

VETERAN FEMINISTS OF AMERICA  
SALUTE TO FEMINISTS IN THE ARTS  
Celebrating Feminist Artists Who Changed The World  
1966-1980

November 6, 2003

The National Arts Club

15 Gramercy Park South -- New York City

All Photos by NYC Photographer Joan Roth

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## MEMORABLE CELEBRATION HONORING FEMINISTS IN THE ARTS

VFA's tour de force of 2003 was the 10-day celebration of artist activists of the feminist art revolution. Held at the gorgeous National Arts Club on Gramercy Park in New York, it was without a doubt ONE OF the most ambitious events we've had so far.

### THE HANGING



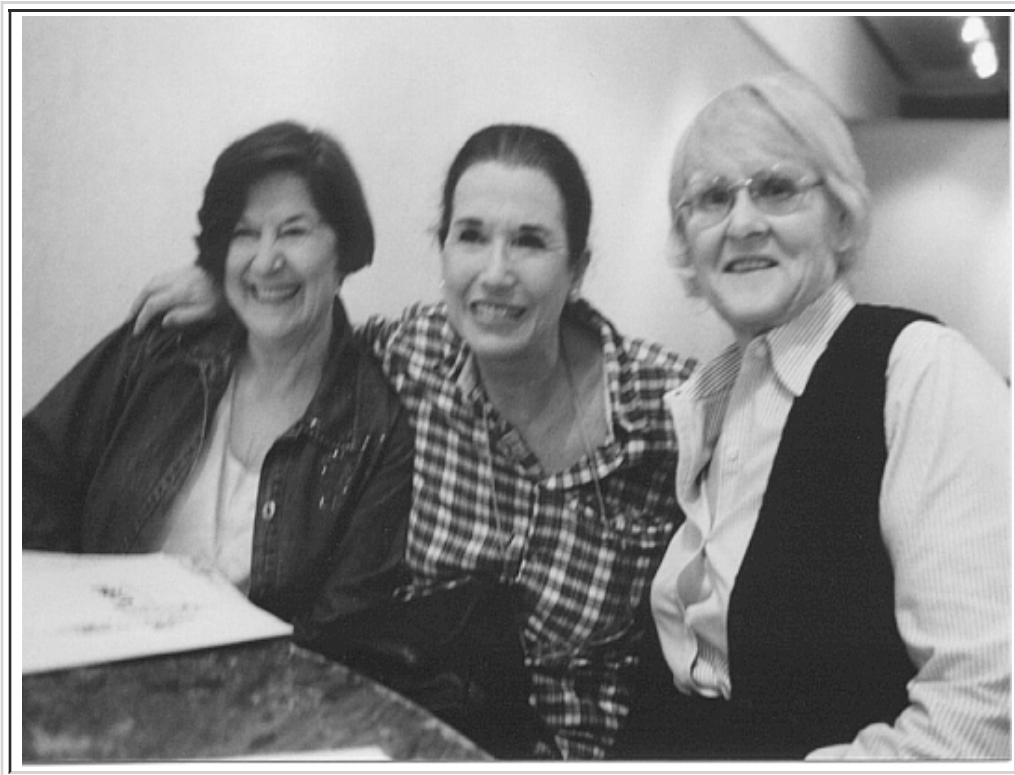
Our celebration began on November 1 when some of us met for the "hanging." All day artists or their reps trooped in and out lugging paintings and removing wrappings. Muriel Fox staked out a key spot for Patricia Hill Burnett's regal portrait of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg which was being driven in from Detroit by Patricia's husband, Bob. Meanwhile the space was empty and the head hanger unknowingly placed another work in its place. A brief drama, and back to work.

*The Hanging.. November 1, 2003 -  
Cristina Biaggi fills out forms for  
insurance, etc...*

There had been guidelines. Did Linda Stein's etching belong there? Where should we place Judy Chicago's bloody tampon? Where is Miriam Schapiro's painting? At last

the hall is mostly hung and everyone's gone, but Suzanne Benton and Jacqui Ceballos sit around to wait for a late arrival.

