referencing. My oil paintings referenced to imaging around the nude, people, and other oil paintings and canvas.

Another insight concerning Wagschal's reflections on traditional art history emerged in this story:

At one point I used to have a very tight mark, much like embroidery. At first, I was disturbed because it was changing. In the past I did not want to have brush strokes, or anything that referred to an evolutionary analysis of art history; philosophically leading to an abandonment of realism. Linda Nochlin wrote an article about this called The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law (1973). Therefore, I consciously eliminated all the brush strokes, and I kept the entire surface detailed, rather than having overlaps or thick paint. I wanted the surface to be like a mirror -- just to break with that whole interpretation of art history. I wanted to separate out from it in a sense. I did not want it to look like 'Art with a capital A' in the way I had come to know it as a student.

When this started happening again in my painting, I was disturbed by it and I thought well, I guess I've been teaching here for a long time, and finally I've become like everyone else. However, now I think that what it might mean is that I've opened a lot as a painter and a person. I've worked pretty hard at painting, and I feel comfortable with a lot of freedom in my painting now. I can do things that I would never have been able to do before, and it gives me the scope to feel my powers, energy and skill.

At another point in the conversation Wagschal commented:

I'm very rarely attracted to say -- opening up the frame, or adding to it, or introducing something else to it. It doesn't move me at all, although I love it in other people's work. It seems to be a part of not wanting to be part of that analysis of history. It's much too close to that for me to feel comfortable, because I'm interested in being moved by people, not by formal and conceptual notions as the primary focus. I'm not really interested in 'painting', with quotation marks, for itself, in an isolated way.

Once more, toward the end of the interview, I attempted to introduce the concept of 'life-associated' values and relate this to a medium. Again, I was unable to draw clear links to the ideas involved and the specific question I had. The result was an awkward situation for both myself and my interviewee but happily, out of the mire, Wagschal found a response to the particular point I was interested in. This was the association of gender to traditions in painting. She said:

I think oil painting has mostly been a male tradition, and has been predominantly about male imaging. For me it's like entering a place of association with maleness and putting a female sensibility into that form. I believe that in my way of approaching the tradition of doing naked people, as well as the relationship of men and women, my sensibility as a feminist comes out.

I know that a lot of women have been left out of this

tradition, and that a lot of people look for alternate media in order to get out of that trap. But, I like inhabiting that area -- I don't want to leave it -- I always wanted to be there.

This is a difficult strategy and maybe I'll regret it, but I would like to be able to make my presence felt within it, in my terms. Not just enter and hope to be accepted, but to infuse it with new energy that completes the picture somehow, and bring another world into it.

I asked, "Did you resolve this issue sometime ago for yourself? Does it come up from time to time?" Wagschal responded:

Well, it doesn't come up as an 'issue' for me. It comes out because of my particular sensibility, and I don't censor it.

I like certain things about the tradition of classical painting and the grand masterpieces of the past. There are things which completely knock me out about that manner of painting. I'm really excited about how the paint is used --the scope, the grandeur of spirit, the awesome feeling in it. And, I like playing with it--that is, I like to explore those things within my experience as a woman which are not necessarily like those feelings. My conditioning as a woman might be the reverse of grand, awesome, adventurous and large. However, despite my conditioning, there is another part of me which I am able to give expression to, and which, I believe, comes out in my oils on canvas with a certain irony.

I feel that I was caught up in one aspect of the irony that Wagschal alluded to, when I entered the gallery at the Saidye Bronfman Center. Having interviewed her without much knowledge of her work at the time, my expectations were jolted to discover that this diminutive woman had produced an exhibit "in the grand manner" indeed. In terms of scale alone, I was met with many paintings I could describe as powerful and awesome -- having dimensions of 8' x 9 1/2'. I was



effectively reminded of a familiar situation -- that of standing reverently in great museums surrounded by vast wall works of the renowned "masters" in art history.

I remembered Wagschal's remark to the effect that she plans her painting process to accommodate many moods. As I began to study the pictures I noticed areas in which she had painted with bold sweeping gesture and others worked in fine and controlled marks. I also became aware of the medium of pencil in many pieces that were essentially paintings. In them, the graphite drawing lines were left exposed -- were not overpainted. In a similar way, parts of the canvas remained unlayered with paint, or merely stained with colour thereby making evident the surface, or ground.

The subject of the paintings were mainly people, in complex groupings, in pairs, or alone. Most were life-sized figure portraits. Invariably the people were accompanied by small objects in their environment -- a miniature bird cage, pottery ornaments, jewelry, a child's toy. In contrast to the imposing figures, these objects held a more personal and intimate feeling for me. They were drawn, and/or painted in careful detail and I felt encouraged to move up to the painting for a close look.

I identified several versions of a teacup. In the

interview Wagschal had mentioned that this feature occurred in several of her paintings. I remember that when she brought this subject up, the formality of the discussion was dispelled in the discovery of our mutual affinity with this object. We began to chat about the special meanings and associations a cup and saucer held for us, exchanging anecdotes and recalling pleasurable teas over a "cup-a". We talked about the dailyness, as well as the ceremonial aspects of tea drinking and found that table and tray arrangements, perhaps tea things set out on hand-worked linen, were familiar and appealing images.

These reminiscences, and others I believe, common to women's experience, enabled me to relate and respond more spontaneously to Wagschal's painting, and particularly to her various portrayals of this object. In fact, both the interview discussion, and my relationship with Wagschal's work, gained in meaning and authenticity by way of this sharing.

JOYCE WIELAND



The Artist On Fire

1983, Oil on canvas, 106.7 x 129.5 cm.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERVIEW 4 -- JOYCE WIELAND

#### Introduction

In 1985 an exhibition of Joyce Wieland's paintings from the 1960s was held at the Art Gallery of Concordia University. After seeing her work there, I felt I would like to talk to her in relation to my thesis research.

I had previously associated the work of Joyce Wieland with her lettered quilts, particularly the Reason over Passion quilt. I had also seen the Laura Secord quilt exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada. From time to time, I had seen single pieces of her work reproduced in art magazines. I knew of the exhibition entitled True Patriot Love, held at the National Gallery of Canada in 1971.<sup>1</sup>

The literature I have since read concerning Joyce Wieland, as well as feminist literature, and Canadian art history, substantiates the fact that this was an important, if controversial, exhibition in a number of ways. With this show, Joyce Wieland became the first living female artist to have a solo exhibit at the National Gallery. The True Patriot Love exhibit represented a milestone for women's art in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

In the last few years I have become better acquainted with the work of Joyce Wieland. In 1986 she was invited by the Department of Cinema and Photography as a visiting lecturer to Concordia University. I attended this event in which Wieland showed four short films, and answered questions from the audience concerning her work. I found the evening instructive and it afforded me the opportunity to see Joyce Wieland in person, and hear her point of view. I have since come to recognize the importance of her contribution to experimental cinema.

Wieland's feature-length film called The Far Shore was conceived in 1969 and premiered in 1976. From all accounts it was fraught with production difficulties and has been her last film piece.

Joyce Wieland's retrospective exhibition opened at the Art Gallery of Ontario in the Spring of 1987 and I travelled to Toronto in order to see it. I spent a large part of a splendid day at the exhibition.

The work spanned the years from 1955 to the present and included a wide variety of the media that Wieland has used-- from film to quilts; from painting to assemblage. I looked forward to seeing her recent work and was pleased that the exhibit included many of the colour pencil drawings and oil

paintings which she has been producing since the late 1970's.

The quality of diversity, which to me characterized Wieland's approach to media, I saw as consistent with the variety of concerns -- feminist, nationalist, ecological, etc., which appeared in her work. Geoffrey James wrote in MacLeans Magazine at the time, "The Toronto exhibit shows an artist who has never been afraid to change lanes" (MacLeans, 1987, p. 53).

I was able to arrange a morning interview with Joyce Wieland for February 12, 1988. An unusually fierce snowstorm hit Toronto the night before our meeting. I took a taxi in the morning in order to allow time for transit problems. I had no difficulty in reaching her Queen Street home but was fifteen minutes early for my scheduled appointment. I recognized her house readily as there was a moose carving in the tall window to the left of the front door. I rang the doorbell and Wieland answered. To my dismay, she had not expected me. I surmised that her assistant had not yet arrived to inform her of the appointment. Following an uneasy introduction, she invited me into a spacious and comfortable room where a fire was already burning in the grate. In spite of my embarrassment, I was attracted to the surroundings and became absorbed in observing the room in more detail.

Wieland appeared to have been interrupted while decorating for a Valentine party. She was in the midst of festooning the dining area with bows and streamers. At the other end of the room where we arranged ourselves for our discussion, the walls, shelves and tables contained a great many books, art works, and objects. I felt that they vividly portrayed her taste and interests, such as her enthusiasm for Canada and her concern with ecological matters.

I was prepared with a knowledge of some aspects of this artist's persona, however, I found that the encounter with her living environment, including the bows and baubles of her party decor, and the unique images and artifacts of such creatures as moose and beaver about the room, reinforced and coalesced my vision of her. The experience provided me with a striking impression before I proceeded with my questions.

We were settled into two couches facing one another in her living room when I began to introduce questions relating to my thesis topic. We had not proceeded very far when I became aware of a quality of impatience and antagonism in Wieland's responses. As a consequence I became confused and tense, and not wanting to continue in an offensive manner, I decided to abandon my planned question strategy. I felt I would adopt a chatty 'go with the flow' attitude, and prepared myself to give up the interview altogether if necessary. This

decision marked a turning point in our dialogue. Wieland, in a way, took charge -- her mood lightened, and the interview proceeded in a much happier and more productive way.

