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MINE

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by
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OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

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Introduction

This support paper is divided into three chapters. The first two, “In relation to Feminism” and “In Relation to Self-Portraiture,” served to answer questions that I had when I began this program two years ago. In critical conversations the issues of Feminism and Self-Portraiture would come up again and again. I wanted to be able to situate myself in relation to these theoretical debates.

Although there is an autobiographical component to these two papers, they do not truly delve into myself as a person. And really it is the person Terra who made the art initially and had to answer to theory after the fact. For this reason I have also included an introduction to me, as a person in the last chapter, “Mine.” This last section of my paper is not written academically but rather gives a narrative of how I see things around me; I hope this illustrates for you how I gather information that is then put into my paintings. My paintings are in no way direct records of my experiences. But my experiences do alter my perception, which, of course affects the way I make work.

Chapter 1: In Relation To Feminism

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

The main point of this chapter is to situate myself and my work in relation to Feminism. I am concerned with Feminism because it is the first canon that I am placed into, as a young, white, woman studying in the visual arts. My other concern with Feminism is it is the first critique that my work is subject to. But instead of being comforted by Feminism, I feel alienated. Alienated because I can't place myself within the Feminist ideology. And like myself, my work does not speak of or to Feminism. I suppose I feel alone because there just aren't that many options out there for women. It's either Feminism or nothing.

Today in 2001, two major ideologies that artists are faced with are Postmodernism and Feminism. Linda Hutcheon is a feminist critic. She defines ideology to be: "(an) all-informing complex of social practices and systems of representation."¹ Hutcheon also believes that "art forms cannot change unless social practices do." These passages set up the complex relationship between society's effect on the artist, and the artist's effect on social change and criticism. This circular relationship is the focus of my research.

Feminism since the 1960's has condemned cultural production that validates

patriarchy. Conflict arises between Postmodernism and Feminism, because the former rejects the notion of a privileged stand, therefore, does not advance the Feminist argument - that women have been viewed traditionally as the "other" in relation to the socially dominant male. The Feminist critique doesn't allow someone like me to join in, because even though I can sympathize, I haven't had the experience of feeling like the "other".

Postmodernism seems to be an all-accepting bricolage, based on an individual's relationship to the status quo. Today there is a new status quo, and Feminism is a part of it. Tradition has changed and now the "other" no longer applies to a person such as myself. It's important to recognize Postmodernism. However, my concern lies with Feminism, so now, I will turn the focus of my writing to that issue.

During my undergraduate degree I was encouraged to heighten my knowledge of the Feminist fight for equality. Instructors lectured on Feminist essays written by Dale Spender and Linda Hutcheon. Studio Profs cited examples from Kiki Smith, Hana Wilke, Ana Mendieta, and many other women artists, who work from a Feminist perspective.

What spurred me into writing this essay was an article published in the spring of 1999 in *Art Journal* called "Re-Viewing The Nude" by Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik. Leslie Bostrom is an assistant professor at Brown University and Marlene Malik is an associate professor of art at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island². These critics are educators; their views, therefore, reach the classroom. Bostrom and Malik are concerned with the politics of the female nude/body and how it is presented in art. They say:

As artists and educators, we must reexamine the implications of this phenomenon [philosophy of life drawing], and look at how we can strategize and perhaps reconstruct and rerepresent the figure. ³

These women use the Feminist critique to examine the use of the nude by men and women in contemporary and historical art.

This article reiterates ideas that have been in existence for thirty years and actually requotes them. This article is one example of today's representation of Feminist theory by educators and critics in the arts. To summarize their argument Bostrom and Malik provide a list of "Pedagogical Suggestions" The following selection is from Bostrom and Maliks' suggestion list:

1. Students are given articles on the history of modeling and the class discusses these articles before the model is brought into the class. The discussion could include exploration of the student's expectations, even the obvious eroticism. The model then has a new context and a new tradition. The model is introduced to the students by name.

11. The student is asked to pick a partner and then create a drawing of the partner in drag. Drag is interpreted very loosely. Here we are trying to undermine the ideal of the true self and also examine gender cues.⁴

My educators both male and female used these suggestions and others on the list. So the list and the Feminist theory that underlies it is not new to me. Part of my goal in this paper will be to show that Bostrom and Malik and other Feminist critics have not changed their Feminist views to match the changes that Feminism has contributed to society. Society has evolved. So should Feminism.

It's disappointing. I've found no new thoughts or ideas published on this issue. These women are not wrong in writing their opinions, but they aren't being counterbalanced by anyone with fresh views on the issue. The only information that is readily available is from a generation that has had to fight tooth and nail in order to change the status quo. I know that I'm not the only person who feels this way in regards to new material on women in the arts. It seems that unless a personal library is compiled that scholarly sources on this issue are few and far between. I think that my own research in my studio practice offers a fresh view on the subject.

As a painter my interest lies in Feminist theories that review the use of the female

nude/figure/body in contemporary and historical art and discuss how those ideologies relate to my pursuit of art theory and practice. Common themes that I have encountered across in my life and education are eroticism, the prefix "re", gender stereotypes, and issues that surround the model. Some of these themes can be applied to women artists like myself today; and some can't because they are outdated. The point of this exercise is for me to exercise my right to decide what applies to me as an artist who is a woman.

I am working out of a historical context of women like Frida Kahlo, an early Twentieth-century Mexican woman painter.⁵ Kahlo understood the art movements around Her but chose not to participate in them. For example, many critics believed Kahlo to be a surrealist, because her works were similar in aesthetics to surreal art. Take for example her *Self- Portrait With Cropped Hair* (1940). Here Kahlo depicts herself in a man's suit with her long hair cut in shreds around her. Kahlo herself is the one with the scissors. Perhaps in 1940, a woman portraying herself as a man could be seen as surreal but Kahlo denied having fantastical, dreamlike sources and instead she believed that she was painting her own reality.⁶ I feel that I mirror Kahlo in this respect: it would seem appropriate that I'd embrace Feminism, but my source is not the idea of "other", my source is the experience of my body. The confusion lies in the fact that a body like mine has up till now been viewed as the "other".

The following case study illustrates the generation breakdown of female stereotypes that I have encountered at a primary level. This personal history is relevant in understanding my view, my perception of my body and myself.

My grandmother stayed at home her entire life. She cooked. She cleaned. She took care of her husband, her children and her children's children until the day she died. She was a well of knowledge and selflessness. I would be hard - pressed to find another person like her. My Grandmother was the cornerstone of our family. She lived in and through the old female stereotype that Feminism has torn down.

My Mother was a single parent. My Mother had many obstacles to overcome.

She had to earn money in a field dominated by men, but that didn't stop her. She was a self-employed businesswoman in the commercial arts field. I watched my Mother pull silk screens larger than her with no assistance. I watched her succeed in other arenas that were once dominated by men, such as sports. As a child my Mom attended a Catholic convent school and the sisters would not allow girls to take gym classes. Years later she won the bronze medal at the Canada Winter Games in downhill skiing. My Mother was a trailblazer. She was a radical. She placed herself in arenas that were dominated by patriarchy. She did this because she wanted to claim her right to choose to do this.

