

Excerpted from

ART/WOMEN/CALIFORNIA

PARALLELS AND INTERSECTIONS

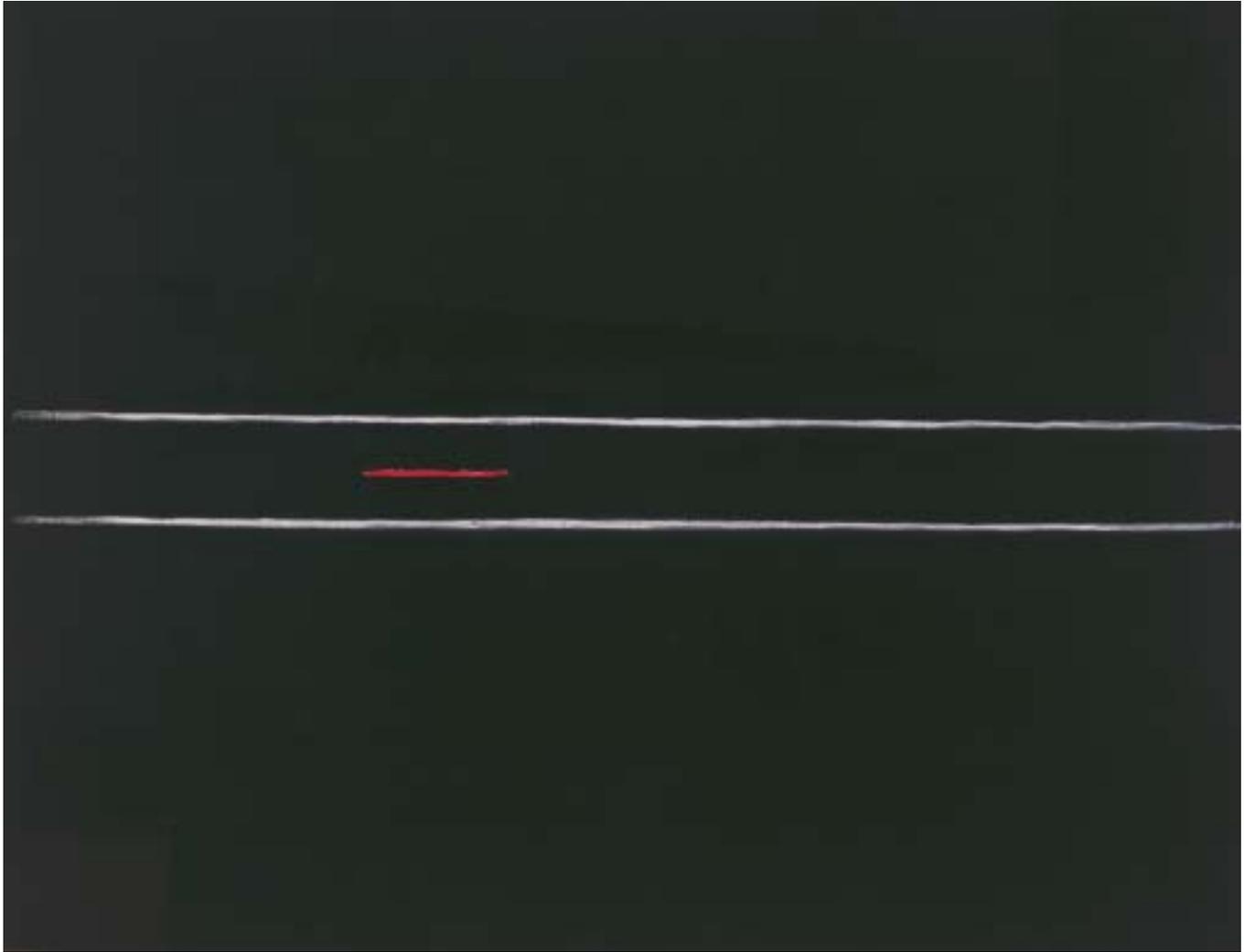
1950-2000



EDITED BY DIANA BURGESS FULLER AND DANIELA SALVIONI

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Mary Lovelace O'Neal, *Untitled, Plenum Series*, 1968–72. Charcoal and pastel on canvas, 7 x 14 ft. Photo: John Brain. Collection of the artist.