It took time following the interview event with Joyce Wieland for me to fully realize that, apart from the disruption that my early and unannounced arrival had caused, my approach and initial questions touched on issues to which Wieland is sensitive and has, in the past, taken a very strong position.

Knowing her art -- it's "in the pictures"

My first question was innocuous enough as I inquired about the medium she was working in at the present time. Wieland replied:

I've been painting for years now. Oil is my first medium really, from my days at Central Tech. It is my primary, base medium. To me, painting is oil and I really like it --very juicy, very living. At the moment I'm just showing oil painting.

Then I asked if she would talk about changes in her attitudes, feelings or values toward the medium of oil painting over time. She was interrupted by a phone call, but when she was able to continue she was clearly piqued by this question as she said:

That's a lot you know, a lot of what you're asking is in the catalogue. Really, we're talking about pictures, and



the development is still shown in the pictures.

Apart from objecting to the comprehensive nature of my question, Wieland's second comment, "shown in the pictures", developed as a significant theme in our discussion.

During the course of the interview, Wieland persisted, however subtly, and at every opportunity, to point me in the direction of her work. Picking up my copy of the catalogue from her retrospective exhibition, she thumbed through the pages continually drawing my attention to the reproductions. "That's the first Canadian subject matter collage," she said. "Which is that?", I inquired. "Laura Secord Saves Upper Canada (1961)", she replied, and continued to turn over the pages. "And all the sexuality, the wombs and things like that, the sexuality is there all the time, and the collages about love." A short while later, she persevered in this activity remarking, "There's the ecology, that's an early one, the filmic works, too." Wieland pointed to her painting entitled Artist on Fire (1983).

You see here we have a role-reversal. Usually she would be the odalisque and he would be the artist. That is Madame Pompadour and that curtain refers to her theatre. The curtains were clouds at first, as I painted it.

Wieland's insistence that I respond to the work, and that the knowledge and meanings I sought were there, appeared as an

overriding concern. The original work was the best source was her message. "Go to the National Gallery and look at the drawings. Go to the Isaac's Gallery, the slides of that work are all there," she entreated.

At 10:00 o'clock her assistant arrived. There was some dialogue between them concerning Wieland's noticeably busy agenda and then we resumed our discussion.

She responded to the aspect of my question which concerned change exclaiming, "My work is change, that's what it is, that's all it is. There is no theories of something."

I propose to elaborate the part of Wieland's statement which pertains to change at this point in the essay . However, it was noticeable that several times in our conversation, the word theory entered her vocabulary seeming to carry contentious connotations.

#### Media diversity and change

Wieland described enthusiastically her recent "French--to do with France paintings."<sup>3</sup> She indicated that a "big shift" had taken place when she undertook this group of paintings. She also said that as she withdrew from these works, she did not know where she was going. She acknowledged

that there have been many changes in her work, saying "those shifts can last a year, or I can have two or three a year, as I see it now."

While Wieland affirmed that changes are characteristic of her work, she seemed to deny that they are as abrupt as the public and many critics have perceived them. The description on the next page, of a specific period of transition which I was curious about, exemplifies her point. I will begin by explaining how it developed.

Wieland had invited me to ask her about a "shift" that was of particular interest to me. Prior to our meeting, I had read the essay by Marie Fleming, another of the three authors who contributed reviews to Wieland's retrospective catalogue. In her essay, Fleming commented, "Joyce Wieland tends to be viewed by the public disjunctively, partly because of the variety of media she has used, and partly because of the hiatuses in the pursuit of a medium" (Catalogue essay, 1987, p. 14).<sup>4</sup> With this author's comment in mind, I focused my inquiry on what I perceived to be a period in which a major media shift took place. I contrasted her feature-length film piece The Far Shore, to the small-scale, detailed drawings in colour pencil which she appeared to produce for several years following the making of the film.

Wieland proceeded to trace a ten-year period, from 1971 to 1981 in which she showed her consistent use of the medium of coloured pencil.

Colour pencil drawings were in the quilts.<sup>5</sup> Then I went to the storyboards. There were a lot of them in colour pencil for that. The National Gallery has all those drawings and you can see them there.<sup>6</sup> The colour drawings finally emerged in a synthesis, in a group of works for the show called The Bloom of Matter (1981 exhibition at Isaacs Gallery). Then the ideas of the colour drawings transformed into painting.

There are something like voices one develops, perhaps because one loves something. You love that light, and you do that, and learn about it. Five years later you may want to add on; maybe you see more about it.

Responding to her explanation, I said to Wieland, "So then you were, after all, producing colour pencil drawings in one form or another over a long period. What you have told me seems to substantiate the idea that there really is no drastic change." Wieland replied:

No, there never really is with anybody, I don't think. Sometimes there may be, because psychologically they have changed, but for most people it is coming out of the root --whatever that personal root is.<sup>7</sup>

Wieland had demonstrated that if one attends to her work in more than a cursory way, it would emerge that while change and variety is her personal style, there is actually, a disconnection in the process.

Later in the interview on the topic of two major media for which Joyce Wieland is well-known, quilts and film, she had this to say:

The quilts were done and over with in 1976, except for a couple of commissions. We're pretty tired of it. They are nice and they are very important to my life, but I don't want to make any more, it's painting now. I don't want to make any more films, either. I think I'll just stay with my painting and see what comes of that, as I did last summer --I really got somewhere.

When the discussion turned to gender-associations of media, Wieland commented, "Well, I'm glad that I worked in all those media personally. It was what I believed in, but it was not thought much of when I did it."

In relation to critics and the system

Though I realized that Wieland might hold a general dislike and distrust of critics, she spoke highly of art critic, and feminist, Lucy Lippard. Prior to her retrospective, Joyce had asked Lippard to contribute a review essay to her catalogue. "That is me," she said, referring me to the essay, written by Lippard, on Joyce Wieland's work and career.

In this same piece, I found it worth noting the following comment by Lippard:

I was struck by retrospective guilt when researching the essay. I realized that, like most garden-variety cultural imperialists, I knew little 'about' the work of this major woman artist (Catalogue essay, 1987, p.4).

At this time in her own career, Lippard names herself as

part of the ruling group, but suggests by her remark that she is aware, and concerned, regarding the difficulties Wieland and other women artists have experienced in relating to these so-called "imperialists".

Although Lippard, in recent years, has become part of the art world establishment, when Wieland and Lippard began their art careers, the ruling group was almost exclusively men. As an artist/filmmaker Joyce Wieland was at one time part of the art community of New York City. She lived and worked there in the 1960s. Wieland had this to say about the situation today:

There's still the whole thing of the patriarchy in New York. You have to go through men to get to the top power. In other words, to become an art star or something. For example, on the cover of the New York Sunday Times they had about two years ago -- seven men and two women artists. Well, the two women are well-known, but they are never going to be the stars that those guys are -- just talking about acceptance. They are very reluctant about giving women that stature in art right now, although the U.S. is full of wonderful women artists, and here too.

But, we don't want that 'kind of heaven' where you're going to go to some day if you're good. You know, a lot of us just don't want it. We're saying, that's just what you think it is. You may have a special place that you people go to, to get written into history, but I don't have to give that any power at all. I don't believe in it. The point is, we are what we are, and we have to live it out, to be what we are. I have to be me. So it's great freedom, it is the freedom.

Wieland has found herself isolated many times during her career from the mainstream art world. Her work has often been ignored and trivialized.

In a book which included the contribution of Joyce Wieland to contemporary Canadian art, the authors state that "even now, after twenty-five years of work, there's a negligible amount of critical writing on her contribution in any medium" (Burnett and Schiff, 1983, p. 97).

At another point in our conversation Wieland remarked:

Well, for years it's been the same problem. Whether it's theoretical or patriarchal bullshit about who decides what art is. Even if they're not using theory, they're using some kind of brotherhood judgement.

#### Reaction to theory

At the time of her retrospective exhibition, Wieland commented that it was not more reviews that she's after but more enthusiasm and spirit, better karma. "I don't want theory, I want someone who can write about my work and get turned on, like Diderot was by Jean Siméon Chardin" (Freedman, 1987, p.78).

Marie Fleming proposed that "Wieland's work is not 'art about art'. It is not directed at theoretical aesthetics or ontological problems" (Catalogue, 1987, p.114).

Earlier in this essay I said that the word 'theory' arose several times in my interview with Wieland and seemed to carry

a distasteful meaning for her. This was apparent as an issue in literature I read concerning her also.

One story told of an incident at a conference when Wieland was asked about the body of theory that her work in film has generated. She replied, "When film got into theory that was the end of vision. I don't know what the hell theory has to do with seeing" (Scott, 1987, p. 59).

As a partial response to Wieland's query about my thesis, I told her about my first attempts at framing interview questions, based on theoretical and feminist viewpoints which I had found in literature. I said that I discovered early in the process that this approach was somewhat offensive to the artists and also produced misleading information. Wieland responded:

The theory anyway is dying. The point is, who needs it. It's a bunch of shit. New interpretations of what women do is much more important. It's about seeing -- it's not about that, putting the word over the image. No way!

Along with Joyce Wieland's denigration of 'theory' as a useful approach, she again revealed in her remarks that direct response to 'the image' is a priority.<sup>8</sup> As I continued to explain the problems I had encountered in the interviews, I said it was awkward and difficult when I asked questions which obliged the artist to respond in a generalized or theoretical way, rather than describing their particular experience. I



remarked, "I am still a naive interviewer." "It is better to be that way. It's about feeling -- it's not about all that crap!", exclaimed Wieland.