But she wasn't alone. Other women in her generation faced similar hardships. Some were artists such as: Hana Wilke, Judy Chicago, Carolee Schneeman, and Mary Scott. Some were art critics like: Lucy Lippard, Lynda Nead and Linda Nochlin. Some had nothing to do with art and weren't famous either, for example my best friend's Mother - Paula. However, all these women contribute into how I define my role as a person/ artist today; they were and are my role models. The point is that Feminism was not only taught to me in school, I grew up with it. To me, it's natural, it's normal.

Now women my Mother's age are educators and professionals. They have enabled me to have a different perception of myself as a woman than those that came before me. They broke down barriers. Because of them, I don't believe that I am a part of the marginalized group called "other". I believe a woman's' perspective is part of the status quo. Women in my generation have the benefit of the history that came before us, a history created by Feminists.

I was raised to know that I could do anything. I was raised to never be ashamed of who I am or what I feel. I was raised to know that I could succeed at my dream as long as I worked for it. I was raised by my Mother. My Mother was a Feminist, but I am not, if Feminism is unwilling to accept this view from a woman experiencing a changed society.

RECLAIMING/ REVISITING:

A Discussion About Women and Their Relationship to Erotic Art and Pre-history

Lucy Lippard is an important Feminist critic. She has been actively writing about women and their role in art for thirty years. Her views are revolutionary to some people even today. Her arguments have helped form the Feminism that is part of today's status quo. In this chapter, I will be addressing Lippard's *The Pains and Pleasure of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art* and *Feminism and Prehistory*. The former argues women artists have reclaimed their bodies through body art; the latter argues that women have revisited history through the artistic investigation of pre-history.⁷ While reclaiming validates women's claim over their bodies, revisiting validates the study of pre-history by women in the arts. The issues of reclaiming and revisiting are related, but still distinct.

These two ideas are related because they evolved out of Feminist theory, and both use "re" to attach feminist beliefs where once only a patriarchal view existed. The terms of reclaiming and revisiting are key to Feminist theory. In turn, the prefix "re" is the key to these words. By employing the prefix "re" Feminist scholars claim ownership of the root word. Feminism confronts the issue of claim over the body, and women reclaim the body as their own. Feminism confronts the issue of pre-history, and women revisit pre-history to claim a history of their own.

In 1973 Lippard stated "I have no strict definition of 'body art' to offer."⁸ To inform her discussion on the body as a source of inspiration and exploration. She uses examples of all types of art done by men and women that range from using the body as a performance piece to using representations of the body. Lippard's essay focuses on artists who are concerned with sexual and personal freedoms. Lippard uses the example of Carolee Schneemann, a '60s performance artist. Schneemann used her body to explore Goddess Lore.⁹ In her performance *Eye Body* (1963), she had snakes crawl over her nude body to reflect on the fertility symbol of the serpent and the serpent's relation to woman and goddesses. In the '70s Lippard felt that society was unable to accept this erotic type

of expression by women.

Artists like Carolee Schneemann needed a sanctuary where they could be taken seriously as artists. A statement by Body Beautiful (Schneeman's pseudonym) demonstrates this need. Schneeman stated:

...the life of a body is more *variously* expressive than a sex-negative society can admit. I didn't stand naked in front of 300 people because I wanted to be fucked, but because my sex and work were harmoniously experienced....¹⁰

Schneeman made this statement because she was ridiculed. She wanted to clarify the difference between her art and what others perceived to be a display of eroticism. Lippard's influence as a critic helped these artists. It provided them with a sanctuary so they could pursue reclaiming the body. Schneeman's statement and Lippard's writing are important because they allow me to understand the difference between a woman's perception of herself then, compared to my perception of myself now.

What I chose to take from Lippard's discussion *Feminism and Prehistory* was her definition of Feminism. This definition is helpful because it allows a person to understand the focus of Feminism, which sometimes gets lost in broad, complex critiques. Feminism was really about women gaining the right to have choices and options. It was about breaking out of a culturally imposed mold. Lippard speaks to this, when she says:

[Yet] Feminism is about changing the negative impact of such notions (destructive stereotypes), about controlling our own lives and products and public images, within a framework of social responsibility to all people.¹¹

I can appreciate this statement because it is noble and open-minded. It doesn't exclude anyone and doesn't judge anyone, based on gender. It points out how women were marginalized. This statement can still be effective today, because of its universality.

Even though Lippard's writings inform the thoughts of today, they don't encompass them. I have inherited the ideas about body art and prehistory. The ideas

encompassed by reclaiming and revisiting have been done and well accepted, in my experience. Therefore, it would be redundant for me to reclaim or revisit. In a sense it would be a lie since the reclaimed bodies and revisited histories were part of my natural perception.

RECYCLING:

A Discussion About The Originality of the Feminist Critique

Another "re" that Feminists seem to like is recycling. No, this is not a new type of Feminist art, but a type of Feminist critique. I respect Lippard's insights into Feminist art, but I disagree with Feminist critics recycling her ideas for twenty-six years. One such quote that is continually recycled --the latest in the spring of 1999-- is something that Lippard observed in 1976, concerning women artists use of eroticism in their work. Here is what Lippard wrote:

A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation, from women's use of women to expose that insult.¹²

Lippard first made this observation, back in 1976, so that the line between pornography and erotic art could be defined. She was defending Body artists such as Carolee Schneeman. Lippard was pointing out the small gray area that separated erotic art from pornography, and defending a woman's right to do this type of art.

This comment had to be made and it should be remembered because it allowed erotic art a space where it could be accepted without exploiting the female subject or using the explicitness as a source for arousal. I infer that Lippard made this statement with the knowledge that Feminism would be unable to conform all viewers of erotic art to an acceptable (as mentioned above) way of thinking. It's a fact. We cannot expect everyone to approach art of any kind in only one way. Today artists like those mentioned above and their contemporaries will still fall into the fetish category for many viewers

who are ignorant of the Feminist movement. So Lippard's statement was vital and necessary for its time. Is it still so today?

While reading the article *Reviewing The Nude* I was struck to find Lippard's quote as cited above.¹³ Finding this quote in texts that referenced each other made me question the originality and evolution of the Feminist critique. Bostrom and Malik cite Nead as a source, Nead cites Saunders as a source and Saunders cites Lippard as a source. If these women have all read each other's texts and respect each other's ideas why are they repeating each other? The answer I found was in where each of the critics pushed their individual discussions. Through appropriation critics attempted to further the discussion.

Bostrom and Malik connected Lippard's statement to women artists who painted the female nude. Such artists, in their opinion, do not succeed in furthering Feminist beliefs. Bostrom and Malik cite the work of Suzanne Valadon, an artist from the 1920s, who moved in circles where she and her work attracted attention from Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas.¹⁴

In their opinion Valadon's use of the nude does not differ in appearance from what a male artist may paint.¹⁵ And I must agree that when I look at *Nude* (1926) it doesn't seem like Valadon painted her nudes differently from her male contemporaries. But how could she in 1926? Feminism was not a support for this artist at this time. Why go after an artist from the 1920s? I think that Bostrom and Malik work out of context here. This is an unfair judgment on Valadon because she is working far before the liberation of Feminism. Why aren't they questioning contemporary women artists? I feel that they attack Valadon because she is vulnerable, and she isn't around to defend herself. A successful artist today would have to consider Feminism, just as she would any other ideology such as: Formalism, Modernism, Postmodernism, and Racism. Bostrom and Malik in my opinion are one example of Feminist theory in 1999, one that continues to employ repetition instead of pushing forward into contemporary society and issues.