DANIELA SALVIONI

INTRODUCTION

Art in Context

Art/Women/California 1950–2000: Parallels and Intersections is a comprehensive survey of women artists working in California in the second half of the twentieth century who have contributed in dynamic and innovative ways to broadening the definition of art. We seek to reveal the richness of this period by contrasting and comparing these artists and their varied artistic practices in relation to the larger sociopolitical context. We present five parallel perspectives on this history, which reflect the distinct experiences of California's major ethnic and cultural communities, and investigate the points of intersection in shared themes and practices. We examine how women artists have been affected by the vast sociopolitical changes of the post–World War II era, which in California had a very distinct character, and how the ensuing events influenced the art they produced. Moreover, we trace the impact that these artists and their work have had on shaping both the California profile and the larger culture into what they are today.

We explore the conjuncture between place and artistic activity from multiple perspectives: thematic and formal, as well as social and historical. The California context has heuristic value both because of the set of factors that make the state unique and, conversely, because of the ways in which California functions as a microcosm of national and global sociopolitical developments.

In California, place is indexed to space. Poised at the edge of the continent, before

the earth's largest body of water, the land that is California offers a very palpable sense of exterior space. Physical space, the land's very physicality, presses itself on its inhabitants because there is simply more room out west, because the land has been subjected to obvious geophysical and man-made stress, because of the economic value of land due to California's robust agricultural and industrial sectors, and because it is the ground upon which so many of its immigrants toil. Space may also be seen as the locus of the body; that is, the corporeal as the place from which to move out into the world, which the feminist movement defined and which had a particularly significant impact on feminist art in California. Space may also be considered as interior, an inner sanctum, a site of personal freedom and introspection. In part this conception derives from the forms that spirituality takes in the non-European cultures that have been absorbed into California culture, and in part from the drive toward active spiritual self-definition forged in those idiosyncratic and unorthodox ways with which California is associated. And finally there is the newest definition of space, interactive and creative, but devoid of geographical space and unhinged from the limitations of the physical body, which comes to us via the Internet frontier, largely developed in California. In this volume, Jennifer Gonzalez, Amelia Jones, Pamela Lee, and Allucquere Rosanne Stone show how

the theme of space—physical, corporeal, spiritual, and virtual—reverberates throughout the art produced in California in the later half of the twentieth century.

The California art world—the real life structures within which its artists operate—has its own specificity. During the second half of the twentieth century, California became a mecca for art students because of its wealth of excellent art schools and its tuition assistance programs (by the 1990s greatly slashed). The schools encouraged the exploration of new artistic practices, rendering California an experimental hotbed populated by scores of young, ambitious artists. California's trove of nonprofit exhibition spaces, which arose in the 1970s, gave artists opportunities to show their work without commercial pressures. Its hitherto relatively undeveloped art market (this too began to change in the 1980s) rendered it an art environment that was underdetermined by exclusionary commodifying forces, compared to other art centers. These factors freed up artists to be as experimental as they wished, regardless of how commodifiable the results would be.

But, for all its specificity, California is also a place that epitomizes national and global trends, and indeed, often presages them. Deep demographic changes, the shift toward ever greater diversity and complexity with all its concomitant sociopolitical implications, are accelerated and

exacerbated in California but similarly are under way elsewhere in the United States as well as abroad. While California is at the vanguard of the information technology revolution, the technology is quickly adopted everywhere, radically altering the ways in which we all work and play. The state's extreme politics, and its late twentieth-century governors ranging from Jerry Brown to Ronald Reagan, were at first viewed as Californian oddities but no longer, particularly after Reagan captured the nation as president. Hollywood has made California into the engine of mainstream popular culture, while freedom of expression and the willingness to experiment in lifestyles and ideas have fostered a global "alternative" culture with a distinct Californian bent. California's role as sociopolitical crystal ball of the nation and its near-mythic role in the global cultural imagination are reflected in much of the work made there and in the influence art made in-California has on art generally.

