

**“unique individuals and survival, or connecting the interior and the exterior or the freedom to be irrational or off the top of my head or heart on my sleeve, etc.”**

I was raised by feminist artists. Those that did not directly raise me I made a point of contacting...Howardena Pindell, Joan Semmel, Kate Millett, Lorraine O'Grady, Mary Beth Edelson, Linda Montano, later Senga Nengudi, Annie Sprinkle...unfortunately I did not ever meet two of the most important for me, Hannah Wilke, whose show “Intra Venus” I saw the opening of when I was 20, and Eva Hesse, who can send me to tears with her work (Hannah died in 1993, Eva died in 1970 of course). Carolee Schneemann was my teacher in 1993, her and Hannah had the most decisive influence on the way I treat my body in my work. Carolee was a guest teacher in the sculpture department, and I talked my way into the class, which was actually a year higher than the year I was in in school. Carolee and Hannah were the actual beginnings in my opinion of something that Eva Hesse started. And I am convinced that Eva Hesse, who was respectively four and five years older than Carolee and Hannah, Eva Hesse started it all because she knew she was dying and dying young. The urgency in her work is apparent to me, as well as her being so in touch with her inner self and body. Recently pictures have surfaced of Eva Hesse with her sculptures in performative poses. Carolee, Hannah and Eva crossed over and broke through, the frame, from other disciplines, they “embodied” the work and Carolee is still and always still doing that today. She is a beacon and a guide for me and I love her passionately as a person as well. I had heard about her work and intuitively knew it was on a wavelength that I felt drawn to. I was not wrong. Adrian Piper, by the way, since you mention her in the beginning list of your questions, impresses me with her rigor and dedication and focus. My husband Robin and I have a small but growing feminist art collection including an early pencil and charcoal self portrait by Adrian from 1967/1968. I made sure to collect early when I had extra money to learn directly from artworks as well as from people and biographies, history, surviving family members etc.

There is much more to the story, and autobiographical details, but I feel they will surface if necessary in other contexts than the one I want to deal with here.

I have a friend, artist Peter Brandt in Copenhagen, who argues that you could go back even further to Josephine Baker and Marilyn Monroe as “embodied” artists. I think he is right. They were both of course proto-feminist.

The point is the centeredness and “being in the body” which is the same thing as the word we use so much in art, “talent”. What women have been driven to do under the oppression of the patriarchy is to go to the deepest interior reaches of themselves and understand the mind and body connection in a way that no abstract Cartesian model could ever do. Male supremacy has been the norm for so long that vital growth on other fronts was being virtually ignored until quite recently in history. Things have also been changing of course, with the industrial revolution and now the technology and information age, it has always been like that. There are surface developments and then the deeper, more meaningful, and un-saleable and un-buyable human developments that intersectionally oppressed peoples are responsible for. That is part of what their work and contribution is to society I feel. An understanding of pain and deprivation and struggle and heartache. But also joy, euphoria, celebration, triumph.

I was raised by feminist artists to be in my body, centered, alive, and to look sharply at the world around me in both aesthetic (think Sylvia Plimack Mangold) and moral and ethical terms. Heck, some artists who are also important to me and my development, like the New York City performance artist Penny Arcade (Susanna Ventura) are not even identified as

feminist but they are that and more. Penny was the first performance I actually saw naked people in. I actually stood there and cried as the glitter and streamers and confetti swirled around the audience and Penny and her dancers danced to club music in the darkened room with spotlights in Penny's play, "Bitch! Dyke! Fag hag! Whore!". Penny worked in the early days with Paul Thek, Jack Smith, and Andy Warhol among others. Which is why I know Warhol was a jerk, just like I always thought beyond the period I had in my early youth when I identified with him as a successful and "weird" gay man. But he was as anti-feminist in my opinion as the plague...

Anyway, back to your questions.

The feminist movement is an emancipation model and example for me. And the best one there is. A good friend, Semira Dallali did indeed teach me about the differences between liberal or progressive peoples, and radicals and activists (liberals=individual=idealistic, radical=materialistic=communal) and I find myself a combination of the two, which I think is a good place to exist. I call myself a profeminist because I have a penis and always have (had) as long as I have been alive in this incarnation, and I do not know many things about what is like to exist in this sexist world in a female body. But I want to come absolutely as close to that experience as I possibly can without changing or altering my physical body. The feminist movement stands for me as everything good in the world, and I am actually most interested in the behavioural aspects explored, like consciousness raising groups in the 1970's. In the performance you refer to (Town Hall...) I was actually, as I have done before and will do again, trying to take an art audience to a consciousness raising level or expansion. The feminist movement is a movement of diverse peoples trying to add good energy to the world. It is about balance, and righting wrongs not in a retrospective sense, or only in a retrospective sense, but on a daily basis. The aspects of femininity I mention are things like being the receptive or penetrated partner in physical sex. Some men still think they have the power over the person they penetrate, and they do not yet get it that it is meant to be a cooperation, physical sex, and not a power struggle. Power struggles are so deeply ingrained in our society that they have been eroticized quite cleverly in my opinion I must add. Power and hierarchy will always be there somehow, the questions are how to learn to live with this situation. I have been very intensely interested in what is called "looksism" which is the basis of judging people by their exterior physicalities. Just think of race, ethnicity, etc. And you can see the implications this has. But also just whether or not someone is considered attractive, questions connected to beauty. Because art (and to / for me also feminist art) is always about beauty questions—whether the work is about emotional radiance or the glory of life or the tragedy of failure and struggle / challenge...there is always an affirmative beauty message. Life is beautiful. Even when it is raw, rough, crude, "ugly" etc.