Gill Saunders is a Feminist Critic who writes on the female nude in art. I read her book *The Nude: A New Perspective* for this essay. Saunders believes that artists use their own bodies out of fear, because if they don't they can't escape traditional objective relationships between the artist and model. She states:

Awareness of this danger (sexual titillation) has lead most artists working with the nude to use their own bodies as subjects, and by doing so they escaped the traditional artist/model, subject/object relationship, using the body as a locus in which the art and artist are interchangeable.¹⁶

Saunders's analysis doesn't seem in tune with Lippard's original observation. Saunders takes Lippard's quote as a warning and exiles artists who use the nude directly into a negatively charged arena, one controlled by fear. I see by using himself or herself the artist can be distanced from the traditional thought of model as fetish object.

If an artist is using her own body she has decided to become the model, not erase the line between the roles. In fact, she has become limber at jumping over the line of the relationship from one to the other. The difference that Saunders should be citing is that this objectification of the model, the self, is not a negative experience because she has consented to becoming the model. Now the model has rights. Now the model has choices. The model can, literally, model behavior that ranges from the innocent to the salacious, and much more.

I would like to examine another point raised by Saunders. She makes an absolute statement that does not hold up when she says:

The use of one's own body is inevitable when the aim is to explore the relationship between individual experience and the social construction of femininity; at the same time it avoids, or tempers, the accusations of exploitation which surround man-made images of the female nude in feminist criticism.¹⁷

An artist doesn't *only* have her body if she wants to combat the social construction of femininity. Jana Sterbak is a Canadian artist who employs the symbol of the dress to

combat society's construction of femininity. The following statement made by critic Ihor Holubizky describes the power of Sterbak's dresses:

The body, for Sterbak is the focus where all these manifestations of cultural and social contradictions are channeled... The body becomes the target and vehicle for exorcism. We can, in some rationalization of our beliefs, separate The Body from the Spirit. But in these works, the Spirit (meaning) is still in evidence in the inanimate object.¹⁸

Holubizky's statement shows that Sterbak's use of the dress, in her works *Flesh Dress* (1987) and *I want you to feel the way I do...* (1985), communicates her individual experience of her body when subjected to stereotypes.

The *Flesh Dress* made out of meat, it raises the idea of a woman's appearance as a consumable item in society. Sterbak's exploitation of this feminine symbol combats social constructions of femininity well. As the meat desiccates and decays viewers are assaulted by the smell of rotting meat, an undesirable smell in society. Just as the stereotype of femininity is undesirable when it's forced upon women.

Sterbak's dress *I want you to feel the way I do...* is another powerful announcement against social constructions of femininity. This dress looks more like a tool of torture than a garment, with its steel mesh and hot electrical wires. Her expression of the feminine as hurtful expresses her feelings of being forced into a stereotype, that she has no choice. A dress when employed in this manner can become a formidable adversary to social stereotypes. I feel that Sterbak's works contradict the previous statement by Saunder's.

**READDRESS/REDRESS:
A Discussion of Protocol Surrounding The Nude**

Another similarity that links Bostrom, Malik, Saunders and Nead together is their arguments that focus on the presentation of the female nude in books that focus on ideal form and figure drawing. All four attack *The Nude*. This book by Kenneth Clarke,

published in 1956, heightened people's appreciation of classical painting and sculpture. Clarke is important because Bostrom and Malik feel he was a direct influence on traditional protocol that's used when observing the female nude.¹⁹ They believe that Clarke's book has paved the way for books and education that set up the phenomenon of aesthetic distance. The point that Bostrom and Malik make is:

We propose to critique the defective vision of aesthetic distance in viewing the nude. Aesthetic distance refers here to the tradition of seeing the nude as unnaled, as an arrangement of formal elements. Aesthetic distance is a device used to convince us that unclolhed bodies used in the classrooms are neither sexual, social, nor political; they are exempt from common human behavior.²⁰

The critics mentioned above are reacting to statements made by Clarke such as:

To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the work implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word "nude" on the other hand carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body; the body re-formed.²¹

The previous two statements are in contrast to each other. Clarke believes that in the context of education the word "nude" is a confident body; in contrast to "naked" a body deprived of clothing. Bostrom and Malik believe that the phenomenon of Aesthetic distance is what allows the tradition of seeing the model as unnaled. In their opinion aesthetic distance is "defective". They feel that a body shouldn't be observed formally but rather essentially. These women don't agree with methods of instruction that objectify the body. I can't agree with Bostrom and Malik because the skills that go along with figure drawing would be lost.

Lynda Nead, author of *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, also responds to Clarke's quote as cited above. Nead believes that if one follows Clarke's formulation the nude becomes the body clothed in art. The relationship that's observed by Nead is "... (naked) is the denotative term to the connotation of the nude."²² I can agree

with Nead's comment in principle. The nude really is naked. But if she is using the same definition of naked that Clarke did, then figure drawing would connote a cruel and hurtful act. When really it denotes an analysis of form.

Bostrom and Malik say that Lynda Nead gives a "sound feminist critique..." of Clarke and I agree in some respects.²³ For example, Nead believes Clarke's first mistake is to describe the study of the female nude as "less intellectual" than the male nude.²⁴ Nead's problem with Clarke is that he reinforces the gender stereotypes that have existed in the tradition of art. She comments on this in the following statement:

It is in the process of dropping the gendered Prefix - the moment when the female nude becomes simply 'the nude' - that the male identity of artist and connoisseur, creator and consumer of the female body is fully installed.²⁵

Nead dislikes Clarke's generalization that 'the nude' refers only to the female nude, and therefore brings into play issues of the male gaze and "Ideal form". Therefore, I believe that sexual exploitation is the real enemy in Nead's discussion.

Kimon Nicolaides, author of *The Natural Way To Draw* (a book written in 1938), is cited by Bostrom and Malik to have also had an influence on traditional protocol, but his was defined in the classroom and in the do-it-yourself genre of writing.²⁶ Bostrom and Malik argue against the traditional protocol that has been used in class situations that involve a model. They oppose pedagogical suggestions that imply the model is lifeless, such as: the formulation or deconstruction of the female nude into geometrical shapes, because these suggestions imply the model (assumed female) to be an object. The key problem with Clarke and Nicolaides is that they offer no view into the sensuality of the figure.

I would pick up Clarke if I wanted to learn about classical painting and sculpture. But it wouldn't be my bible if I wanted to know about the female body, because I'm not convinced of his credibility in all areas. For example, Clarke attempts to point out the difference in proportions between the Greek and Gothic idea of the female nude. But I

would take his writing with a grain of salt when I read passages like:

The basic pattern of the female body is still an oval, surmounted by two spheres.²⁷

Or:

One of the few classical canons of proportion of which we can be certain is that which, in a female nude, took the same unit of measurement for the distance between the breasts, the distance from lower breast to navel, and again from the navel to the division of the legs.²⁸

Kimon Nicolaides mirrors Clarke's clinical approach in describing the female body:

There is much talk about beauty and much talk about truth, but all the student need concern himself with is reality - that natural reality which he recognizes in normal everyday life and which establishes itself in his mind through his senses.²⁹

I take into account when reading this material that these men don't know better than to deconstruct the female body. They are important because they allow me to understand the idea of "other". But it is because of the practices of earlier Feminist critics that the idea of "other" has not continued through generations to reach me. The way Clarke and Nicolaides talk about the body is definitely distressing, which is why Linda Nead gave Clarke a curt review. But we also must realize that Clarke and Nicolaides were immune to Feminism. To them women were objects, when these books were written there was no existing model that shed light on the experience of the female body.