The artists presented in this book form a heterogeneous group—diverse in age, ethnic background, cultural milieu, and formal artistic training. They are painters, sculptors, photographers, performance artists, installation artists, filmmakers, video artists, artists using new technologies, and graphic artists. Their works employ different artistic styles, content, modes of address, target audiences, and sites of interventions. When focusing on artists who may have little or nothing

in common aesthetically or culturally except for the fact that they are all women, there is the risk of over-determining the importance of gender. But, we eschew a single privileged optic and the search for a oneness of artistic vision whose homogenizing effects distort the complexity of reality. Rather, we examine the work in the larger context, taking into account how California history, politics, and economics have affected the artists' cultural formation and their artistic production. For instance, Amalia Mesa-Bains and Terezita Romo discuss how some Chicana/Latina artists critically address the structure of Chicano/Latino gender relations in their imagery and in the way they work. Similarly, while so much art of the 1980s addressed issues of cultural and sexual identity, which early feminist art had thematized in the 1960s and 1970s, we recognize its roots in historical developments running parallel to and/or preceding feminism (such as the Civil Rights movement, and anticolonial movements abroad) as well as in profound economic shifts.

From whence did the developments that fostered this artistic fermentation arise? World War II was a historic watershed for the United States because it marked the beginning of a profound economic and social upheaval that unleashed far-reaching demographic and cultural changes. The war effort spurred economic growth and social independence for both working-class and

middle-class European American women and to a lesser extent for men and women of color as well, who suddenly found themselves filling jobs previously reserved solely for white males. California was an important center of the military industrial complex, which drew workers from across the rest of the nation. At the same time, California's agricultural and industrial economies were burgeoning, which renewed immigration trends from Asia and both Central and South America. The sociopolitical and economic landscape that emerged in California after World War II stimulated a radical social activism, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, which triggered an enormous response by scores of women of all cultural backgrounds, prompting them to make art that reflected their personal experiences and/or often was politically charged.

What was the artistic climate women artists faced in the period covered by this book? By the 1950s, the institutionally sanctioned art world was no longer exclusively the province of well-to-do white men and recent emigrés from Europe but was, instead, becoming more diversified in terms of class. The postwar GI Bill of Rights afforded unprecedented numbers of middle-class and working-class veterans the luxury of training to become professional artists. By the 1950s American artists had established new ways of making and perceiving art that was no longer derivative of European art—the unbound expres-

sivity of abstract expressionism and subsequently the ironic complicity of Pop art were the cornerstones of a newfound autonomy. But, because they conceived of expressivity abstractly, these artists did not thematize personal subject matter or content as such. Moreover, until the feminist art movement, the sociological profile of the artists, while broadened, was still staunchly European-American and male. The rare exceptions in the earlier part of the postwar period were artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Louise Nevelson, and Lee Bontecou, who explored ways for making art unfettered by the male-dominated aesthetics of the time. But their work was marginalized and relegated to the status of curious asides in the official histories. Artists who did fit the dominant mold, like Helen Frankenthaler, were often dismissed as feminized versions of the "real" thing. Eva Hesse stands out for having incorporated a "feminized" aesthetic into post-minimalism and having been highly acclaimed by the mainstream art world. But she is the exception that proves the rule, for very few other women artists at the time achieved such recognition.

The social changes that swept the nation in the postwar era introduced "new" protagonists—women, peoples of color, gays and lesbians—onto the social stage. Against the background of the postwar economic boom and coupled with California's cultural openness toward the new, California became an environment where people

from diverse backgrounds were emboldened to create their own artistic vocabularies. The advent of the feminist explosion, which itself was born of the Civil Rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, was especially felt in California, particularly Los Angeles, which became a principal epicenter for a variety of feminist art practices, particularly performance.

Feminism forcefully made content, instead of abstraction, art's essential and critical component. Although the feminist movement was limited in its support of women of color, its ripple effect was to render personal experience acceptable subject matter for art. Moreover, it made women artists—whether overtly feminist or not—more visible en masse, bringing them greater public and institutional attention.

The struggle for civil rights and empowerment of people of color, which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, also inspired women of color to exercise their role as artists and to develop art practices that reflected and addressed their own specific concerns and interests centered on the issue of identity. But it was not until the latter part of the 1980s that the effects of these struggles were finally absorbed by the mainstream art world, and the excellence of the artistic reality promulgated interest and response. The issues and themes elaborated by artists of color began to be acknowledged; their opportunities for exhibiting increased; and they received greater critical

attention, though here, too, biases were not entirely expunged. Nevertheless, today the art world has been compelled to realize that seemingly neutral categories and distinctions ordinarily taken for granted in the hegemonic discourse on art were actually often exclusionary and restrictive.