**NOVEMBER 5** -- LUNCHEON RECEPTION FOR MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ARTS CLUB -- AND A LITTLE NAME-DROPPING: I arrive early but can't get into the gallery where our reception will take place because another event is there, so I am squeezed into a corner outside the door. Dan Rather stops by to ask a question. He stops by again on his way out. Wrong show, he says. Our guests are arriving and still the other group lingers. Finally they're gone and guests rush in to see the exhibit and meet the artists. Peggy Kerry drops in on her way to brother John's campaign headquarters. Carole de Saram, our "charge des affaires" for the luncheon, rushes in from a real estate deal. It's nice, but nothing like the BIG DAY.



*VFA's Coordinators of event, President Jacqui Ceballos; Board Chair, Muriel Fox and Editor of Pioneer Feminist Project, Barbara Love*

**NOVEMBER 6** begins at one with a sweet memorial service for deceased artists led by Gloria Orenstein. Alix Kates Shulman pays homage to the much beloved Irene Peslikis, an artist and activist, founder of the first feminist art school. Then all race upstairs to the room where Gloria moderates the panel.

**She introduces Nancy Azara, Suzanne Benton, Judith Brodsky, Betsy Damon, Arlene Raven, Faith Ringgold, Susan Schwalb and Miriam Schapiro** to an audience of mostly artists, many as distinguished as the panelists. Each panelist

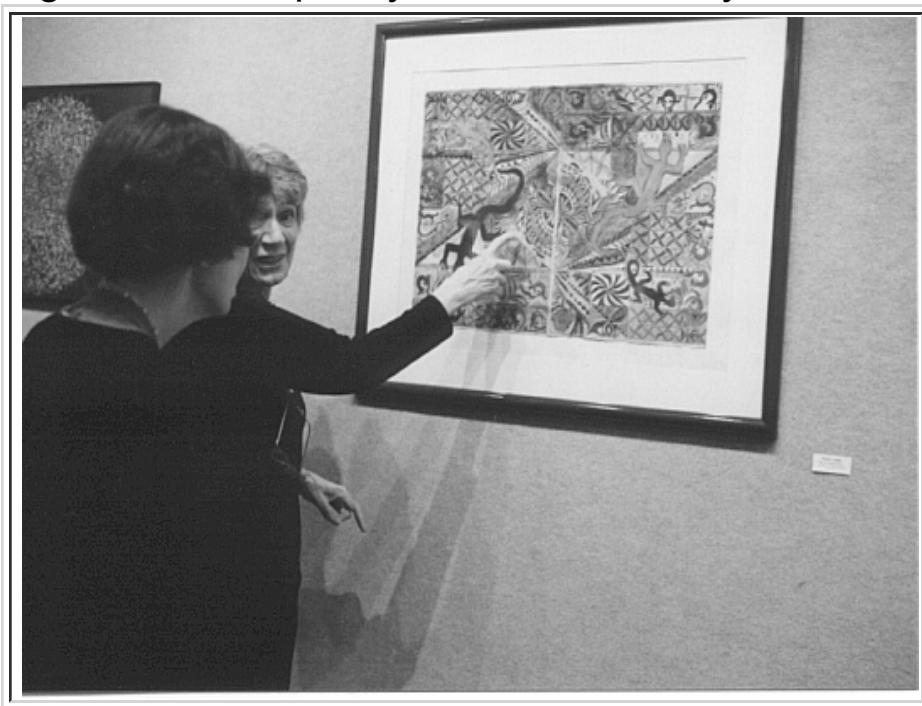


shares a bit about her struggle to be recognized and shows slides of her works. Then begins a fascinating back-and-forth between panelists and audience.

**THE RECEPTION** was a charged event. The high-ceiling wood-paneled bar lounge was packed. Many had traveled thousands of mile to be here. Betsy Damon had come from Beijing, China, Martha Nilsson Edelheit came from Sweden, several from the West Coast. Members of WAR (Women Artists in Revolution) and other early groups were greeting

*Nancy Azzara describing her art*

one another and reliving the accomplishments their efforts effected. This wasn't just an evening of nostalgia, though there was plenty of that. For many it was a renewal--and an introduction, artists and activists of the feminist art revolution meet the feminist activists who started it all. For, not counting the late Irene Peslikis and VFA cofounder Suzanne Benton, many of the artists had never been involved with other feminists. In fact, most had never even heard of VFA!