Also, the main goal of Clarke and Nicolaides was not to put women in their place, but to inform their audience on the nude. Now anyone who wrote like these guys would be considered outdated and not credible, ignorant of the male gaze, ignorant of Feminism. Which is why I wouldn't refer to them when I was searching out information on the body.

It seems to me that there is a dualistic study of the female nude now. One is the study of the appearance of the female figure - that which Clarke and Nicolaides attempt to shed light on - and the other is the study of the experience of the female body. Now the

female body is a phenomenon successfully explored by artists such as Kiki Smith and Jana Sterbak.

In many women artists work I see that the ideas of the figure and the body are closely related but still distinct. The main difference between them is the focus. One could look to Kiki Smith's *Untitled (Train)* (1993). Smith approaches the female body in a contemporary manner. In *Untitled (Train)* the viewer is focused on a sculpture of a life-size woman's figure out of which is flowing several red cords. The cords illustrate the blood lost while menstruating. The cords coming from the figure illustrate the bodily function that women share in common. Women also share the concealment of menstruation. By putting this intimate bodily function on display I see her not only drawing on the common issues that women share. She also makes this otherwise mundane experience precious. Here the female figure is an image employed in art where the focus is not on the *appearance* of the body, but rather the *experience* of the female body.

Artists like Smith allow me to agree with Bostrom and Malik, at least when they discuss the experience of the body. The following statement puts into words issues that the male gaze and ideal body have overlooked:

The bareness of the naked body can sum up everything to which we aspire and everything we most fear. The body is the source of our deepest pleasures and traumas; our experience of the world is set by the way we experience our bodies. To be naked can mean humiliation, discomfort, or exposure, but it can also satisfy some of our most profound narcissistic and intimate needs. To see another person naked can reassure or alarm, satisfy curiosity or provoke guilt, arouse desire, disgust or both. The body preserves the memories of lost wholesomeness and carries the seeds of our death.³⁰

This positive, sensitive and original statement is what I would like to see Feminism promote. Because of Feminism there is the beginning of an understanding of the difference between the figure and the body. So...Feminists should celebrate! Feminism

has triumphed and critics/ educators like Bostrom and Malik come so close to breaking new ground.

With this understanding I think that historical art can be recontextualised and reappreciated. We must realize that the "Ideal Body" is only one representation of the female figure. This representation is still around today in TV and fashion journals. The positive outcome is that with statements like the one above, and artists like Kiki Smith, women are given choices on how they want their bodies to be perceived. Now there is a new study of the female figure and a new investigation of the experience of the female body.

REVERSE/ REVERSING: A Discussion on Stereotypes

The "other" can only exist because of its marginalisation from the status quo. I have said that I believe Feminism is now part of the status quo, but I also see that so are many once marginalized groups. Feminism has led the way for all the "others" to stand up and claim their rights and become part of the dominant group.

When "other" demands and attains rights, then the "other" begins to infiltrate the status quo's institutions i.e. education, politics. And the "other" becomes an acceptable view for the new status quo. Here, we see the abolition of the traditional white-male status quo, because he too becomes an "other" group in relation to the new status quo.

The product of this movement is a society that changes their views internally according to the external changes of hierarchy. This internal change is one that I grew up with. I see all of these once "other" groups as part of the status quo. I refuse to align myself with an ideology that uses Feminist material out of context to label all men in the patriarchy as dominant. The following are some quotations that trace the evolution of the reverse stereotype. The following statements are listed in a chronological order, keep in mind that these statements originally developed in the '70s. These statements are also full

of absolute terminology:

In 1971 Linda Nochlin described the "Normal male" and the "Oppressed female":

And it is here that the very position of woman as an acknowledged outsider, the maverick "she" instead of the presumably neutral "one" - in reality the white-male-position-accepted-as-natural, or the hidden "he" as the subject of all scholarly predicates - is a decided advantage,...³¹

In 1974, Tania Mouraud on the difference between the male artist and the female:

...The male's fixation on his sex, the fundamental fear which animates him of one day finding himself impotent, has completely falsified the notion of art. Women do not act out of fear, but out of love and knowledge.³²

In 1976, Lucy Lippard comments on the difference between male and female body art:

It has often been remarked that body art reflects the 'role crisis' in contemporary life. The urge to androgyny, in fact, has frequently been expressed by body artists of both sexes, although more often by men than by women (odd given the advantage of being male in this society...)³³

In 1999, Bostrom and Malik comment on the significance of the female nude:

"A female nude, even if created by a woman, still takes on the position of object/symbol/nude - the other to the socially dominant male subject."³⁴

In the former statements I observed the following: that Nochlin was speaking about how she and so many other women felt at the beginning of the Feminist revolution. But if I were to stereotype all men now in 1999, as Mouraud did in 1974, I wouldn't be giving them the benefit of the doubt as to whether they recognize Feminist points of view. According to Lippard in 1976, women were still being judged as inferior to men. I can understand Nochlin, Mouraud and Lippard creating absolutes in the 70s, because the treatment as women as "other" was pervasive in society at that time. But, when Bostrom and Malik create absolutes they weaken their credibility. I'm not proposing that Feminism has abolished the patriarchy or rid the world of all male-chauvinist-pigs. But, there has been a change in society in regards to the treatment of women. And it is this change that

these women to fail address in their article. I don't think that education needs to gear its Feminist ideologies this way, today.

The Feminist argument doesn't sound as strong if these suggestions are inserted. Those select men who... or the faction of the patriarchy that.... Perhaps Feminism needs to take it down a notch. Perhaps, Feminism needs to define the oppressive group in a new way. So the stereotyping: all men as dominant or, all men as the status quo can stop. With this in mind Feminism will become more effective. Even though Bostrom and Malik don't say this they certainly imply it with their quote, because why else would they still consider themselves socially inferior to the "dominant male"?

In 1975, Linda Nochlin expressed her views on female imagery:

My first reaction is anger, because the term is so constricting. I'm human, undefined by preconceptions, an androgynous being that isn't slated to give birth to any particular imagery. But my second reaction is to try and think it through. I do live in a society, and who I am is determined by the structure of experience a woman is supposed to have. My experience is filtered through a complex interaction between me and the expectations that the world has of me.³⁵

I think this statement sums it up. The earlier critic seems to have defined a significant insight that later critics have either obscured or lost. My disagreement with Bostrom and Malik's stereotype is that it undermines the great leaps and bounds that Feminism has made on a woman's perception of themselves in the '90s. The expectations that the world has of a woman is dramatically different than it used to be. Therefore, their stereotype as the woman as "other" is no longer a relevant gender issue. I can not comply with a Feminism that still holds an "us against them" attitude.