The unique confluence of distinct energies and traditions of this period resulted in multiple challenges to the formal European modernist aesthetic that had dominated artistic creation, theory, and discourse. In their challenge to the established discourse, women artists employed strategies that had hitherto been downplayed, if not outright exorcised, from modernist art. With rising concerns over a host of issues—from environmental hazards to threats to community cohesiveness within the urban context—the notion that artists might have the ability to initiate social change suddenly became relevant again (after lying dormant since the 1920s). This radical new awareness must have been especially compelling to women artists, who had so much to gain from changes to the white male-dominated bastion of art.

Women artists started to break away from established formalist theory and to develop new styles, strategies, and goals which put personal experience at the center of the work, invoked narrative, incorporated folk and craft elements, critically appropriated media images, impelled attention from the media, performed concrete

bodily enactments, and made activism a viable art strategy. The art practices spawned by women artists anticipated and laid the foundation for contemporary art through the close of the century and beyond.

Issues of personal and/or collective identity have dominated much of the work produced in the period covered by this book. They are a constant theme, from the visceral performance-based work centered in Los Angeles's Woman's Building and the fictional personae developed in enduring performances sometimes lasting a year by artists such as Lynn Hershman Leeson and Linda Montano in San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s, to the plethora of 1980s and 1990s artists wrestling with the subject, including artists as different as Tran T. Kim-Trang, Kara Walker, Laura Aguilar, Jean LaMarr, and Diana Thater.

What is less obvious is the pervasiveness of identity issues lying beneath the surface. For instance, art involving new technologies raises identity issues on an interstitial level of the work. Free of prescribed frames of reference dictating the making and viewing of the art, art that employs new technologies is open to preoccupations that are excluded from the art historical cannon. It raises questions about the nature and the role of the collective and/or individual viewer and issues of what is deemed public and private. By contrast, traditional media tend to beg already prescribed responses by the artists and the tradi-

tional art viewer alike. Of course, this is not always true. Painters like Kim Dingle are finding subtle and provocative ways to use the traditional medium of painting that unsettle the traditionally conceived relation between art and viewer. And we can imagine a time, perhaps in the immediate future, when the "old new technology," like video, will become ossified and formulaic. Indeed, video is now on the verge of becoming technologically obsolete as new equipment and software become available, constantly challenging the artist with ever broader potential.

Exploding onto the art world in the 1960s, new technologies ushered in an array of new responses and new interlocutors which concretely shifted the identity of the targeted audience away from the circumscribed parameters of the past and engaged viewers who had hitherto been un- or under-addressed. "New technology" is a historical category that changes with time, but in the last four decades of the twentieth century it included video, computers and proto-computers, and communications technologies. California—with its culture of experimentation, its role in innovative technology and in generating popular media, and its wealth of new media facilities—has been a hub for new technology-based art. JoAnn Hanley, Nancy Buchanan, and Allucquere Stone discuss the conditions that first prompted women artists to use the new medium of video to document feminist performance-

based work of the 1970s, and then challenged them to explore new ways to create, to communicate, and to travel in the potentially infinite world of cyberspace.

Some women artists in California in the 1960s and 1970s turned their backs on “high art” by pursuing art’s capacity to affect the status quo through directly intervening into society, rather than speaking only from within its established venues. As creative agents for social change, artists such as Bonnie Sherk, Suzanne Lacy, Judith Baca, Helen and Newton Harrison and, more recently, Reiko Goto, Ann Chamberlain, and Susan Schwartzenberg have stretched the boundaries of art beyond the traditional and commodified confines, blazing a trail for art as a socially responsible activity. Curiously, during this period there were few comparable male artists developing art forms that intervened directly into society; German artist Joseph Beuys is the lone brilliant exception.