Wieland appeared to align theory with an intellectual approach. Her concept of 'theory and intellectualism' was consistently set in opposition to 'feeling and seeing' in a direct and visceral sense. For example, questions I asked concerning the 'intention' of certain of her images, gave me some insight and clarified her position. At one point in our conversation I had inquired about her paintings that show images of wombs. "Do you intend these womb-shapes?" I asked. "In certain works they appear intended, and in others they seem to emerge." Wieland flared:

They come out of your gut because it has nothing to do with a wonderful intellectual mind. Painting is about seeing and I disagree with theoretical stuff.

Elsewhere in the interview she elaborated on the 'womb imagery'. Referring to a painting on the topic of sexuality she remarked, "It came out of just a need to make a mandala-- like a womb."<sup>9</sup>

Proceeding with my line of questioning concerning "intention" I said, "And yet you do embark upon your painting with some ideas?" In a more expansive mood Wieland described the following process:

Well, you get stimulated by images of life, like Marat and Charlotte Corday or the thought of a child murdering -- that's what that painting's about. Charlotte Corday was just a woman who lived in the north of France. She was upperclass, but she decided to lie to her father that she was going to London with friends, and she went to Paris instead. She thought the revolution was going too far, that things had to change, so she thought she should kill Marat, and she did! Maybe there have only been two paintings done of the murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday in French history, but I want to add to that, my view of what that was -- that particular tragedy. I've dealt with some very big subjects recently that I've never dealt with before. I felt, I think I can handle murder, and I think I can handle suicide and things like that. It's that time in my life when more synthesizing is going on, so I can deal with heavier subjects; like a poet wanting to deal with such and such theme and maybe they do it at a certain time after a lot of experience.

Why would I want to do that? Well, it's a very strange thing for a woman to have done in those days -- the murder of Marat."

#### Women's concerns

In a retrospective comment to Lucy Lippard, Wieland said:

I got into looking around in history for female lines of influence. I read the lives and works of many, many women; salonists, diarists, revolutionaries, etc. I started to invent myself as an artist. I saw only gradually that my husband's concerns were not mine. I had to look into the lives of women who had made independent statements in their lives. Eventually, women's concerns and my own femininity became my artist's territory (Catalogue, 1987, p.6).

Joyce Wieland's work has touched me in that she presents to me an embodied realization of what women's work can be. It was a stimulating, if "thorny" experience to meet with her views in direct discussion.

I felt the interview ended amicably. She invited me out to the kitchen to look at her garden. She was clearly thrilled with the beauty of the fresh snow as it lay on the branches of a birch tree and iron fence. Then she found me a bag to replace one with a broken handle and gave me directions back to the hotel. I left her climbing back onto the dining table to finish her party decorations. "I feel like a big bear", she exclaimed.

Lucy Lippard concluded her essay (Catalogue, 1987, p.16) by saying that the painting entitled Experiment With Life (1983) could, she felt, be appropriate as the title for Wieland's retrospective. It indicates, she said, "the artist's continuing vitality." She went on to write that, "After a sunny and stormy thirty years of art making, Wieland is still considered 'eccentric'," and it's still impossible for a feminist or socially-concerned artist to be perceived any other way.

## REFERENCE NOTES

1. This was probably because of the wide spread coverage it received in art periodicals, newspapers, and magazines. In this exhibit she "publicized women's crafts as artistic expressions at a time when North American art critics ignored such work (Rabinovitz, L., 1980, p.39). Wieland was a forerunner in presenting feminist issues in her art.
2. It is also of some significance that Wieland's 1987 retrospective exhibit is the first afforded a living Canadian woman artist by the Art Gallery of Ontario.
3. Later in our discussion Wieland said, "I don't know why I'm fascinated with French history, but I am. I don't even question it anymore, but it's very difficult to deal with. I'm interested in going to their museums and I would like to add on another view of their history."
4. In our conversation, Wieland alluded to this perception of the public herself, when she said to me, "That is my problem, I do not have a product. You see people who buy, want something that looks like past work."
5. For example -- Arctic Day Quilt, 1970-71, 160 round cushions on which are mounted circular drawings in colour pencil.
6. Between 1972 and 1975 Wieland made three series of drawings visualizing the film scene by scene. "This is an unusual method to make storyboards for a feature-length film", says Marie Fleming (Catalogue, 1987, p.91-92).
7. Lucy Lippard said about the work of Joyce Wieland, "Her expansive approach to mediums is paralleled by the breadth of her content, but at the same time Wieland has always had a centre." (Catalogue, 1987, p. 1) Lippard also said, "Wieland, who has made films and quilts and a cake and a garden, epitomizes the integration of these supposed polarities" (Catalogue, 1987, p.7).
8. Nonetheless, according to Marie Fleming, in her film work and quilts, Wieland demonstrates a special ability to marry image and word. Fleming writes, "Wieland has a feel for the quality of words, their graphic character and literary uses. She establishes a rapport between the character of her letters and the content of her message" (Catalogue, 1987, p. 75).
9. Lucy Lippard wrote that Wieland not only used female motifs but recognized them. She quoted Wieland as saying in 1965, "It's very female to put things in other things, like boxes. In a way, you could say it's female to limit things" (Catalogue, 1987,p.5).

Orientations



Film frame from The Far Shore,  
The heroine Eulalie  
by Joyce Wieland, 1976.



Two enormous cardboard boxes were filled  
with the purses she owned, perhaps every  
purse she ever owned, and each purse had  
its former contents intact.

Lenticular card announcement for  
The Palace of the Queen, installation  
by Corrine Corry, 1987.



Painting, oil on canvas,  
Man and Woman with Calico Cat  
by Marion Wagschal, 1987.



Painting, oil on gessoed panel,  
A Child with Two Adults  
by Mary Pratt, 1983.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS**

**INTRODUCTION**

I chose a two-part question to guide my analysis in the following two sections.

What are the orientations of the four women artists to media, and what is the response of their audience?

## FOUR WOMEN ARTISTS' ORIENTATION TO MEDIA

This section is based mainly on what the four artists said in their interviews. However, my analysis of their orientation to media also includes some observations I made of their work.

### Mary Pratt

Mary has specialized in oil painting for over thirty years and says that she has little inclination to change. On occasion she produces watercolours and drawings. Although she became familiar with photography as a medium in childhood, it was later in her career that she began using a camera and coloured slides to assist her in her work. At present the medium appears to me integral to both the process and the finished product.

When I asked about other media interests, Mary was enthusiastic about film but considered that, in balance with her accustomed media, she favoured "the contemplative thing that a two-dimensional painting offers". She went on to say, "You've got to have some restriction". This comment conveyed to me an attitude which leans toward specialization.

During our interview, and in other situations when I have

heard Mary discuss her work, her preoccupation with optically perceived reality has been apparent. The achievement of a correct and exact image in the physically existing world emerged as the primary motive in her work. I feel that the high degree of understanding and technical skill she has acquired regarding her media is put to the service of this goal.

I highlighted Mary's general approach to working with media, when I pointed out the frustration she exhibited in discussing her use of canvas in the painting of Donna. She said she had not used this material for years. It appeared to present an impediment in terms of diverting her goal of achieving a realistic image.

There seemed to be very little play and experiment desired by Mary during the process of painting. Also, little residue of these elements appeared to me in finished works. Mary described her working process in painting a face as particularly "nerve-wracking". Her choice of a narrow range of materials that she was thoroughly accustomed to, also suggested to me a cautious attitude directed toward presenting a final clear image.

I felt that Mary may approach drawing in a more casual, investigative way than appears to be the case in her oil



painting procedures. In a beautiful drawing entitled Study For A Bedroom (1987) which was exhibited at the Mira Godard Gallery, the lively colour-pencil drawing marks were plainly visible and the surface more open, than in her paintings. Her painted works gave little prominence to the brush mark and the ground did not intrude. They had a sealed, completely solved appearance. The drawing was, by comparison, more suggestive and experimental.

Mary had discussed her awareness of photographic perspective -- of looking and understanding reality through a camera lens. But, in the final analysis, it appeared that here also the primary function of this medium is seen by Mary as a tool in the process of portraying the realistic image.

Mary told me that the painting Venus From A Northern Pond (1987) represented a new approach. I recall looking at this work quite carefully, and was confused about the medium she had used. The title card told me it was an oil painting, but even the oiliness of the paint, which was evident in other works, was absent. The overall surface had a dull, matt quality, and was perfectly smooth and even in texture-- neither brush mark, nor ground made any disturbance. Except for the size of the work and the context it was in, I had the sense of looking at a photographic printed image -- not a painting.

I concluded that in Mary's desire to create crystal clear images, other aspects of her painting, such as the medium, are generally allowed to speak very little, or are given no voice at all.

Mary side stepped my questions directed toward associating gender with the medium of oil painting. However, I found it interesting that she named video, as well as quilting, as a possible candidate for a woman's medium.

In preparing for the interview with Mary I had read a statement concerning her feeling about being a woman artist. She made the following statement over a decade ago (Gwyn, S., 1976, p.40).

I think quite consciously as a woman painting, and I have strong feelings about the women's movement, without being a part of it. I worry that because the things I paint are woman's things, people will assume I'm trying to get ahead by using the movement. I have a lot to thank for it, but not the origin of the work, not the impetus to paint.