The feminist movement model has become for me a way of life. It is a way of living and believing and testing the world around me. And as I am an artist and I live this way, I become a feminist artist who learns from feminist models and examples. Specific people. Interconnected behaviour, one-on-one encounters and sharing in groups of all kinds and make-ups.

Again, the most broad way I can describe what the movement is for me is "ironing out the wrinkles and creases that have accumulated with thousands of years of human existence." Not that wrinkles and creases are unsavory or so, but what is required in the world that we live in today is smoothness. Balance. Equity. Peace. And real peace can be had in this world, it is a question of accepting the way things are and doing what you can to change them. I don't know of any other movement than feminism that works for this kind of thing, and the two indispensable words for me are feminism and art, because I believe those are two ways of living that go together perfectly and could actually make an earthbound person "angelic"...

Feminism and art are my religion. Female embodied presences, biological females, Women, this is where the stress must be until our out of balance world comes closer to balance, but the earth is also an entity, and all the creatures and living things on it. I have been thinking a lot about intersex people and the ecofeminist movement, anarchy also, and wondering how it is to live on a gender continuum which is not the either/or system we are used to. And also about not eating meat, and how I treat people, and if I can be “all things to all people”, and if my statements can also have power (as in Hannah Wilke’s case at times) if my statements are rhetorical.

I believe in dialogue where possible. I believe that men need to be deconstructed.

I am not sure if I believe anymore that we need more naked men in public, but I think it would at least provide some kind of strange balance. John Stoltenberg has performed workshops where he puts men in the position of women in pornography and advertising, to help them feel just how “awkward” those positions can be...I believe that more naked or nearly naked male models / men in public advertising etc. would help to “defuse” the shielded, veiled powers of the mythic male body...fear would be reduced and ameliorated I would hope. I think the problem is that the male body remains under a sort of “Durable Fig Leaf” (which is the title of a wonderful book written by a man) where the phallus (or “mind penis”) is still somewhat feared, by both men and women, and in control. I have had experiences that my erect penis in images has caused people to feel threatened, and this is simply wrong. As Carolee reminded me, the male penis erect is how men show pleasure – and pleasure is also another denigrated, disparaged, looked down upon aspect of human life.

I still think that both women and men, and people in general, are under considerable pressure to measure up to beauty and ideal body standards, and this is supremely damaging. It makes it hard to see how we can really relate to each other as people, and not as “scanned” objects under controlling gazes policed by the patriarchy/ies.

Some argue that part of the way we “look” at people and ourselves is conditioned by our animal selves, but I think this is an excuse and it could eventually change with different types of indoctrination as we are usually now given. Beauty in my opinion is a “whole package” issue, and I assume we all at some times would like to feel beautiful and desired and like we are part of something bigger than ourselves and that we even “fit in” somewhere...I am very pro-sex in this regard and think that pleasure and desire have been used for too long to manipulate us into spending money etc. instead of really looking at what we are doing and arranging alternative ways of being in the world pleasure and desire-wise. There is much work to do in this area, much research, trial and error testing etc. Age is one taboo that I think should be addressed more in (art) work these days, and I am personally for exploring more and more intergenerational relationships between consenting adults. And mentoring relationships in general where experience is shared.

A criticism I have of my own work is that I like to find things out for myself instead of taking them from books etc. I know much research and work have been done on beauty issues for instance, and I don’t want to “reinvent the wheel” as they say, but I find that theoretical work is best used applied in daily life. Monique Wittig’s book “The Straight Mind and Other Essays” from 1992 is my favourite resource still...

One more thing regarding the feminist movement as a whole: I think it is for me a disparate group of people, of all kinds, that are all looking for each other and some kind of connection. Feminism as a movement=equals=good. Patriarchy still equals bad. To me anyway, for me anyway.

I believe where feminism could go next as a movement is to enter into further and further dialogue and sharing of feelings and emotions. This is different than our mass culture of sharing like in Big Brother and reality TV shows. I make a distinction between these media

events and art because art in my opinion is the opposite and enemy and corrective for and to the media and advertising world.