When I first began my research I felt that Feminism had acquired its own stereotype. I thought, Feminists were a bunch of angry women who saw men as being more powerful than women. Now I understand where this stereotype came from. I can't disagree with the way that women created absolutes in the '70s. I truly believe that at this

time women had to get mad. But when women like Bostrom and Malik continue to make absolute statements in 1999, the stereotype that I mentioned before becomes the only one that society sees. I had to do a lot of reading and contextualising to understand the plight of Nochlin, Mouraud and Lippard. But no matter how hard I try I can't contextualise absolutes that are written in the '90s. I really don't believe that Feminism is about absolutes any more. I mean, even in the '70s women like Nochlin gave disclaimers, on how their views would change to match changes in society. My problem with Feminists like Bostrom and Malik is that they are not taking up the challenge of redefining themselves, so they can be effective today.

The following case-study will put into practice the ideas that I have presented in the former discussion. Betty Goodwin is a contemporary Canadian artist who I feel navigates the issues of Feminism well. Goodwin is able to frame gender politics in a new way that I find innovative.

CASE STUDY - Betty Goodwin

Betty Goodwin is a Canadian artist who shows both internationally and nationally. She recently had a one-woman retrospective at the Art Gallery of Ontario and when showing in Paris the *Beaux-Arts* magazine described her impact as being equal to Louise Bourgeois.³⁶ *Artforum* magazine has an ongoing series where they invite writers to discuss a contemporary work that holds significance for them. The following excerpt from Anne Carson's poetic comments about Betty Goodwin's piece "Seated Figure With Red Angle" will serve beautifully to introduce the following case study of Goodwin's work:

If red is the color of cliché.
 If red is the best color.
 If red is the color of art pain...
 If artists tell you art is *before thought*.³⁷

The period of Goodwin's work that interests me began in the 1980s. Her work evolved to a stage where it began to discuss "apocalyptic scenes of political representation and senseless inhumanity that seems to be increasing globally."³⁸ A quote from Goodwin herself that sheds light on her artistic purpose is: "there are eruptions everywhere (in the world), Everything is fragmenting. Not that it does any good - Goya had no illustrations about that - But art allows me to accept it. It's my way of coping with the world."³⁹ Goodwin's work is not about art as therapy. Instead it's about filtering absorbed information about the world, and reassessing that information through drawing.

Goodwin's inspiration comes from the confusing perceptions that she takes in from the world, through TV, newspapers and magazines. An example of this is the endless feed of inhumane events on the nightly news that shares time with superficial commercials.⁴⁰ Goodwin's reaction to the world around her does not come out as a sermon, she wouldn't want it to. Goodwin takes her reaction to the world and translates it through her art so that it becomes a universal. Perhaps her success comes because she isn't condemning the world, just reacting to it. Her reason for creating is "(it's) the way I cope. Without art, I would certainly be on the edge. Not that art wipes all of it away."⁴¹

Goodwin claims that her process is not conscious. Her favorite expression to relate herself to her art and subjects is "burrows". In her studio Goodwin burrows into her material until the work is finished. She has no expectation of when that could be. Her process is an additive and reductive one. Almost spiritual. A drawing could change infinitely because she wields her eraser as much as her oilsticks. Goodwin knows when to stop. She is finished when " the image finally emerges."⁴²

Most of Goodwin's images employ the figure. Whether they are female figures or male is never clear. Her representations appear androgynous and genderless. Her use of androgyny allows her subject to become a universal, a stand in for the unknown person who is experiencing the trauma of the world. Goodwin's figures are undoubtedly corporeal. The figure functions on levels of narration, and psyche. The body also emerges

in her representations because of her tactile drawing process. Her raw abstract style or "burrowing" allows the viewer to transcend the narration to a layer where there is an experience of the body.

Goodwin has some links to feminist theories. Lippard's belief that androgyny was a signpost of society could be applied to Goodwin. Androgyny was also a suggestion made by Bolstrom and Malik made in their List of Pedagogical Suggestions. Goodwin doesn't denote gender, perhaps, because she sees inhumanity to be a non-gender theme. Goodwin furthers Feminism's notion of tearing down patriarchy, because she doesn't create any hierarchies. Her paintings don't judge any social hierarchy, nor do they instill a new judgment, new order, or new hierarchy.

Goodwin does not like to talk theory. There is no mention in any publications of her responding to Feminism. A recent critic Georges Bogardi attempted to categorize Goodwin into Realism, Expressionism, and Extentionalism. He couldn't. I am not implying that Goodwin is a Feminist either. However, if Goodwin is a Feminist, I think her work would recognize a Feminism that I could be party to.

The former case study examines a woman artist who I believe has adapted Feminist ideologies that were discussed earlier in this text. Goodwin doesn't ignore or destroy Feminism; she moves beyond it. Goodwin is a contemporary example of the complex relationship between society's effect on the artist, and the artist's effect on social change and criticism. Her work and the way that critics respond to her work prove that society's relationship to women in the arts has changed. I would be happy to use Feminism the way that Goodwin does - but I'm not sure it's Feminism anymore. I believe what I relate to with this woman is her interaction with today's society, and how the experience of living in today's world impacts the work.

When I look at Feminism in its original context and read critics like Lippard and the other critics that I have discussed, I recognize their intensity and wisdom. I also understand why they are making the Feminist argument. However, when I read an

article like "Reviewing The Nude" by educators in the 1990's I feel like they are living in a world other than the one I perceive. What I mean is that I can look at them as individuals and believe that their experiences in society have been radically different than mine. But I can't allow them to speak for me just because I'm a woman.

RELATIONSHIPS:
Feminism in My Work

I don't think that just because I'm a female artist I should have to pledge allegiance to Feminism. However, if I want to be a responsible artist I will acknowledge the Feminist critique - just as I would any other - and decide what applies to me. In my world Feminism gives way to individualism.

I have investigated Feminism because as I said earlier it seems to be the first canon of thought that my work is subject to. Now I understand why. Up until now Feminism has been the only option for women who wanted to address the female figure/body, because women until now have been viewed as the "other". Even when female artists have used themselves they have this idea filtering through because it has been part of their experience. As I have said this is different from my experience.

The confusion directed at my work lies in my aesthetic choice to employ the female figure, but my figures filter through my different thoughts and experiences. Women are my inspiration. My art emerges from a process of observation and analysis of the female/ figure and body. This research is gathered through my personal perception of myself and other women. In my work the issues of figure and body are considered. I have had to confront issues of protocol surrounding the nude. In my work I observe the female figure when I render it so that I can give an analysis of the female body, as in **Figure 1**. The body I deal with embraces a representational form that communicates through gesture, and body language. The female figure is loaded with history in traditional painting and as I have discussed earlier with respect to Feminism. However, my figures

are loaded with my own personal experience.

My technique resembles in some way the art of Betty Goodwin. My process is similar to hers' because I'm sure that a lot of drawing happens on an unconscious level. There also seems to be a similarity in the raw, tactile approach that we both employ. Goodwin's images are androgynous and my work has a tendency to bend this way also. Initially the figures are female, but as my drawing begins to reach completion, I build up the musculature. I do this because I see so much strength in the female body.

Even though the figures become more androgynous they are still imbued with a quiet sensuality. This forms out of the sensuality that is generally associated with women, a sensuality that I recognize and then transfer through my drawing process. My figures are active. They move. They are not shy or self-conscious. They enjoy their freedom to move. To live.