*Sheila Lamb and her art work " Ode to a Dead Gecko"*

**THE CROWNING MOMENT: DINNER AND HONORS EVENT.**

You felt the joy, warmth and passion the minute you came into this huge dining gallery so beautiful set for 270 guests surrounded by provocative feminist art. And you hardly noticed that the food was exquisite and the wine wonderful, for you were heady with the wonder of being in this room at this table with icons of the feminist art world.

Sheila Tobias began introducing the honorees, but there were 59 artists to be

honored! They came to the mike in alpha order, except those who had to leave early. Everyone was teary-eyed as Sylvia Sleigh hobbled to the podium, so happy to receive our medal as the guests stood up and applauded. There was a standing ovation for Arlene Raven, for Faith Ringgold and Miriam Schapiro. But each had something unique to say, and we wiped the tears as we listened and relived with them the days of struggle and success. You'd think that after 25 or so presentations guests would have had enough, but no! The majority stayed until the very end, then lingered some more!.



*Unveiling "Ruth Bader Ginsburg"*

## **COMMENTS FROM ARTISTS**

**GLORIA ORENSTEIN:**

Jqcqui, I've spoken to half the world and everyone is just thrilled. I have first and foremost to say thank you for what you and VFA have done! Such a contribution to history! Like Sylvia Sleigh, one of the most renowned of artists....there she was old and feeble, yet she dragged herself to the podium to be honored. She was in tears! And Miriam Schapiro and Faith Ringgold. What a reunion! VFA is like the United Nations for Women!

**SILVIANNA GOLDSMITH:** I am so proud and honored to have been part of that extraordinary evening . It is no wonder so many were moved to tears. Praises and blessings to all the heros and survivors honored.

Gloria, I loved your descriptions of your mother and her constructions. You

really brought her to life. And Suzanne, I never will forget that innovative workshop I took with you and your incredible masks, ones that dared show the pain and anger we felt but weren't allowed to express. Jacqui, how great that you and Gloria conceived of this event together! Brava! Muriel, it was wonderful to get to know the person behind all this wonderful work. And Sheila and all the committee -- I must salute you for the amazing amount of work that went into a fabulous evening. One sad final note. Two artists are to be added to the memorial list:

Stella Waitzkin, died October 2003, age 83, at the Chelsea Hotel, where she lived since 1968. She was a renowned sculptor of books. in many shows including the Smithsonian. She was an original member of WAR, as was Nancy Spero.

Doloris Holmes, died tragically June 2001 She was a poet, playwright, creator of White Mask Theatre, and interviewer of Anais Nin in 1972, which tape (made by me) is now in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art and is available online. She was a member of WAR and in the X-12 show.

DARA BIRNBAUM: It was an odd experience to be in the room with so many women my age! It was fabulous to hear the stories of all who have in their own ways been part of a great movement to make space for women to achieve. I wish there could have been more time to really know more. I thank you for the wonderful time I had at the opening of the "Salute to Feminists in the Arts." Thank you for making me a part of this valuable and memorable experience.



*Gloria Orenstein, Art historian, teacher, co-chair of Art Event and panel moderator; Susan Schwalb, artist, was art director of Women in the Arts newsletter, Aphra and Women and Artists News.*

SUZANNE BENTON: I hope you and Muriel are enjoying the glow of a fantastic set of events that was set in motion by your passion and enduring

dedication to feminism and the feminists who changed the world. Thank you for bringing us artists into your fold.

DOLORES ALEXANDER: Congratulations on your wildly successful event last Friday. It was clear that all the honorees were thrilled to be there and to be recognized with the VFA medals.

MURIEL FOX: Congratulations to all of us! Yes, that was a memorable, heartwarming event we all pulled off. Comments from participants have been ecstatic. We can also congratulate ourselves that throughout this year we all worked together on this complex and difficult (almost impossible) project in a spirit of great cordiality and sisterhood. It was a refreshing, if exhausting and time-overwhelming experience.