Social interventionist artists or, artists making social sculpture, like those mentioned above, create projects designed to initiate fundamental and concrete urban, social, and/or environmental change through social interactions that draw laypeople, the media, and/or government officials into the process. They take aim at specific governmental policies and social and ecological practices by targeting the source of the problem, often in dramatic and highly visible ways. More-



Kim Yasuda, detail from *The Canyon That Took the Place of a Couch*, 1999. Mixed media installation (foam, fabric, plastic, porcelain, cast plaster, resin, video projection), 12 x 18 x 30 ft. Art in General, New York.

over, instead of merely critiquing objectionable aspects of modern society, the most ambitious interventionist projects actually instantiate microcosmic examples of the changes they seek. Bonnie Sherk's "Farm" project, for instance, was a living example of an alternative form of community space which fostered creative and democratic interaction between people amidst environmental soundness. The notion of "retraditionalization" that Jolene Rickard discusses in this volume, referring to the political import of Indigenous artists' work, bears significant affinities to the "instantiating" aspect of social interventionist art. Some younger artists, such as Catherine Opie and Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, insert interventionist/instantiating modes back into the traditionally bounded art sphere by making discrete art objects that are metonymic of their communities. They "take over" pieces of the visual (art) domain by placing in it a lesbian and an Indigenous presence, respectively.

Political art is traditionally divided between art that is closely linked to grassroots organizing and that self-marginalizes itself from the art world, on the one hand, and art that functions exclusively from within the art world, relying on illusion and representation to affect political consciousness, on the other. Social sculpture marks a third way: it extends art into society, targeting policy and institutional practices directly, while remaining firmly committed to participating

in the discourse on art. The extension of art into society is the inverse of, for instance, Hans Haacke's art-based activism. While he performs an incisive critique of the vested corporate interests that underwrite art institutions, rather than dwell on the negative moment of critique, social sculpture concretely instantiates utopian alternatives.

The novel and audacious ways in which social sculpture has expanded the definition of art informs much of the most interesting work produced in the United States and abroad in the 1990s. But, what is perhaps most impressive is the fact that some of the interventionist artists discussed in this book have seen their work successfully and concretely affect public policy and institutional practice. In surveying the landscape of women artists working in California in the second half of the twentieth century, we find that issues of identity and social sculpture (cultural reflection upon and active intervention into the environment and the community) are among the areas where women artists have been their most experimental, ambitious, and innovative.

When planning a book, one never fully foresees all that the book will be. A text holds its own surprises, even for the editors. Unexpected parallels and intersections emerged in the course of the making of this book. One sub-theme that surfaced in a number of the essays is that of mentoring. JoAnn Hanley notes how women artists who

took up new technologies in the 1960s and 1970s sought each other out, freed as they were by working in a field devoid of “father figures.” Mentoring is also a persistent subtext in Theresa Harlan’s discussion of the struggle faced by Native artists. Judith Wilson invokes the importance of mentoring as a weapon against invisibility imposed on African American women artists. On the other hand, Allucquere Stone describes the Web as overrun by grrrl guerrilla artists who reject both “mother” and “father” figures.

Our project has three goals: (1) to consider the effects of sociopolitical forces on culture at large, on the artists, and on their communities of origin and/or choice; (2) to investigate commonalities of themes, issues, and practices among these artists, as well as the differences between their experiences; and (3) to examine how art by women in the last half century expanded the critical dialogue and aesthetic practices with new concepts, approaches, and perspectives.

Contributions to this book by twenty distinguished cultural figures document and assess the artistic responses by women artists to the shifting conditions of the post–World War II era and to California as a global microcosm of cultural innovation. Their voices are individual, distinct, unique, often complementary, and at times discontinuous, reflecting the complexity and variety of the art and the artists discussed.

The book opens with two overviews, one art

historical and the other political. Whitney Chadwick writes an art historical “anti-overview,” to borrow her term, that highlights five artists from the five dominant ethnic groups of California, who are considered as individual instances of their subcultures rather than as representative of a community. Angela Davis contributes a political perspective in which she provocatively suggests how labor struggles and aesthetic values might combine.

The book is organized into two main sections, “Parallels” and “Intersections,” which establish a grid of historical perspectives for placing the art within relevant sociopolitical trajectories.

The essays in the “Parallels” section, subtitled “Reconsidering the Terrain: Five Historical Perspectives,” examine how women artists from the five major ethnic communities in California—African American, Asian American, Chicana/Latina, European American, and Native American—in parallel fashion are historically influenced by their separate experiences within the California context, and how they in turn have left their distinct mark upon it.