I always pay extra attention to the hands and feet of my figures. These are important areas because they contact the world on a tactile and sensual level. However, the figures and their appendages are rendered in anatomically challenging positions. I like the idea of challenge and I like that my figures overcome that challenge and still retain their sensual qualities. I suppose I could apply this idea to my perception of being a woman.

My figures encompass my perception of my body. My figures research a woman's inner being, through a woman's experience to society. My figures talk about a body that is constantly experiencing society. Societies effect on me, and the "new status quo's" effect on me, has produced an artist and art that can paint from a new perspective. A perspective that doesn't see woman as "other" in it, the only explanation that I have for this is the "other" is not part of my experience. I have a new view. A view that has no absolutes, a view that focuses on the experience of the individual.

I opened this thesis with an epigraph from a piece of fiction written in 1890, by Charlotte Brontë. This excerpt from Jane Eyre has proto-feminist values in it. This piece

of fiction illustrated the factual society that Feminism fought against, and foreshadowed the message that Feminism would bring. Brontë's last line is the most powerful: "It is thoughtless to condemn them (women), or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex". This statement is the one that brings Feminism to the forefront. Feminism came into being because of this. It is the statement that describes the challenge that Feminism has now overcome. In the final passage of this essay I will appropriate Brontë's words and alter them to fit my case:

Feminists are concerned with women generally: but I feel just as Feminists feel; I need exercise for my faculties, and a field for my efforts as much as Feminist do; I suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as Feminists would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in my more privileged fellow creatures to say that I ought to confine myself to the acceptable notion of "other" by reclaiming the body, and revisiting history, to being disgusted by Clarke and Nicolaides. It is thoughtless to condemn me, or laugh at me, if I seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for my gender.

Chapter 2: In Relation to Self-Portraiture

The goal of this chapter is to understand the relationship between self-portraiture and my art. I'm interested in self-portraiture because it is an element in my work but I have never felt comfortable recognizing its importance until now. I didn't want to make a painting and have people say "you're so vain!" or "is that because such and such a thing happened to you?" or "how can you show yourself like that?" The attributes to self-portraiture - vanity, autobiography, and objectification, were what made me dislike the issue.

Self-portraiture is one of those misunderstood art practices that get thrown around because it seems to be so obviously self-explained. The writings of well-known art critic Sir Kenneth Clark are a good example of the misconceptions attributed to self-portraiture. Clark was fond of Rembrandt's self-portraits. In his essay "Rembrandt" he wrote the following statement about Rembrandt's *Portrait of the Artist* (1663):

Rembrandt's self-portraits are the greatest autobiography ever presented to posterity, and as I look at this noble picture at Kenwood my first thought is of the soul imprisoned in that life-battered face. Perhaps that is always true of a great portrait. It is primarily the record of an individual soul.⁴³

Over the years Clark has been a great influence on art theory and criticism. The opinions expressed in this statement have become the most common definition of self-portraiture. According to Clark great self-portraiture is about autobiography and the individual who made it. The time has come to revamp the limited, traditional definition of self-portraiture and add new ideas to the concept of self-portraiture.

The first part of this chapter addresses the misconceptions associated with self-portraiture in three sections. These sections address the subject/ object relationship, autobiography and the universal connotations of self-portraiture. The second part of this chapter brings the theory into practice with two case studies of artists who use self-portraiture in their work: Cindy Sherman, and Jenny Saville. Both artists use self-

portraiture in unconventional ways extending beyond the common understanding of the term. This is why I have selected them. Finally, I have applied self-portraiture to my own work and practice.

An influential source of inspiration and encouragement has been Marsha Meskimmon's book *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture In The Twentieth Century* (1996). This thought-provoking book confronts the limited definition of self-portraiture that is commonly recognized. Meskimmon's book centers on women's art and offers a Feminist approach to the issue. My opinions do not mirror Meskimmon's Feminist ideals (in this chapter I will not address the Feminist content in her words because my position in relation to this cannon has been discussed in the previous chapter *In Relation to Feminism*). With this chapter I hope to offer more to the investigation of self-portraiture begun by Meskimmon.

SUBJECT/ OBJECT:

A Discussion on the Independence of Exploitation and Objectification

The following discussion addresses the debate of objectification's presence in self-portraiture. Critics such as: Gill Saunders (who wrote *The Nude* in 1989) and Marsha Meskimmon claim that artists employing self-portraiture avoid objectification of the subject matter. These critics have approached the idea of objectification via Feminism. By doing this these critics have overlooked some of the characteristics of objectification that do not allow it to be eliminated. They specifically overlook the independent functioning of exploitation and objectification.

The debate surrounding the absence or presence of objectification is linked to the bad rap that it has garnered, due to the ideologies of Feminism and the male gaze. When Feminist critics acknowledge objectification they overlook the fact that objectification is not a gender trait. In order to resolve this argument an investigation of the history of objectification must be looked into. But first, a working definition of object and subject

must be understood.

Robert Atkins' book *Artspeak* (1990) claims to be "A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements and Buzzwords." In this book he looks at objectification through his explanation of term "other". This is a prime example of why objectification has been looked at as a negative function. He writes:

To regard people as "Others" is to see them as objects rather than as subjects driven by psychological needs and desires similar to the viewers.⁴⁴

Atkins defines a subject as a being with similar requirements as the presumed viewer. Therefore, to be an object must mean to be different and have other requirements than the presumed viewer. Traditionally, the presumed viewer looks through the male gaze; this means the "other" becomes an object. And this is why Feminist critics have confused objectification with exploitation.

Marginalized groups have been repressed throughout history. It is understandable why Feminist critics would like to find a way to rid the art world of this repression. Gill Saunders stated:

Awareness of this danger (sexual titillation) has lead most artists working with the nude to use their own bodies as subjects, and by doing so they escaped the traditional artist/ mode., subject/ object relationship, using the body as a locus in which the art and artist are interchangeable.⁴⁵

Saunders's claim shows how the ideas of "other" and objectification are interwoven. Her statement is excessive and uncompromising. Objectification still exists when an artist uses his or her own bodies as subject matter. As I have said before, if an artist is using their own body he/she has decided to become the model, not erase the line between the roles. In fact, the artist has agreed to jump over the line that separates subject and object. Saunders should be citing that this type of objectification of the model (the self) is not a negative experience because exploitation is absent.

Marsha Meskimmon does not go as far as to say that self-portraits enable the artist

to totally escape objectification. She does claim that objectification is reduced in self-portraiture, as for example, when she writes:

By using their own bodies, women artists are able to rid the works of some inherent objectification involved in representing others and potentially liberate images from stereotypical patterns of looking. There are of course possible repappropriations of these images as 'objects' in themselves, which makes their production a difficult task... One of the key elements in these self-portraits is the attempt to find new strategies for contextualising the representations of women which defy the conventions of objectification and visual mastery constructed as norms for both producing and consuming western artworks.⁴⁶

Meskimmon, like Saunders, should be citing the absence of exploitation between the artist and model not absence of objectification. Consider again Meskimmon's statement. She understands the process of objectification to be twofold.

First, the objectification between the artist and the subject takes place. The artist objectifies the subject by choosing that subject for the artwork by representing the subject in a visual manner pleasing for the assumed viewer. Secondly, objectification takes place when the artwork is seen by the unknown viewer. In the first part of the process subject and artist are the same person so the exploitation of the subject manner is eliminated. But the artist will never be able to guarantee that the viewer will not objectify the art. The objectification and exploitation processes operate independently from one another. Eliminating or reducing exploitation does not mean the artist can eliminate or reduce objectification.