There was such a warm feeling of camaraderie. The art work was excellent, the Ginsberg portrait superb. My daughter also loved the event and meeting the people she has read about rather than lived through as we have.

Rockland Center for the Arts let us use their insurance policy and thus saved us many hundreds of dollars. The director of Rockland Center was enthusiastic and let's hope this will lead to future exhibit exposure for feminist artists.



*An audience of distinguished aratists takes active part. Jaunita McNeely; Anita Steckel (second row), back row Ce Roser*

As you know, that beautiful event was all videotaped and will be sold to universities and other institutions. If you think of any art-oriented institutions that might wish to purchase it, please send Sheila Tobias their names and addresses. Sheila's e-mail is [sheila@sheilatobias.com](mailto:sheila@sheilatobias.com).

Her address 724 N Campbell St, Tucson, AZ 85719

The videotape or DVD is



*Faith Ringgold, artist famous for her magnificent painted story quilts quilts; Gloria Orenstein, Susan Scwalb and Betsy Damon, who came from Beijing for this event.*

available for little more than the cost of printing and mailing. The video is \$25 for one, \$40 for the two. DVD is the same deal. If you want a copy or copies, send check MADE OUT TO VETERAN FEMINISTS OF AMERICA to VFA, 220 Doucet Rd, 225-D, Lafayette, LA 70503.

FINALLY, THE SAD BUT SWEET "UNHANGING" on the 10th, with photographer Joan Roth taking last shots of artists and their works. Suzanne Benton is there til the end, with a young friend who is writing about feminism. Again the artists or their reps troop in and out to pick things up,

rewrapping and toting their works.

Again we're there until after 6 PM waiting for someone to pack up their work The hall is empty and another art show is being hung. We're pushed into the parlor to give them space. Suzanne has to leave, and I sit in an overstuffed chair by the huge windows looking out on Gramercy Park, feeling so tired, but so happy and dwelling on the great accomplishments made by OUR GREAT GENERATION of the Second Wave.

We may not have sold as many of the works as we'd hoped, but we'd brought these wonderful artists into the feminist spotlight.. As for the art sale, etchings and paintings under \$500 were the most popular. Linda Stein's Virginia Woolf sold three copies, Kate Millett's etching -two, one Judith Brodsky, and June Blum's painting of Betty Friedan was



bought by Muriel Fox. The art is still for sale on our website ([www.vfa.us](http://www.vfa.us)), and VFA will get 40% of any sale made. So check it out!

We thank these members whose generosity helped make this unprecedented event possible: Merle Hoffman, Cristina Biaggi, Elizabeth Shepherd, Diane Welsh, Pamela Martens Carole deSaram



We also thank the hard-working *Gracia Molina Pick*, VP from San Diego Art Committee, which has devoted many months of effort to this project: Co-Chairs Suzanne Benton and Gloria Orenstein; Diana Kurz, Susan Schwalb, Linda Stein, Cristina Biaggi, Pamela Martens



## PANELISTS

Nancy Azara, Suzanne Benton, Judith Brodsky, Betsy Damon, Gloria Orenstein, Arlene Raven, Faith Ringgold, Susan Schwalb, Miriam Schapiro

Black & White photos of the November 6th Event honoring Feminist Artists, taken by photographer and VFA member Joan Roth

*Panelists Miriam Schapiro, Nancy Azara*, Veteran Feminists of America Committee for this



*Suzanne Benton and Anita Steckel*

Event: Jacqui Ceballos,  
President; Muriel Fox,  
Board Chair; Sheila Tobias,

Executive VP & Events Chair; Amy Hackett, Treasure; Grace Welch,  
Admissions Chair; Carole deSaram, Reception Chair; Jan Cleary, Website  
Director; Adele Conover, Public Relations Chair; Natalia Ronceria Ceballos -  
Door Asst.

**MORE PHOTOS!**



Sheila Tobias and Miriam Schapiro, Jacqui Ceballos



Dell Williams, VFA co-founder & founder of Eve's Garden with photographer Betty Lane and Joan Nixon.



Jeanne Hirsch, artist and co-author, with her late mother, Holly Hirsch, with Judge Emily Jane Goodman



Beth Ames Swartz and daughter



FAITH RINGGOLD