### Corrine Corry

The very nature of the term by which Corrine introduced herself to me -- that of a "multi-media" artist, denied, in my opinion, an orientation toward specialization. Her work has ranged through video, film, performance, installation and

photography. Over the years she has interrelated various combinations of these media. In The Palace of the Queen exhibit, she utilized all of them.

In contrast to Mary Pratt, Corrine talked about feeling a greater affinity with moving images than static ones. She also mentioned her discomfort with "painting" as an art form even though she had, at one time, adopted it as a core medium. She said she believed then that painting represented "art with a capital A". To me this statement implied that the medium of video, with which she had at the same period, considerable working experience (NFB/CBC, 1974-77), did not enjoy the same stature.

Following this hiatus with painting, Corrine returned to university. She traced out her fairly rapid evolution towards acquiring new means, such as the direct use of objects in her work, as opposed to using paint to represent objects. She described her first steps toward a performance orientation. It was interesting to me that, though these inclinations originated from her own felt need, she credited a teacher for recognizing and placing them within a framework of performance art.

She described her conviction that working more directly in ways such as using her own body language as a medium, and

incorporating actual activities framed from her daily life, were important new directions for her art. The experimental activities which she pursued at that time were essential, she felt, in order to define her position and her limits with this new medium. As a student, for a short time at least, she appeared to be in a milieu in which she could fully explore these orientations.

"Experimenting", which Corrine referred to as "testing", showed up consistently as a personal approach to media. In her descriptions of developing The Palace of the Queen exhibit, her operations reminded me of a scientist. She set up a hypothesis. In this case -- Can a photograph lie, that is, not give us the exact truth as we assume it does? Then she proceeded to uncover and present the evidence to prove it.

She also referred to her intense, experimental study methods when she described her effort to throw off the influence of working in television for the National Film Board. She told of spending months working alone with a video camera, relearning her tool in relation to her work as an artist.

When I focused on the orientation of Mary Pratt to media in comparison to Corrine, I concluded that both artists exhibited deep involvement in understanding and controlling

their chosen media, and both work carefully and meticulously with their mediation tools. It was with regard to the role of media, and the importance of media in their work, that I became most aware of two different positions being represented.

Mary exercised super control over essentially one medium in the interest of a realistically painted representation. In the finished work I was unaware of the medium. On the other hand, The Palace of the Queen confronted me with Corrine's questions, comparisons and postulations concerning media and their particular abilities or disabilities to represent. Here media was certainly manifest -- given a voice. It became apparent that media was a central issue in Corrine's work.

I think Corrine Corry's identity and experience as a woman is expressed in her work. Although I have not seen her performance pieces, we discussed them in the pilot study. She told of framing activities, such as folding linen, which she believed to be of particular significance to herself, and other women. She mentioned the importance to her of dialogue with other woman artists and their work.

A key subject in the work The Palace of the Queen was an important woman, as the title suggests. In the process of this piece Corrine explored her identity in relation to her

Mother. In the final installation one way in which she drew a comparison was to situate each woman in adjacent rooms-- domestic environments suitable to each generation.

Corrine's portrayal of the younger generation's environment struck me as exceedingly masculine in atmosphere. This reaction gave me pause for thought regarding my own background, inculturation and identity in relation to new generations of women.

#### Marion Wagschal

Wagschal defined herself as a painter. She said that she was trained as a painter and loves that art form. She spoke in glowing terms about the various painting media she has worked with, such as egg tempera, acrylic, and oil paint. When asked about using an alternative to the painting form, such as installation, she said that while as a teacher she does a lot of experimenting with different media in her classes, painting is right for her. Painting lends itself to represent her ideas about people, the aspect of her work that she regards as central.

At the present time Wagschal is working primarily with oil paint on canvas. She mentioned liking the "flexible" quality of oil paint in terms of the effects she was able to

create.

Though working in a realistic style, Wagschal did not exhibit the same disposition towards optically perceived reality as Mary Pratt. I noticed that she may paint a subject in realistic detail, but she may also use paint and brush in ways that merely suggest optical reality. She often allowed the drawing materials and the canvas to remain visible in the finished works.

Wagschal's choices of painting media seem to me to situate her in a traditional context. She talked about referring to Flemish paintings when working with the medium of egg tempera. She connected these art works to her own vision of portraits. Similarly her oil paintings of nude people were referenced to "other paintings done before" she said.

Wagschal appeared to be mainly concerned with the relationship of each medium as "suitable to her imagery". But, she also spoke about relating to her materials in "sensual ways". The "warm, waxy" effects of egg tempera paint and the "marble-like" quality of the gesso ground were appealing and pleasurable she said. From her description I felt that the sensual quality of gold leaf was a compelling influence in her decision to incorporate this particular material into her paintings.

The sensual appeal in relation to media which suggested itself in Wagschal's orientation did not show up significantly in the orientations of either Mary Pratt or Corrine Corry in my opinion. Based largely on Corrine's descriptions of working with video and film, I felt her relationship with her media emerged in terms of complete and thorough knowledge of it, rather than direct sensorial response to it. Then I realized that I do not myself experience a sensuous relationship towards working with these particular media, whereas I can readily relate it to painting. I started wondering if it was my training and understanding of painting that was influencing my view of Corrine's orientation to media.

Play with a medium appeared as both pleasurable and an important part of Wagschal's procedures. I enjoyed hearing her recollection of one raw canvas which reminded her of human skin with pores. She described playing with the patterns and bumps that she saw, and 'fleshing out' a figure by merely staining the canvas with paint.

When the conversation moved onto the topic of gender and art, Wagschal said that she recognized that oil painting has a predominantly male media tradition. She extended this concept to say that oil painting has mainly been about male imaging.



Though a concerned feminist, and aware that women artists in the past have been "left out", Wagschal was not prepared to adopt a separatist strategy when it came to her choices--such as her choice of a medium. She feels that much of that masculine tradition forms her own sensibility. She said she enjoys it and draws from it. She was confident that her female identity or sensibility would emerge in her particular way of approaching these traditions.

### Joyce Wieland

Over the years, the strongest impression I had concerning Joyce Wieland's art, was its diversity. This was reinforced when I viewed it collectively at her retrospective. When I asked her what motivated her to change her media, I was not prepared for her immediate assertion: "My work is change, that's what it is, that's all it is. There's no theories of something."

In order to get a better perspective on her curt statement I reread the complete interview with her many times. I concluded that Wieland wished to convey to me the idea that change is part of her essential being.

The directness and spontaneity with which Wieland delivered this remark was characteristic of her dialogue

throughout our conversation. I noticed some of the same qualities in her approach to handling the medium of oil paint, particularly in some of her recent work. Wieland had told me she was currently working almost exclusively in the medium of oil paint. She added, "and I really like it -- very juicy, very living". The 'gutsy' words she used indicated to me a responsive, sensuous relationship to the paint. I began to identify this orientation as a unique feature of Wieland's work in a variety of media.

A comparison of Mary Pratt's orientation to the medium of oil paint, with Joyce Wieland's, raised the question again for me about what each artist wants to say, and how they speak. I feel that in her visceral or haptic orientation to media, Wieland situates closest to Marion Wagschal. Wieland appears to want to celebrate and tell us about a sensuous relation to oil paint in many of her works. However, although Wagschal told me about her pleasure and responsiveness to painting materials, she made it clear that this was not the primary source of meaning for her.

I thought about the films of Joyce Wieland and the film and video works of Corrine Corry that I have seen. I realized that common to each was their desire to speak about the qualities inherent in their media. These qualities are made explicit -- they hang out and show up in a way that Mary Pratt

never allows in her work. For example, in an analysis of a film by Joyce Wieland, Lauren Rabinovitz (Catalogue, 1987, p.165) said:

Wieland's illusionistic fragments physically challenge their own verisimilitude, and their ability to 'explain' reality. She deliberately makes images ineffective as photographic representations of reality.

Wieland's most direct remark concerning hierarchy among the multitude of media she explored, concerned text, or written words as a medium. "Putting the word over the image - no way.", she exclaimed.

I was aware that Wieland presented an explicit feminine viewpoint that was a continuous central theme of her work. Speaking about her films, Laurin Rabinovitz (Catalogue, p.117) said:

Within the parameters of independent filmmaking practices and aesthetics, Wieland has developed a uniquely feminist vocabulary that addresses women's experiences, attitudes and ways of speaking.

I was also conscious of the fact that Wieland had actively supported, indeed taken a lead, in bringing feminist issues to public attention. During our dialogue her sympathy for women, interest in their lives and the social climate in which they lived, present and past, were obvious. One example of this was when Wieland told me of her extensive research into the history surrounding the death of one of the leaders of the French Revolution, Jean Paul Marat. The reasons for

his murder by the girl-child, Charlotte Corday, was a subject of great interest to Wieland. Her concern became the basis of an oil painting on this subject, The Murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday (1987). Art history scholars are familiar with the painting of this same subject by the official artist of the French revolutionary government, and leading artist of the neo-classical style -- painter Jacques Louis David (1748-1825).

## RESPONSE TO THE WORK

Some of my responses to the work of these four artists have been documented in the previous section. In this section I shall extend this to include:

- The artists' desired viewer response to their work
- Critical response to the artists' work: sources
- Critical response to the artists' work: content

**The artists' desired viewer response to their work**

### Joyce Wieland

Wieland indicated that several requirements were important in an ideal situation between a responder and her work. The main one was that the viewer approach the work with an open attitude. She put an emphasis on allowing the senses to respond, and stressed the importance of making first-hand contact with her original work.