Phyllis Jackson shows how the art of African American women, who she describes as multiply oppressed, sheds light on white bias in the media, art, and art history, as well as actively promoting positive Black imagery. Karin Higa discusses the work of Asian American women artists in light of their historical travails and experiences, while at

the same time commenting on the shortcomings of the homogenizing term “Asian American.” Laura Meyer looks at the peculiar predicament of European American women artists, at one and the same time relatively privileged because they belong to the dominant cultural group, and yet subordinate because their interests and concerns are still devalued. Artist and scholar Amalia Mesa-Bains illuminates how art making and the struggle for recognition and dignity are deeply intertwined for Chicana and Latina artists. Jolene Rickard examines how Native artists, as key agents in sovereignty building by Indigenous nations, break down the borders between art and life or community, which dovetails in interesting ways with similar efforts to break down the barrier between art and life undertaken by non-Native artists since the 1960s.

The “Intersections” part of the book opens with a section called “Ley Lines.” Ley lines are alignments of ancient sites stretching across the landscape. We took this as our metaphor for the deep-seated differences and unresolved issues that persist. They are the product of the specificities of particular histories, which is not to suggest that these conditions are self-caused, but that, once in place, they follow their own track. The “Ley Lines” section is not exhaustive; rather it merely gives a sense of the ongoingness of those issues that continue to agitate, even though seemingly absorbed into contemporary culture.

Amelia Jones discusses how feminist principles greatly influenced women’s artistic practices and the content of their work, but notes that feminist art is still barely acknowledged by academics and critics. This exemplifies the propagation of feminism’s unresolved issues. Terezita Romo analyzes the path-breaking course pursued by Las Mujeres Muralistas, the Latina artist collective, against the background of Latino culture’s specific gender biases. Theresa Harlan gives a poignant picture of the very real barriers uniquely confronted by Native artists to this day. Judith Wilson shows how the unique invisibility of black women artists has been fabricated and imposed.

The second part of “Intersections” is called “Themes and Practices”; in it we trace some of the more compelling points of contact between the work of various artists, in terms of the themes they raise and the artistic practices they employ. In surveying the field, we found that there tends to be more overlap among artists engaging in nontraditional art practices than traditional ones, and this is reflected in the type of work discussed in this section. Place, space, and technology enter into the field as legitimate “canvases.”

Jennifer Gonzalez discusses artists who metonymically engage land in their work as culturally laden subject matter, in contrast to the dumb primary material it has been for 1960s male Earth Artists. Sandra Phillips points out how the sug-

gestion of narrative is effectively mined by artists whose work is indexed to the notion of photograph as documentation, from Jay DeFeo to Carrie Mae Weems. Film scholar and critic Rosa Linda Fregoso's tour de force essay rounds out our discussion of women artists' contribution to visual culture by taking a panoramic view of women's film in California in this period. Pamela Lee discusses the quasi-spiritual vein that traverses the art of some women artists in California, and how this aligns with the concept of space as redefined in the technology of the Internet. In a recorded e-mail conversation, scholar Moira Roth and artist Suzanne Lacy illustrate how West Coast women's performance art enacts a paradigm shift from the 1960s "post-modern" variant associated with New York, toward a more activist form. JoAnn Hanley clearly demonstrates the pioneering role of women artists in the history of technology-based art, against mainstream assumptions to the contrary. Similarly, Nancy Buchanan explodes the myth that video art is a white bastion, revealing it to be at the forefront of critiques of the Other in art.

The epilogue by Allucquere Rosanne Stone looks into the future with a tantalizing discussion of the creative and freeing aspect of the construction of gender, opening up the definition of woman to womyn. She underscores how woman/womyn is a mutable political construct, a battleground, and the basis for creative acts,

especially in relation to new technology's ability to spawn entirely new interactive communities unattached to physical locus and the constraints that come with it.

The method adopted in this book combines the use of updated art historical criteria with a sensibility that identifies and cherishes differences. We seek to locate the social forces underpinning the relations of power that are infused in society at large and the art world in particular, in an effort to expose—and undermine—the hidden biases lurking beneath tacit assumptions about "the norm" or "ground zero" in art. In many ways, the artworks presented here perform similar critical dialogues.