Art critic Lucy Lippard addressed this issue as early as 1977. She warned women body artists of the possibility of exploitation. By doing this she also illustrates the difference between viewer and subject, which results in the evidence of objectification. She wrote:

A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual

titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult.⁴⁷

Today's viewing audience is diverse and difficult to anticipate. Objectification due to the viewer's appropriation of the subject matter of art is unavoidable. Exploitation due to the viewer's misappropriation of the subject matter is a possibility. Lippard's comment is still relevant today because it explains why objectification cannot disappear.

An artist has the right to do what he/she will with his/her own body. This is how exploitation is partly eliminated, but the subject does face the possibility of exploitation from the viewer. An artist has the right to do what he/she will with his/her own body, but this does not give them the privilege to eliminate objectification. Also the self-portrait (an object in its own right) will without a doubt face appropriation by the viewer and in turn a second dose of objectification.

Objectification of the subject is inevitable even in the case of self-portraiture. When a member of the group, identified as the "other", uses him/her self as a subject they knowingly consent to becoming an object, objectified by the art making and viewing process. For example; what I find relevant about the previous statements by Saunders, Meskimmon and Atkins is that they offer an understanding of the assumed negative experience of objectification. Atkins states that the Other exists only because it is objectified. Saunders and Meskimmon state that artists using their own bodies can escape the subject/ object relationship, because they are not being objectified. But after Lippard's statement it is clear that art makers can't make art that complies with every viewer's needs and desires, so objectification will inevitably occur. Objectification only connotes the negative action of exploitation; it does not denote it. Artists and viewers should realize that objectification can be independent of exploitation.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

A Comparison of Self-Portraiture to Autobiography

The idea that a self-portrait is merely an autobiographical statement is

predominant, and as I have said before was an idea endorsed by art critic Sir Kenneth Clark. This idea is apparent when Clark comments on Rembrandt's self-portraits:

Every touch is both a precise equivalent of the thing (Rembrandt's image) seen and a seismographic record of Rembrandt's character.⁴⁸

Meskimmon expands on this predominant but limited understanding of self-portraiture. She's opposed to Clark's thinking and writes:

Although there are many analogies to be found between conventions in autobiography and self-portraiture, the two forms are not, of course, merely reducible to one another.⁴⁹

Meskimmon condemns the psychobiographical approach that many critics employ when deciphering self-portraiture. The following citation demonstrates her thoughts:

Artists who frequently represented themselves in their art have often been subject to having their complex self-portraits 'explained' with simplistic reference to anecdotal details of their personal lives. This psychobiographical approach is particularly acute in instances where the artist's life was scandalous or otherwise marked by personal trauma.⁵⁰

In Women's Self-Portraiture Meskimmon explores the differences and similarities between the two types of art. The main link between autobiography and self-portraiture is the subject of the work. In both, the author or artist provide the primary information and are the subject.

Meskimmon was not the first critic to discover that self-portraiture could tap into more than autobiography. Roland Barthes is a cultural theorist who has also shed light on the implied inappropriate interpretations critics have made in regards to self-portraiture. His essay "The Death of the Author" was published in 1977. Although Barthes is not addressing the issue of self-portraiture per se his essay is still relevant because it illustrates the difference between artist and art in the following way:

The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannical centered on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's, his madness and Tchaikovsky's his vice. The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were in the end, through more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.⁵¹

Barthes' thesis is that in order to understand the art made by an artist one must divorce the two from each other, and indeed refuse the commonalities between them. Literature, art, and music are entities in their own right; they do not need to depend on their makers.

I have noticed that many critics are unable to think along the same lines as Barthes and Meskimmon. It could be that the initial source of inspiration and information confuses them. In self-portraiture the artist works from primary information, not from an external subject, which is secondary information. Another person, or thing used as the model is secondary information because the researcher (artist) is not experiencing the idea of being the model, in a factual sense.

For example, a 20 year-old artist is painting a 50 year-old model. The young artist cannot paint from his/her own knowledge what it is like to be 50. But, if the ages were reversed, the 50 year-old artist could paint from his/her own primary information (life experience) what it is like to be 20 - or at least what he/she remembers of it. The confusion here arises in the fact that the mature artist need not use this primary information to explain his/her life. Meskimmon observes that the root of this confusion begins with the phenomenon of "the artist as genius". The following passage by Meskimmon reviews how this concept impacts self-portraiture:

Such psychobiographical readings of self-portraits have been particularly persistent in art historical discourse since the Romantic period of the nineteenth century. Like psychoanalytic readings of autobiography developed in the twentieth century, they intended to explain the psychology of the

creative individual. These readings mirror the idea of the visual artist as a genius who has an especially sensitive, intuitive nature which unfolds in the artwork produced.⁵²

Artists making self-portraiture have had their work explained away by the events in their lives. Returning to Barthes we are presented with a reason why critics adopt autobiography and why it endures:

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text; to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypotheses: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work. When the Author has been found, the text is explained - victory to the critic.⁵³

In the case of self-portraiture Barthes' comments are frighteningly true. The artist has publicly admitted that they are the signifier. Responsible viewers shouldn't limit the work to the life of the creator. The art does not hinge on the autobiography of the artist even in self-portraiture. The art cannot guarantee the state of the artist accurately nor can the state of the artist solely determine the work of art. Barthes and Meskimmon would agree that the art making process begins with the author/ artist, but it doesn't end there. Rather, artists who use self-portraiture may see themselves as an appropriate model that can become a signifier for an idea, (a model that may address issues beyond the artist's life experiences).

**PERSONAL VS. PUBLIC:
A Discussion of how Self-Portraiture can Relate to Public Issues**

This next section will attempt to answer the question: Can self-portraiture address widely accepted models of thought relating to public and social issues, such as: class/ economic status, race/ ethnicity, gender and religion, or is it merely just too personal an art form to operate as a general signifier? Imagery is a powerful tool that can relate to different ideologies through connotation. That is: connotative meanings offer even

personal images the chance to operate within public and social interpretations. Roland Barthes offers an overview of this idea in his essay *The Rhetoric of the Image*:

...the tomato, for example, signifies *Italianicity* by metonymy and in another advertisement the sequence of three scenes (coffee in beans, coffee in powder, coffee sipped in the cup) releases a certain logical relationship in the same way as an asyndeton. It is probable indeed that among the metabolas (or figures of the substitution of one signifier for another), it is metonymy which furnishes the image with the greatest number of connotators...⁵⁴

Barthes examples of tomato and coffee allow us to understand the connotations that society has attached to such items. This characteristic is not only attributed to objects it can also be attributed to images in self-portraiture. Connotation allows the self-portrait to address ideologies beyond the realm of the artist's life experiences. The image of woman in self- portraiture is affiliated with many connotations, one being feminism. The identity of a woman cannot be qualified by gender alone. There are many different kinds of women. Marsha Meskimmon concisely explains this fact:

Collective action is produced through an understanding of shared oppression and a sense of identity as 'woman'. Yet, there are many variables, particularly surrounding issues of class, race and sexuality, which separate women from each other. Even the ideals of womanhood itself change in different contexts; to be a white middle-class woman is not the same as being a black, working class woman.⁵⁵

From this statement it can be understood that women as a group are formed of many individuals.