By reading the interview and looking at relevant literature, I began to recognize the kind of theoretical/intellectual response patterns and situations which disturbed Wieland. The literature of feminism has shown me that theoretical/intellectual discourse and response to art has prevailed over the senses as a way of understanding.

Feminists argue that the constraining character of this kind of dialogue has served to leave out, marginalize, and underestimate whole bodies of artistic endeavour. It has also served to distance the viewer from the work of art, and silence his/her voice.

I suspect that the views of feminist author Marguerite Duras may correspond somewhat to Wieland's on this subject. In an essay entitled 'Smothered Creativity' (Duras, 1981, p.111), she made strong antitheoretical statements in relation to patriarchal traditions. She wrote:

The criterion on which men judge intelligence is still the capacity to theorize and in all the movements that one sees now, in whatever area it may be, cinema, theatre, literature, the theoretical sphere is losing influence. It has been under attack for centuries. It ought to be crushed by now, it should lose itself in a reawakening of the senses, blind itself, and be still.

Men must learn to be silent. This is probably very painful for them. To quell their theoretical voice, the exercise of theoretical interpretation.

I also read an article by feminist May Stevens. She discussed the relation between feeling and theory (Stevens, M., 1980, p.41). She made links to both art (aesthetic theory) and feminist politics (political theory). She said: "Our feeling must fit our theory. If we are not attuned to feeling, our own and others', the theory will not hold."

## Corrine Corry

On the basis of my response to The Palace of the Queen exhibit, and two other smaller installation pieces by Corrine, I saw one intention that she and Wieland have in common: they both want to create an intimate relationship between their work and their audience.

Corrine's installations seem to compel the audience to literally 'enter' the work. In The Palace of the Queen, I felt that she demanded of me, as viewer, to become directly engaged with inherent concerns in her work. For instance, while I sat in the room with the television, I could not feel comfortable or drift off complacently. Facing me on the monitor was a jumpy, contorted image of Corrine. I wondered why she portrayed herself with such a pained expression. I also wondered why nothing much else happened, a 'story' did not develop on the screen. I was slightly annoyed because I couldn't get any easy answers. When I thought about it later, I realized I had become directly involved with some of the questions about this medium that Corrine was raising.

It turned out in the interview that it was disappointing to Corrine that I and others of her audience, did not understand fully the media content of the piece. I felt I might have accessed the meaning better if I had had more in-

depth, or hands-on experience with the media involved. My prior knowledge appeared insufficient to respond to Corrine's expectations. This kind of engagement with the work by the responder seemed different from that which Wieland suggested - that the responder approach her work unencumbered, or naively.

Corrine told me she needed to receive responses to her work as it helped her to understand it better. However, she was ambivalent about trying to expand her audience from the relatively small group she now enjoys.

#### Marion Wagschal

Wagschal placed a lot of emphasis on her wish to address issues of our human condition to her audience. She felt that her realist style painting was the best way for her to achieve this. She chose each medium mainly to suit her imagery but she also talked about working with paint in a purely sensuous way. She said that while she was sure that "meanings come through this pleasure", she reiterated that she was "not really interested in "painting" with quotation marks, for itself, in an isolated way and being a part of the analysis of art history that leads to the abandonment of realism."

At a later date than our interview, Wagschal remarked to



me that she felt that "realism has been a pretty discredited form." I felt that this comment raised a basic question regarding response to her work, and that of other realist artists -- how realist-style painting has been evaluated in the past, and by whom. When, on Wagschal's recommendation, I read art historian Linda Nochlin's article The Realist Criminal and the Abstract Law (1973), I was able to contextualize Wagschal's commentary on her own orientations as a painter -- to see her position regarding the medium, and her general desires more clearly.

Nochlin discusses in her study two general, but opposing, theoretical stances concerning art, which she categorizes as realism and idealism. She maintains that realism has been inimical to many theoreticians of art from Antiquity through the Renaissance and down to the present day (p.57). Nochlin says that over the history of Western Art, realist art has had its admirers. She cites as examples, Netherlandish art of the fifteenth century and the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, the most authoritative of the critical spokesmen, from Michelangelo to Berenson, Roger Fry and Clive Bell, have negatively compared the realism of Northern Europe to the "more elevated productions of the very font of Ideal Art: Italy" (p. 59).

Nochlin argues that the values traditionally assigned to

the ideal side of the theoretical and aesthetic dichotomy were generally associated with the nobler or more elevated segments of society and their opposites to the Power echelons. She says (p. 57):

Status is generally conferred upon art insofar as it is separate from and superior to life itself. Realism, its mundane attachment to the here and now, to the specific detail, to all that is transient, shifty and shapeless, with its tendency to transubstantiate the surface and the medium into the simulacrum of life itself, has been a villain -- in the original sense of the term -- for a long time.

Nochlin places modern, abstract and formalist painting squarely in the 'idealist' tradition. She discusses the definitive article entitled Modernist Painting (1966) by influential art critic Clement Greenberg. According to Nochlin (p. 56), "Greenberg repeatedly stresses the built-in antagonism between Modernist attempts to purify the discipline of painting and realist impurity." Modernisms use o<sup>f</sup> art to call attention to art was presumed a good thing whereas, Greenberg wrote, "realistic, illusionistic art disassembled the medium using art to conceal art" (Greenberg, C., 1965, p. 194), "and obviously this was a bad thing."

In his essay (1966), Greenberg talks about the unique and proper area of competence of each art coinciding with all that is unique to the nature of its medium. He explains his theory about the orientation of modern painting to "flatness". He feels that two-dimensionality is the guarantee of painting's

independence as an art.

Nochlin acknowledges (p. 56) that the ideology of Modernism had some serious effects on the evolution of painting. However, she argues that the "reductionist" notion that the flat surface of the canvas makes some sort of absolute demand on the painter is a myth, which is not supported by examining the most innovative painting of the last century or so. She also maintains that "this mythology is specifically aimed at the high or 'pure' art of painting rather than other art forms."

I feel that Wagschal made it clear that she situates herself within the realist tradition. Her interest is in conveying ideas about people and their lives. She does not use her medium with a Modernist/formalist rationale. Furthermore, I sensed that she wishes her art to be accessible to everyone, not only to an "in group", or elitist art audience.

From my preliminary studies concerning women and art, I was familiar with Linda Nochlin as the author of the article which asked "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) -- considered an important contribution to the fields of art history, criticism and feminism.

Wagschal acknowledged in our conversation that, in the past, painting has been dominated by the male voice. She also recognized those things within her own experience as a woman which, she said,

are not necessarily like the feelings of awesome, grand, large and adventurous that is associated with this male tradition. However, my desire is to infuse that tradition with new energy that may complete the picture - bring another world into it -- make my presence felt in my terms.

### Mary Pratt

In our conversation Mary appeared to say little in a direct way about her desired response to her work. Clues for me, however, were her references to paintings as "contemplative things", and her description of many of her paintings as having the quality of "icons". I surmised, on this basis, that Mary would like her audience to approach her work with a contemplative, almost reverent attitude.

In our discussion of life-associated values in relation to her work, Mary said impatiently, "No, I've never bothered with what people said about paintings from a formal point of view." After analyzing her approach to media, it became evident that she does not want any distractions that a viewer might derive from a medium. Her main objective is to convey images of the physically existing world that can be clearly

identified as such.

One explicit remark that Mary made about response concerned the buying public. She mentioned that deviation from her accepted style was not received easily by buyers. In a similar vein Wieland said: "That's my problem -- the public wants to buy what looks like past work."

From sources other than the thesis interview (related interviews and personal correspondence), I concluded that Mary takes a strong position concerning the "proper" role of art. She conveys the idea that it is essential that art relate to the ordinary person and that they can readily access its meanings. She also seems to consider that her realist style paintings function better this way than other forms do.

As a confirmation of this latter point, in 1986 Mary wrote a letter to me in which she said that after some consideration, she had chosen not to do an installation for her upcoming show on the subject of weddings. She wrote:

It's just too easy and besides I feel installations are awfully condescending to the public. After some soul searching, I believe that paintings are more important than installations. Artists shouldn't think they know more about life than other people, and installations seem to try to convince the public about various things they really understand anyway.

Because of our similar art educational backgrounds I believe I recognize that Mary voices an ideology concerning

art forms, the role of art and artists and notions concerning responding to works of art, that was profoundly implied in our training at Mount Allison University. As a student, thirty odd years ago, I was aware of a transformation of ideas about art, the introduction of new media, etc., happening in North America. To my regret, these new ideas were not of much interest to our teachers. I now recognize they were antithetical to the basic philosophy governing the Fine Arts Program at the time. Over the years, I have felt both the need and the desire to adjust to situations outside, even opposed to the training I received. Nevertheless, I also feel that deeply-rooted in my own outlook are some ideals retained from my original preparation.

Mary had mentioned in the interview her interest in film as a medium. She also felt that the 'movies' exercised a powerful influence on the general public that was usually not to the good. Linda Nochlin discussed the film medium in relation to media hierarchy and modernist criticism in her article (1973, p.56). She maintained that many of the same people who supported the modernist ideology regarding the "high" or "pure" art of painting, did not apply the same criteria to other visual art forms. For example, they managed to find a different rationalization for supporting narrative, representational reportorial or documentary -- in short, a realist film aesthetic. Nochlin suspects that there are other

reasons behind this double standard than the purely aesthetic ones. She argues "by virtue of its social context, film is seen as essentially an impure medium." To support her view, Nochlin proposes:

Film, the late comer to the arts, was plebian in its genesis and appeal, universal and popular, rather than exclusive and difficult. The same high standards of purity and self-definition do not apply to it as they do to the elite realm of painting. Modernist critics go 'slumming' in the less rigorous area of the film as a sort of relief from the perpetual high-minded purity they demand of the other visual arts.