To achieve a comprehensive survey, we adopted a three-pronged strategy—by our selection of the writers, the artists, and the work: (1) We invited writers who are prominent in their fields and who write from different positions of ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class. They come from California's five dominant ethnic communities—African American, Asian American, Chicana/Latina, European American, and Native American—and this is reflected in the structure of the "Parallels" section of the book, where the writers discuss work from their own communities of origin. In addition, Davis's overview provides a class perspective, and Stone's epilogue speaks from a position of defined sexuality and gender. (2) The artists come from a wide array of cultural

and ethnic backgrounds and exist within different artistic, political, sexual, and cultural communities. (3) The work presented in this volume includes all contemporary genres of visual art. It is varied in form and content. We went beyond the mainstream galleries, exhibition spaces and art publications, to the streets, local communities and independent initiatives to find work for inclusion. As a result, the book contains institutionally sanctioned art alongside art that lies outside of mainstream circuits, without placing one over the other.

We sought to identify work for inclusion in the book that has affected the greater collective discourse of art and, in the process, has transformed our perceptions, disrupted stifling norms, and/or revitalized art's connection to its surrounding community. Our desire to be comprehensive does not sacrifice quality in the art. But in order to accommodate the gamut of artistic practices employed in the latter half of the twentieth century, we needed a notion of quality that is not reducible to the restrictive traditional formalist criteria of Western Modernism. Our notion of quality had to take into account content, process, practice, and the context of the artist's self-defined community—aspects that contemporary art has raised as important to our evolving notion of what constitutes art. But, at the same time, we do not do away with formal art historical criteria. Rather, we underscore the importance of the

aesthetic dimension in rendering the work appreciable to those outside of specific traditions and/or experiences. In this collection of essays, we document and critically evaluate the strength and importance of these artists' work, not all of which has received adequate critical attention.

In selecting artists for inclusion in the book, our criteria had to be both elastic enough to accommodate vastly different art projects, yet strict enough to be useful in defining artistic value. For us this meant that the work needed to signal an important stage of development, a cultural turning point, and/or an achievement that reflects the unique experience of each artist. The field of potential artists for consideration was limited, of course, to artists who have worked in California for some time, but also included artists who have made work there which has had significant ramifications for the art public, for the artists' own work, and/or for other artists (as is the case, for instance, with Ann Hamilton and Faith Ringgold). We only considered artists who reference their work to an art context, even if antagonistically. We had no wish to "import" makers of artisanal or ritualistic objects into a Western-conceived art context—which we deem replete with problems. (However, in some cases, especially with some Native American artists, the work may also function in ritualistic or artisanal ways, as well as referring to an art context.) But,

the flexibility of some of these criteria means that their application is neither conclusive nor infallible, and undoubtedly there are deserving artists who have been overlooked. For this, we are sorry.

Certain themes recur throughout much of the work presented and discussed here. They include: reclamation and affirmation of the artist's particular heritage, experience and identity; (re)presentation and deconstruction of objectification, stereotyping, sexuality and the body; political resistance and protest; appropriation and subversion of hegemonic cultural icons; cultural critique, particularly of Eurocentric art historical traditions and masculinist media imagery; personal and autobiographical narrative and/or the elaboration of fictitious personae; preservation and reclamation of the urban and natural environment; ideas of public vs. private spheres; exploration of the expressive potential of new or previously devalued forms, materials and techniques; and reconsideration and reconfiguration of our relationship to space. A comprehensive look at contemporary art in California reveals to us new criteria for evaluating and classifying art that counter the prejudices of Eurocentric Modernism. It prompts us not to limit ourselves to the physical object—which is

the basis of both Western formalism and craft-oriented practices, but also not to discard traditional art historical criteria entirely. Rather, it prompts us to combine those criteria with a consideration of the extended context of each work and the perspective (whether individual or collective) of each viewer—thus expanding the critical discourse.

In the second half of the twentieth century, California became a supportive environment for artists. California's culture of experimentation, its proximity to centers of technology and media, its role as gateway for a myriad of immigrants, its history of social activism and alternative institutions—all contributed to a climate of unprecedented openness in which sizable numbers of women from diverse cultural groups found ways to establish new aesthetic practices of their own. In multifaceted ways, individual strands of autobiographical discovery have been recast as part of the identity of an entire culture. In the context of great social transformations, the artists discussed in this book have enhanced our appreciation of California as a global cultural and sociopolitical microcosm, and have helped to empower us to imagine future possibilities for the new millennium.