I believe that feminists could approach things from an ever more personal level, this is threatening to the patriarchy's continuation. Male profeminists have a job to do too as far as this sharing of emotions and feelings goes. First we have to teach men more how to do this (share feelings and emotions), it's not only for the grrrls. ☺

John Cage said something like, "In trying to change the world you will only make things worse" and I somewhat agree with him the older I get. I believe that acceptance does not mean complacency or laziness. I think first accepting that things are not equal in the world is a precondition to working for the change that one person could do. I am very idealistic of course, and believe that if each individual worked for small change then big change would occur. This depends on many things, and this is when I revert to my "crazy artist" persona and say I do what I can—I am not a politician, and these are the real policy makers. I would love to go in dialogue with a politician, Gloria Steinem was an important influence for me growing up, Dian Fossey etc.

I believe a feminist is a role model, no matter what she does or what position she holds or how big her audience is. A feminist is a feminist in her own domestic environment, the basis of all life and life activities. This is where it all starts. And when I say "her" in my case I mean "he". I am very into the domestic, and realize that even when I saw commercials on TV in the 70's I thought I wanted to be a woman. I think I have gone far in my life in becoming that mythic woman I wanted to be.

I hope that the paragraphs above have provided an answer to your first paragraph of questions.

In your second paragraph I think I have answered everything except the last sentence / question. The first feminist movement, say the end 60's and 70's and into the early 80's, is very important because lots of these women are still alive and working and thinking and acting and behaving and interacting. We are in my opinion not in any kind of post movement but in a continuum, we are in state to extend foundational work that was done in these formative periods. I for instance think that possessors of penises for instance could do good with breaking things open for themselves and really looking at what happened in these early days, and making themselves somehow VULNERABLE. What I don't like today in art and politics is that it is still not sexy for men, even gay men, to be vulnerable and awkward and insecure and even depressed (modern condition brought on by capitalist stress). Men still don't seem to want intimacy much, and I even notice this sometimes within myself. But what I do to try to work on it is I make myself vulnerable as much as possible, an easy target, an example, a model, and when I speak with men or women I try to really connect. This sounds all so vague and sort of new age-ish, but is that a bad thing? I have found it very hard to love myself, and I think this is something a lot of intersectionally oppressed people struggle with. I believe with WASSINQUE INC. That with my husband Robin and cat Betsie we form a unit of society. A feminist unit of society.

We care, we want to do good in the world and for others and ourselves, and we work on love and care and adding good energy whenever we can.

One more thing, I wanted to demystify the interior of my body through the back / bottom hole because it is where I get the most pleasure and also because of Beatriz Preciado's statement in The Contrasexual Manifesto which says that the asshole connects us all. I'd like to talk more with women about anal sex. And many other things. I believe there are different models and ways of going about these issues. This is just the way I think I can be most effective and I

connect to younger artists like Elke Krystufek and Tracey Emin who owe a huge debt to the feminist art movement and the feminist movement in general.

What I don't like is when people define feminism and feminist art as one thing. This is fine for general definitions, to make things clear. But I think that following one's heart and filling in the blanks and making one's own version of feminism and feminist art is the key to success in a life well lived, and a soul examined, a feminist life.

I want to end with artist Harmony Hammond's definition of feminist art, which is the best short definition I have seen and makes things clear in English anyway, US American English, that had not been done before:

"Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art, and the Martial Arts", TSL Press (Time and Space Limited Press), New York City, 1984, p. 99::: "Feminism is the political analysis of the experience of being a woman in patriarchal culture. The main problem is that both the art establishment and the feminist community approach feminism as an aesthetic or a style.

But feminism is not an esthetic. It is the political analysis of the experience of being a woman in patriarchal culture. This analysis becomes a state of mind, a way of being and thinking when it is reflected in one's life. It can be articulated in art, and the art itself can in turn contribute to the process of analysis and consciousness. If art and life are connected, and if one is a feminist, then one must be a feminist artist--that is, one must make art that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture. The visual form this consciousness takes varies from artist to artist."

I realize this brings up more questions and reasons for dialogue. What is a woman, What could a woman be? Is this the answer, to change what it means to be a woman? Big questions. And is separatism the answer? Shall we all become homosexual? A friend says that overpopulation is our biggest problem. I wonder if this could be true? I in any case feel lucky in such a violent world to have made it to 36, and I think (remembering that Eva Hesse died at 35) that we should start remembering artists lives in the middle rather than a strong beginning and a weak end or so. Everything these days is so geared towards profit, professionalism, capitalism. I believe that as an artist I am more important as a "work of art" than my work. I believe in process, I believe in Hannah Wilke calling herself a "lunatic", I am more important as a living breathing human body than my art work physical objects.