#### Critical response to the artists' work: sources

I looked mainly, though not entirely, at professional sources for dialogue and responses to these artists' work. In collecting items such as articles, reviews, interview discussions, etc., for my research I recognized the quantity of items on each artist was uneven. I surmised various reasons for this which will become clearer later. And, even though limited in scope, I am presenting the following survey as an indication of the formal response to the work of each artist interviewed that has been forthcoming.

#### Mary Pratt

I began seeing reproductions and critiques of Mary Pratt's work appearing in established journals, such as Canadian Art, in the mid-1970s. This was about five years

after the time she set out on her career as an artist. Her exhibitions have been reviewed regularly in Canadian newspapers and art journals since that time. From time to time, I have heard Mary interviewed on CBC radio concerning her work, the most recent being an interview with Sheila Rodgers (State of the Arts, CBC radio, November 1987). An interview between she and Robert Fulford was aired at the time of her Toronto show (Realities, TV Ontario, November 1987). She was a guest speaker in 1986 at Concordia University, invited by the Department of Painting and Drawing to discuss her work. Her work is represented in art history texts, such as Burnett, D. and Schiff, M., Contemporary Canadian Art (1983) and Murray, J., The Best Contemporary Canadian Art (1987).

#### Joyce Wieland

In my view, Wieland's retrospective show was a breakthrough for her in terms of public exposure. Reviews at the time pointed out the surprisingly small amount of critical writing on her work considering her productive career and the contribution she has made.

According to film critic, Jay Scott (1987, p.59), a great deal more has been written theoretically about her films than her paintings. He feels that lack of theoretical response to



her work in other media indicates to some people, not him, "that Wieland is 'more important' as a filmmaker than as an artist." It is true, he says, that Wieland's films are known in the United States, whereas her other endeavours are not known there. In Scott's view, her work in other media, mostly exhibited in Canada, is equally important.

Joyce Wieland's work is presented in the contemporary artists' section of the National Gallery of Canada as part of the permanent collection. It is also represented in recent history texts of such as Visions: Contemporary Art In Canada (1983) and Contemporary Canadian Art, Burnett, D. and Schiff, M. (1983), and others.

The catalogue of Wieland's retrospective exhibit became a major, though not the only, source of ideas and information about her work for my research. Of the three women who wrote essays for the catalogue, I was aware that two are active feminists -- critic, Lucy Lippard and historian, Lauren Rabinovitz.

Among the four artists under consideration Joyce Wieland has had the longest career, and yet I had read the comment that her work has received relatively little critical attention. Nevertheless, I still had expectations that it would be known in a wider sphere than turned out to be the

case.

At the time of Wieland's retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario, I made some informal inquiries among my friends and family. I feel it is fair to describe this group as comprising people interested in art, though not art-specialized professionals. I wanted to know if this group knew of Joyce Wieland as an artist, and if they were at all familiar with her work. I discovered that few had heard of Wieland and among those that had, they knew next to nothing of her work.

Colleagues at Concordia seemed better informed, but I was astonished that in a group of eleven fourth year art education students, for whom I was a course instructor, only one had heard of her. I might add that both the university constituency and the less specialized group were familiar with the work of Alex Colville.

### Corrine Corry

Corrine's work has been exhibited regularly since 1978 in Canadian galleries, art centers and universities. She has also given workshops and lectures in these same settings in relation to her work as a multi-media artist.

Galleries which have exhibited her work have been those which show new and/or experimental work, or that which may not reach the general public through mainstream museums.

Following Corrine's The Palace of the Queen exhibit, reviews appeared in two Canadian art journals -- Vanguard and C Magazine. I think both these journals could be described as vehicles which highlight the presentation of new, or avant-garde art. Both reviews of Corrine's installation were by women. The essay for the catalogue for the The Palace of the Queen was contributed by Liz Magor -- a well-known artist in avant-garde circles.

#### Marion Wagschal

Wagschal has presented her work in group and solo shows across Canada since 1969. Recently she participated in a Berlin/Montreal exchange; her work being exhibited in Montreal in November, 1988, and in Berlin in March, 1989. Her work is represented in several Canadian public collections including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Beaverbrook Art Gallery of New Brunswick. It has been reviewed regularly in newspapers following her shows, as was the case in her Accounts show (1987), which was reviewed in the Montreal Daily News and the Vancouver Sun.

Wagschal lectured at Concordia University in 1984 on the topic "Is There a Woman's Art?". I was aware that Greta Nemiroff, who wrote an introduction to Wagschal's Accounts exhibition, is interested in feminist issues.

I was conscious that the feminist movement offered support for women artists, and that feminist writers brought important issues to public notice concerning women and art. However, it became evident to me that in the case of all the artists on whom I focused, positive critical dialogue about the work came mainly from other women.

#### Critical response to the artists' work: content

This section consists of selections of some specific feedback that the artists have received. Other selections are more general, and compare the artists' overall orientations to mainstream art criticism.

#### Joyce Wieland

In the opening paragraph of Lucy Lippard's essay for Wieland's retrospective catalogue she wrote: "Wieland's expansive approach to mediums questions the constrictive specialization that characterizes most 'successful' art"

(Catalogue, 1987, p.1). She went on to say that the "conglomerate nature of Wieland's art has dismayed some critics." She gave as an example, John Bentley Mays, art critic for the Toronto Globe and Mail, who apparently called Wieland's 1983 show at the Isaacs Gallery, "an untidy array", and to that added, "cloudcuckoolands will interest the curator or scholar who someday tries to put together all the pieces of Miss Wieland's various, unusual career." Lippard quips, "and so they do" and says that furthermore, the variousness of Wieland's art is just what she likes about it. "Diversity allows the artist to break the pattern of high art, and the grip of the ruling class", she said (Catalogue, 1987, p.7).

Film critic Jay Scott wrote in his review article of Wieland's retrospective (Scott, J., 1987, p.56):

Wieland's difficulties in gaining critical attention might be ascribed to her penchant for dabbling in too many media, each of which may interest a different audience; but Andy Warhol never had that problem, nor did General Idea in Canada.

On the apparent diversified character of Wieland's art, Scott states, "There is, in truth, scant variation tonally, textually, or thematically in Wieland's work -- regardless of the medium" (p. 60).

Corrine Corry

It seems to me that because Corrine works with relatively new art media, she situates herself in an avant-garde context. Like Wieland, she also takes a multi-media approach and is, she told me, experiencing difficulties regarding recognition. In the pilot interview she recalled that in the pioneering days of performance, she became aware that critics were inclined to say that the work of women performance artists was "self-indulgent". At the same time they were praising men's performance work. "That's another problem," Corrine added.

I noticed the method in which the three women reviewers responded to The Palace of the Queen exhibit. In each case, their comments were descriptive and interpretive, but I found few evaluative statements by them. Then I looked back at the general methods by which the three women contributors had responded and reviewed the work of Joyce Wieland in her retrospective catalogue. Both the Lippard and Rabinovitz essays did have evaluative components, while Fleming confined hers to a description and interpretation of the work. Each contributor included biographical and social context to their discussions. The feminist position of Lippard and Rabinovitz was evident to me. Rabinovitz concluded her essay on Wieland's films by championing Wieland's feature film The Far Shore in the face of its many detractors (Catalogue, p.179).

Positive evaluation set against negative evaluation from mainstream sources, emerged as an element in Lippard's essay as well.

### Marion Wagschal

The curator of the art gallery at University of British Columbia, Glenn Allison, said he was anxious to bring Wagschal's exhibition called Accounts (1988) to Vancouver, because so few local artists concentrate on the "figure". Elizabeth Godley who reviewed the show wrote: "Like a fire and brimstone preacher, Wagschal forces the viewers to confront the bodies imperfections" (Vancouver Sun, September 1988).

At the time of the Accounts exhibition in Montreal, one negative criticism which I heard regarding Wagschal's work was based on the fact that she does not "idealize" her images of people. The comments that I was party to were mainly voiced by non-art specialists.

### Mary Pratt

I believe Mary's work is admired by many people for her skill in painting images from everyday life in super-realist style.

One review that I read concerning Mary Pratt's exhibit, Aspects of a Ceremony (1986), discussed her technique in relation to the total art work. (Fee, E., 1987, p.38-39) The author said, "the work presents the viewer with technical evidence that Mary Pratt is a superior painter." She goes on to say, however, that in her opinion, Pratt's "style and the absence of painterly risk may insulate the work from the viewer by a hermetic seal." According to Fee this depersonalized presentation may work favourably with certain kinds of subject matter -- especially that which is inherently sentimental. But, sometimes the viewer is unable to access meaning and is left with admiration of technique alone.

Mary does not align herself with any particular categorization when she talks about her work. I have heard her say, in fact, that she needs to isolate herself from the contemporary art milieu in order to maintain her own directions. Nonetheless, within the art community, her work, perhaps because of its specialization, seems to lend itself to categorization. Comment on her work references it to a school of photo-realism. Her work is identified with both Canadian and American realist painters, and comparisons are made of it within that framework.

Another characteristic of the dialogue situates her clearly as a "woman artist". Her role as a woman painter in



relation to male artists invariably becomes a topic in discussions and interviews. Her work is frequently compared and discussed with other artists' work on the basis of gender. This raises a question: What is the function of categorization in responding to art? Although helpful, perhaps, in making things clearer -- can it also be used to avoid the uniqueness of the work by relegating it to a category?

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

#### ADJUSTING TO THE PROCESS

Among the four artists I interviewed, the diversity of attitudes and the range and uniqueness of their ideas surprised me. Because I was aware from the beginning of the complex questions I had brought with me to the thesis, I had attempted to frame open-ended questions that might offer scope and flexibility within which each artist could respond. Nevertheless, I did not anticipate the full diversity and richness of the information which I was to uncover. I discovered that the artists' responses could not altogether be contained within my framework of possibilities. I realized the need to make adjustments.

An illustration of how this developed was my experience in talking with Joyce Wieland. I had anticipated that Wieland might discuss feminist issues concerning media hierarchy and the ambiguity that surrounds a definition of the arts and crafts. As it happened, she made no direct reference to any hierarchy of media in considering the art made by women. The topic of hierarchy among various media occurred only in a very oblique way in our dialogue. Overriding this, and some other issues which I thought she might address explicitly, was her stand against theory and theoretical approaches. The strong

feelings she exhibited over the role of theory for artists intrigued me. I considered it imperative not only to include and highlight this aspect of our conversation in my interview essay, but also to try to contextualize her concern. Divergent ideas arising from the other interviews needed to be incorporated as well, and a shift from my original frame of reference seemed called for in order to accommodate more possibilities.

As the thesis evolved, and I worked deeper into the material, I recognized the importance of the reading that I had done in preparation for the study. However, one problem developed as a result of the emphasis I had placed on feminist issues in the preliminary phase of my research. Throughout the process I found it difficult to become disentangled from specific complex issues and debates. Though they interested me, I finally realized I could not develop them adequately along with my other interests within the framework of the thesis. My thinking shifted from looking at women as different from men, to focusing mainly on the differences between the four women under study.

A second shift in emphasis which occurred during the process had to do with "responding to works of art". In the preliminary phases of the thesis I had considered some minor questions for teaching involved in this area which I wanted to

explore. However, as I studied the interviews, I recognized that this was a crucial concern for the artist. The topic had much wider implications for teaching than I had originally envisioned. Response and dialogue with the work of art became a major theme.

The complexity of the artists' responses and the wide range of implications inherent in them, ruled out simple answers or resolutions. It became neither viable, nor important to me, to attempt to impose closure or make definitive conclusions in the study. The conclusions I have reached are open-ended, nuanced and not singularly conclusive.

### **Orientations**

Although the material was complex, nevertheless I discovered certain patterns. For example, as I was studying the diverse ideas and attitudes of the four artists, I began to differentiate two fairly distinct orientations that seemed to parallel Viktor Lowenfeld's "visual" and "haptic" models (Lowenfeld, 1953, p.97). He pointed out that while these types represent extremes on a continuum, it is important to realize that the third, and by far the largest group, lies in between the two. I noticed that, according to Lowenfeld's types, Mary Pratt seemed to exemplify a visual mode,

especially in relation to Joyce Wieland, whom Lowenfeld would probably have considered haptic.

During the process of interviewing and studying the results, I had been attempting to situate myself as a teacher, artist and woman in relation to the ideas and attitudes that emerged. After a more detailed picture of each artist developed, a clearer portrait of myself also evolved. I could also see myself in relation to a visual/haptic topology.

Thoughts about my orientation, my style and approach to teaching art generated questions and indicated possible problems. I recognized that both visual and haptic students would likely be present in any normal group. I asked myself: What if my orientation is in conflict with a student's -- each of us viewing things from an opposing perspective? How would I go about accommodating that student in a teaching/learning situation? What happens to a student, or myself as a teacher, if either of us is at odds with the main group? I began to understand in more depth and detail, ways in which some students could feel alienated towards types of activities and instruction biased in the particular orientation of a teacher.

The recognition of these two types also led to questions concerning the extent to which I might attempt to expand these orientations in students and/or act as a mediator between

subjects who speak from different orientations. In general, Lowenfeld advocated that the teacher simply encourage the student along the lines of his/her natural orientation (Youngblood, M., 1982, pp.32-36). As a result of my study however, I have become convinced that dialogue between the two might well be more valuable and enriching. I have already begun to consider ways to create a better climate for such a dialogue to take place in the future.

I recognized that my orientation to making art embodied many of the same qualities as my approach to teaching. My general working methods, my way of handling media in relation to images, for example, were consistent with my general orientation. In the hope of developing a more informed point of view, I have become exhilarated at the prospect of experimenting and extending my outlook in my own studio work. I feel a need to challenge myself in ways that are different from my accustomed approach. I am now more aware of the different modes of control in dialogue between artists and objects, as well as teachers and students. I feel that I would be more sensitive and receptive to the demands of material - media (as another entity) even those that I have avoided over the years. Perhaps they have threatened to pull me into a more haptic mode than I was willing or ready to explore.

As I consider change in relation to my art-making process, the possibility also occurs to me of initiating a dialogue with a new, or different group of people as responders. It seems likely that some of those who relate to the work according to its present orientation, may respond negatively to changing forms of expression.

Both in the interviews, and in my analysis of the responses of others to these artists' work, I identified a major concern with the accessibility of works of art to viewers. I became more conscious of how different viewers approach art works from different orientations. One example of this problem emerged in the study concerning Mary Pratt.

Her training as a painter emphasized the visual model. This, combined with explicit remarks she made, led me to believe that she would have difficulties if confronted with the work of Corrine Corry. Corrine described her disappointment at the inability of her audience to access her work. She is also responding to the frustration of working with a public that is often accustomed to one extreme, the highly visual and realistic forms of traditional art.

This is a recurring problem in teaching as revealed in art education literature. In the past, I have used methods advocated by writers such as Edmund Feldman (1970, pp.348-383). This model appears to be based on objective approaches

that he attributes to the art critic. In future situations however, when I mediate between art work and viewers, I will be more cautious of my point of view -- my orientation as one among others. I hope to be sensitive to different orientations. I believe I am better prepared to reach a deeper understanding by encompassing the diversity of 'voices' both from within works of art, and from viewers.

Talking with each of the four women person to person was the highlight of the thesis process. Not only did I learn a great deal about each of them from direct contact, the experience also helped me to define myself. Because of my general orientation which I now recognize more clearly, I consider it was a personal breakthrough that I was able, during the process, to drop some of the formality that I assumed was expected of an interviewer. I was also able to work through and put aside some of the abstract concepts, which I laboured over in the preliminary stages of the thesis, and discuss my concerns and questions in a "natural" way.

The interview with Joyce Wieland, the last in the group, was a turning point in this regard. In this situation the somewhat overwhelming amount of outside information, theory, and opinion I came prepared with, tended to act as an intruder upon our discussion. Wieland swept these cobwebs away. She forced me, then and there, to make my own assessment of her



orientations. Her admonition to respond directly to her work -- to forget, for the moment, the ideas of others which stood between me and the work was an important event of the thesis. The exercise of reacting more spontaneously to her comments and ideas during the conversation was a positive adjustment I was able to make. "What do you really want to know, and we'll talk about it" she said. I noticed that in the dialogue which followed this statement, we communicated much more productively. I am indebted to Wieland for confronting this problem. I could identify many of the same elements and general dynamics at work in the other interviews. However, the mix between my orientation, and that of each interviewee, created unique situations in every case.

Over the years, I have appreciated corresponding with Mary Pratt. Her ideas and work have given me a personal frame of reference to reflect on, and helped me to recognize more clearly my own choices and directions as an artist. In the same way, the convivial exchange that has grown between Corrine Corry and myself has contributed to my understanding of her art, which appeared at the beginning of this process mysterious, estranged and "other" to my own. Sharing in the past experiences and present desires of each of these artists, has been a regenerating process for myself.

The various environments and circumstances in which we

met also appeared to influence the dialogue -- sometimes constricting it, at others allowing for a more relaxed approach, or even facilitating it. This corresponds to my experience with teaching/learning situations, and the context in which they happen. I suspect that elements of the conversation with Marion Wagschal as we were enjoying a "picnic" in her office may leave a stronger imprint than the essays I read concerning feminist aesthetics.

While I have broadened my conceptions of artists' media and acquired a better understanding of artists' orientations to media, answers to some questions remain undefined. I wonder, for example, to what extent machines and electronic media will eventually displace centuries-old forms such as painting with pigment, and sculpture in clay and stone? What are the implications for the future regarding "core" media in study and teaching? Through what media will students be introduced to art, and what media will be most relevant at different age levels?

I read an article recently about New York artist, Jenny Holzer (Taylor, P., 1988), whose work will represent the United States in the 1990 Venice Biennale. She is described as a Post-Pop artist who embraces commercial techniques. Her art originally took the form of posters but now her provocative social statements are often shown on huge

commercial, electronic billboards. Her signature medium, since 1983, has been LED (light emitting diode) machines, which Taylor explains (p.456),

are those anonymous black boxes across which flashing red letters (and recently green and yellow ones as well) dash and disappear. Without paint or canvas, pencils, or even a camera, her art is just dancing points of light which tease and taunt with brief, punchy messages.