And this for me is a feminist statement (and radically narcissistic but not egocentric in my case). It sounds a little defensive perhaps for an "easy target" but I think 'misunderstandings' of feminist politics and feminisms in general, including in art, all depend on the intentions of the person with the misunderstandings or confabulations or different perspective or whatever you might like to call it. I would like to in the near future do some rethinking over the concept of "good intentions" and see where this awareness brings me in my life and in relation to other people. There are a lot of "indefinables" simply things which cannot be defined and mean different things to different people. In that way I think intergenerational dialogue is an essential point of who I consider good feminist artists today. I feel like my favorites have all reached out to their predecessors. Acceptance of things as they are and as they feel is the first step. And many people have yet to take that step...I've had people say that my person and presence is more impressive than my physical objects, charming even (but there were others who hated both / all) and they are right, that is as it should be.

I know it sounds arrogant but I consider interaction with me to be an artistic and political litmus test, my main audience is and might always be my husband Robin. As he is my ideal as a person and makes me feel safe to express myself in all ways sentimental (which I got "permission" for from Carolee Schneemann, among so many other things)...I can often be

'childlike' which is one of the denigrated feminine traits so disparaged by the patriarchy and our world, an adult man who can still be optimistic, affirmative, open-eyed and supportive. This is important in teaching art (I often think I am a terrible teacher but I do my best) where as Carolee reminded me, "I am a teacher not a judge." Oh what do we as a world really need anyway these days? My answer would be "social visionaries", people who can think 'freely' and see themselves and the world in alternative, novel ways. This is just an intuitive answer, not a catch-all, I am for the integrity of people and the right to change opinions and learn and grow and hold a definite position but remain unfixed and in process. The only thing that we can be sure of in life is change itself. The power structure, especially in the art world, has never needed me, has not been able to incorporate me, and is essentially against what I am a "beauty warrior" for. I worry sometimes that I am too provocative, but if there is a strategy it is to open myself and be as honest and forthright as possible, and to erase the boundaries between my work and my life. When I was in my early 20's and had my first exhibit, "Sands Murray's Personal Artistic Business", in 1997, the curator (Martijn van Nieuwenhuijzen) wrote "it's not clear if Sands puts art in his life or life in his art". This is still true for me. I guess I am interested in deconstruction and looking very closely and very hard and focussed at what are considered intimate things in life (again intimacy as the denigrated feminine), stopping to analyze every moment and movement that I can and this makes it hard to rest but I am learning...I'm listening to Annie Lennox and The Eurythmics (first "Savage" and now "Heaven") as I type now and that seems fitting, alternating between this and a lounge playlist on [www.grooveshark.com](http://www.grooveshark.com). Music calms the savage beast. I love cliches! I feel like Eva Hesse in that I don't know how long I will live and this could be seen as prophetic. I feel a sense of urgency and even desperation in what I do as an artist / person. That has always been there and has always been the same. Most of all I think that my work will really only ever "mean" something when I am dead and gone as a living breathing body on the planet. When my energy goes into the atmosphere. I wish it was different sometimes because I struggle a lot and frequently and feel humiliated (an important emotion) that I have not become more self sufficient by the age of 36, but that is the way it is and I must accept this too. I think about capitalist consumption of which I am also supremely guilty, and I want to make my work and ideas difficult to consume for some reason which I am still exploring. I am limited in so many ways and like many others I would like to be unlimited. I work for that feeling of "unlimitedness", release, rapture even. I would venture that we all deserve that, human beings...

Language both written and spoken is crucial to the future I believe, as if we are all individually and as a social body "case studies". In many ways these answers and this text are an outline of my research interests. I would enjoy seeing more people answer the questions, "What is the feminist movement to you?" and "What is an informed feminist art practice to you, built on knowledge of foundational work?". I personally feel intuitive about my answers and feel that everything I need to know is contained in the idea of the consciousness raising group and the sharing of emotions, feelings and experiences in the 70's. That is why sometimes the question arises, "is the message more important or the aesthetics?" these days I answer "the message". There's a great book by Lucy Lippard called "Get The Message?" published in 1984 with some wonderful essays on political art. A lot of early feminist art was about bringing life experience into an art frame, as I understand it. I make my own work and think my own thoughts with this as inspiration. I do not want culture to be an "empty sign" or signifier or semiotic. I do not think we can avoid the naked stripped down body, because advertising will never let it go. I am still not sure if I understand or agree for instance with Mary Kelly's ideas about body representation. I want culture these days to be an actual message, saying something directly. No irony or cynicism. I want to take people at their words.

I could be so critical of my own words. Like that I connect feminist with “fringe” or the margins etc. But I think of Audre Lorde and the reality of the margins in the world, “You cannot dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools.”

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(Sands Murray-Wassink / Sands1974)