Perhaps Holzer's work points to a future where painting will not actually be abandoned, but merely transformed--melding with contemporary technology. It seems clear that artists' media and their outlook towards the role of media, has undergone rapid and significant changes in this century. The original assertion of the thesis; that it is important for an art educator to keep abreast of these shifting currents in order to make optimally informed choices, suggests continuous study. The stimulating events involved in the research process, and the thought-provoking ideas which I encountered have served to make that proposition a fascinating one.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Selected readings forming preliminary background research

- Alloway, L. (1976). Women's art in the '70's. Art in America, 64 (3) 64-72.
- Collins, G. & Sandell, R. (1984). Women, art and education. Virginia: National Art Education Association.
- Cooper, P. & Buford, N. (1978). The quilters: Women and domestic art: An oral history. New York: Doubleday Anchor.
- Ecker, G. (Ed.) Feminist aesthetics. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hafter, D.M. (1982). Toward a social history of needlework artists. Woman's Art Journal, 2 (2) 25-29.
- Hauser, H., (1982). The sociological approach: The concept of ideology in the history of art. In F. Frascina & C. Harrison (Eds.), Modern art and modernism: A critical anthology. New York: Harper and Row.
- Lippard, L. (1980). Sweeping exchanges: The contribution of feminism to the art of the 1970s. Art Journal, 40 fall-winter 362-365.
- Loeb, J. (Ed.), (1979). Feminist collage: Educating women in the visual arts. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nemser, C. (1973). Art talk: Conversations with 12 women artists. New York: Scribner's Sons.
- Nemser, C. (1975). The women artists' movement. Art Education, 28 (7) 18-22.
- Owens, C. (1985). The discourse of others: Feminists and post modernism. In H. Foster (Ed.) The anti-aesthetic. Washington: Bay Press.
- Roth, M. (1983). The amazing decade: Women and performance art in America 1970-1980. Los Angeles: Astro Arts.
- Tomkins, C. (1980). Off the wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the art world of our time. New York: Doubleday Inc.
- Vogel, L. (1974). Fine art and feminism: The awakening consciousness. Feminist Studies, 2 (1) 3-37.

Wolff, T. (1981). The relevance of sociology to aesthetic education. Journal of Aesthetic Education, 15 (3) 67-82.

#### References -- books, articles and reviews

- Burnett, D. and Schiff M., (1983). Contemporary Canadian art.  
Edmonton: Hurtig and Art Gallery of Ontario.
- Duras, M. (1980). Smothered creativity. In E. Marks & I. de Courtévrion (Eds.), New French feminisms. (pp. 111-113).  
Boston: University of Mass.
- Fee, E. (1987). Mary Pratt. Vanguard, 16 (1) 38-39.
- Feldman, E.B. (1970). Becoming human through art. New Jersey:  
Prentice Hall.
- Freedman, A. (1987, April). Roughing it with a brush. Toronto Magazine, pp. 38,40,41,78,79.
- Greenberg, C. (1965, Spring). Modernist painting. Art and Literature. 4, 193-201.
- Gwyn, S. (1976). Mary Pratt on Mary Pratt. Art magazine, 7 (25) 40-41.
- James, G. (1987, April). The protean vision of Joyce Wieland. MacLean's, 100 (17) 53-55.
- Lippard, L. (1976). From the center: Feminist essays on women's art. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Lowenfeld, V. & Lambert-Brittain, W. (1982). Creative and mental growth. (7th ed). New York: MacMillan.
- Murray, J. (1987). The best contemporary Canadian art.  
Edmonton: Hurtig.
- Nochlin, L. (1973). The realist criminal and the abstract law. Art in America, 61 (5) 54-61.
- Nochlin, L. (1971). Why have there been no great women artists? In E.C. Baker & T.B. Hess (Eds.). Art and sexual politics. New York: Collier.
- Parker, R. & Pollack, G. (1981). Old mistresses: Women, art and ideology. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- Poovey M. (1983). Persuasion and the powers of love. In C. Heilbrun & M. Higonnet (Eds.), The representation of women in fiction, (p.178). Baltimore: Johns Hopkin's Univ. Press.
- Pratt, M. (1987). Afterimage. Canadian Art, 4 (3) p.124.
- Rabinovitz, L. (1980). Issues of feminist aesthetics: Joyce Wieland and Judy Chicago. Woman's Art Journal, 1 (2), 38-41.
- Scott, J. (1987). Full Circle. Canadian Art, 4 (1), 56-63.
- Spires, R. (1987, Fall) Corrine Corry. C Magazine, (15) p.53.
- Stevens, M. (1980). Taking art to the revolution. Heresies, 3 (1) 41-44.
- Taylor, P. (1988, Nov.). We are the word. Vogue, pp. 391, 393, 456.
- Visions: Contemporary art in Canada (1983). Vancouver / Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre.
- Waquant, M. (1988, April-May). The palace of the queen. Vanguard, 17 (2), p.35.
- Wine, C. (1985). Across the table: An indulgent look at food in Canada (original watercolours by Mary Pratt). Scarborough: Prentice Hall.
- Youngblood, M. (1982). Lowenfeld's unremitting legacy. Art Education, 35 (6), 32-36.

#### References -- exhibition catalogues

- Corrine Corry: The Palace of the Queen. Toronto: Mercer Union Gallery and Montreal, Powerhouse Gallery, 1987. Text by Liz Magor.
- Joyce Wieland: A Decade of Painting. Montreal: Concordia Art Gallery, 1985. Text by Sandra Paikowsky.
- Joyce Wieland. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1987. Texts by Lucy Lippard, Marie Fleming, Lauren Rabinovitz.

Joyce Wieland: Drawings for The Far Shore. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1978. Texts by Pierre Théberge and Alison Reid.

Mary Pratt: The Skin of Things. London: London Regional Art Gallery, 1981. Text by Joan Murray.

Marion Wagschal: Accounts. Montreal: Saidye Bronfman Center, 1988. Text by Greta Hofman Nemiroff.

Some Canadian Women Artists. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975. Text by Mayo Graham with statements by the artists including Mary Pratt.

## APPENDIX

### Re-entering studio study

In 1983 I registered for my first graduate studio course. Prior to this I had been painting predominantly in water colour, as well as teaching an adult art group using the same medium. I was excited about the possibility of exploring new materials. I was thinking about combining various textiles and fibres with needlework and painting. I was intrigued also, with the integration of text into many art works I was seeing at the time.

Corrine Corry was the course instructor. In the first session she told a story explaining that this might provide a starting point to respond to for our first project. Her narrative unfolded like a dream sequence and suggested a walk through the spaces of an old habitation. We were asked to bring in our work the following week for group critique.

I set off in high spirits. I interpreted the story nostalgically and romantically thinking about childhood visits to my grandmother's farm. Among old photos, magazine clippings and collections of prints and fabrics I found images and materials in my home suitable to the ideas I had in mind. These I cut, tore and pasted to a board using paint to draw



the various elements together into a composition. I experimented with letter shapes and worked the work "Eden" into the design. This word summed up my feelings about the gardens and orchards which surrounded her clapboard farmhouse. Finally, I draped parts of the montage with a veil of cheesecloth suggesting frail blowing curtains. In the context of my previous way of working, choices of media etc., these were adventurous, new directions. I had allowed myself far more playfulness than was usually the case.

The piece was small (16" x 20"). It absorbed much of my energy and thought that week and in that way was fairly ambitious. I was, nevertheless, apprehensive about the impending critique. I did not know the other students in the class or their work. I was also unfamiliar with the format and procedures of a studio course at the graduate level.

I was one of the first called upon to show my work and with some trepidation I put it before the group. There was a lengthy pause until someone, at last, ventured to say that the word "Eden" was an overstatement (a problem that I too had noticed). Other comments followed which suggested obliquely that the whole approach was somewhat sentimental. I sensed that the piece was considered not adequately informed in the context of current art dialogues -- pretty, but trite. My immediate inclination was to try to justify the work, to

attempt to explain that is lacked subtlety because it was not finished. However, as nothing had been stated explicitly, I kept quiet. The guarded responses of the group may well have been due to their unfamiliarity with my previous work, and their anxiety at the start of a new course. Nonetheless, the enthusiasm with which I began the piece diminished.

Following this awkward exposure, I was coopted by the next exhibitor to be a participant in her piece. To this end, I was expected to sit in a circle on the floor with the others, be blindfolded and sprayed with cologne as the artist danced around the outer perimeter of the encircled group. My head swam and my annoyance grew. To say I was confused about the intent of these activities is an understatement. To begin with, I had difficulty associating her medium with the vocabulary of the "visual arts", as I had learned them, and there was no object. Everything about the work disturbed my expectations. I was also bewildered by the arrangements of "found" objects, xeroxed prints of found images and documents, polaroid snapshots, etc., that constituted the response to the project by many other students.

We had been told that a contribution by way of critical comment was expected as a requirement of the course. However, finding my ideas and orientation to the work "out of sync" with my colleagues, I tended to withdraw from this activity.

One student had done a series of line drawings of a telephone. I was once more mystified as to how a telephone as a subject of the piece, related to the assignment the instructor had given us. Nevertheless, I felt more secure in commenting on this work. I recognized, and admired, what I considered accomplished drawing skills in portraying one view of this object in different ways using a variety of lines. I could relate to this piece, feeling I understood some of the thinking and processes involved.

As time went on, relationships between the participants in the group developed, and dialogue expanded concerning each person's work. I felt at ease in the class. Nevertheless, I still remember vividly my feelings of disorientation and alienation in the initial situation. It seemed imperative that as an artist and educator I explore the questions and new ideas that confronted me.