How then can this disparate group be related to on a general level? Because of Feminism the image of woman created by woman has become a statement loaded with connotations, one being the claim of "shared oppression". This allows women's self-portraiture to extend the individual's first-hand experience, as cited by Meskimmon:

Rather than woman attempting to find a voice through her role as artist, we

can see these images as the artist addressing her role as woman.⁵⁶

Connotations affiliated with the image of woman have allowed images of women to work in society as a signifier for a complex ideology. The image of women can relate to many through the shared quality of gender. So in the case of contemporary woman's self-portraiture it can be seen that this image is not only an image of one an individual but instead a model for a group recognized by society. To be specific, the image of woman created by woman can be a signifier for the ideology of Feminism.

Moreover, we are not limited only to female contemporary artists to show that self-portraiture can aid in conveying widely accepted models of thought. Rembrandt used self-portraits when conveying narratives of religious events. Rembrandt's use of self-portraiture has intrigued art critic Andrew Small, who has commented on Rembrandt's painting, *The Stoning of St Stephen*, in his book *Essays in Self-portraiture*:

Rembrandt included at least one self-portrait in this work (The Stoning of St. Stephen), the horrified face looking at the spectator from behind the principal executioner. All critics agree that the painting contains at least one self-portrait; some, however, argue that two other non-participating small heads are also self-portraits...⁵⁷

The Stoning of St. Stephen is not primarily a self-portrait. The focus of this painting is not Rembrandt himself. This painting was made to depict an event in Christian history. Yet, there he is: Rembrandt's mimetic image is in the painting. This is an intriguing concept: the joining of a model of thought, that is, the Christian story of the Stoning of St Stephen, with a self-portrait, an image predominately thought to be personal and intimate.

It's obvious that Rembrandt's intent isn't autobiography; so, there must be another explanation why his image is in this painting. Perhaps Rembrandt had no choice but to use himself as a model. Kenneth Clark comments on the lengthy time it took Rembrandt to paint a model:

Baldinucci, in one of the earliest lives of Rembrandt, tells us that one reason why the number of his sitters declined was the quantity of sittings he demanded, and this is confirmed by the technique of his later portraits. The surface is covered with scumbling, scratching, glazing - every known device in the cookery of painting - and with minute touches of the brush or palette knife, each put on after the preceding layer was dry. We need no longer ask why he was forced to paint himself; the wonder is that he found anyone to sit for him...⁵⁸

Or, perhaps Rembrandt found that he was better at role-playing than other models were. In the following statement Clark presents another reason why Rembrandt painted himself:

He portrayed himself because he could make the faces he wanted, and could study the familiar structure of his own head distorted by laughter, anger or amazement.⁵⁹

Whatever the reasons and however minimal the use of self-portraiture does not change the fact that Rembrandt's self-portrait was involved in communicating this example of religious history. Rembrandt used himself as the model, and therefore the signifier of at least one, perhaps more, of the spectators of this event. This painting is interesting because it demonstrates several unrecognized qualities of self-portraiture. For one, self-portraiture can function as an element in art; it doesn't have to be the entire focus of the painting. For another, self-portraiture can aid artists when they wish to portray public issues. Also, *The Stoning of St. Stephen* shows that an artist well recognized by art history has used these functions of self-portraiture.

Self-portraiture can be a part of the process and end product of an artwork without being the be-all and end-all of the piece itself. The flexibility of self-portraiture is what I want to emphasize. Self-portraiture when handled properly can extend to reach many social/ public models of thought that exist beyond the artist. So what does this mean in the whole equation of artist/ model to individual/ public? Artists can choose to represent themselves many ways with self-portraiture. The resulting image will work as a signifier relating by connotative methods to ideological themes that can be recognized by a wide

audience.

The following case studies offer some specific examples of the theoretical issues discussed previously. Cindy Sherman, and Jenny Saville are artists that I have selected to demonstrate how self-portraiture can operate outside of its status quo definition. These case studies however, are not an in-depth review on these individual artists. Rather, I have concentrated on the innovative ways that these artist have used self-portraiture in their art.

CASE STUDY: Cindy Sherman

Art critic Barbara Pollack has written: "Cindy Sherman put a face on postmodernism"⁶⁰. In fact Sherman put *her* face on postmodernism, not that anyone would know - unless you knew to look beyond the disguises that have carried Sherman through all of the roles and stereotypes she has played since the 1970s.

Cindy Sherman is a photographer. She is a model. She is an artist. The Cindy Sherman in real life fills many roles. Her artwork involves her transformation into roles that connote common stereotypes, thus resulting in the process of self-portraiture. She uses self-portraiture to combat negative stereotypes associated with women. However, Sherman's portraits are not about herself. Sherman manipulates her appearance in order to play a role. Sherman's self-portraits are not about Sherman the person but Sherman in a role as an actress.

The *Untitled Film Stills* were the first series of photographs by Sherman that reached high critical acclaim. In *Untitled Film Still #35*(1979), Sherman dresses up as the "Stay-at-home girl". Underneath her apron and simple dress Sherman's model emits a natural sexiness. This is one of many stereotypes of women presented on the silver screen. The "dressing up" confounds the notion of autobiography. As Barbara Pollack would say they are about "every woman". Review the following statement she makes in regard to Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*:

The project has beguiled curators and critics alike with its exploration of identity as a construct of the mass media. The photographs themselves, perfect recreations of black-and-white publicity stills, defy traditional expectations of self-portraiture. The woman in the pictures is every woman, a product of photographic conventions and female stereotypes, rather than a depiction of the artist Cindy Sherman.⁶¹

In *Untitled #223* (1990), Sherman plays the role of the Madonna. This picture conjures up a stereotype of woman presented by art history. This self-portrait is not about Sherman's autobiography any more or less than it's about my biography and me. It addresses the social ideology of Feminism. Sherman objectifies herself to illustrate the objectification that women have endured through this historical role as Madonna. Barbara Pollack elaborates on how Sherman intentionally loses Sherman by disguise:

Donning disguises, wigs, and prosthetic devices, the artist changes her appearance with each image. This esthetic strategy has frequently been compared with that of the chameleon-like pop star Madonna, who is an avid collector of Sherman's work. But, unlike Madonna, whose main talent is self-promotion, Sherman subordinates her person to the final composition. She presents herself as a work of eternal fiction - Unknowable and ultimately absent from the artwork.⁶²

Another critic, Arthur C. Danto, believes that Sherman is not a photographer, but instead a performance artist. Sherman is a chameleon. Viewers cannot come to know Sherman through her self-portraits. Danto speaks to this paradoxical characteristic of Sherman's work in this way:

Photography is not her medium. It is rather a means to her [Sherman's] artistic ends. Her medium is herself. But that is not to say that she is her own subject, for the photographs are of her only in the reduced sense in which Delacroix's *Liberty Storming the Barricades* is of the model who posed for Liberty. The knowledge that they are of Cindy Sherman penetrates our experience and appreciation of these works, but she herself is not what the works are about.⁶³

If the definition of self-portrait means to capture one's external image, Sherman has done this. But if self-portrait means to capture something of the artist as a person,

Sherman does not. What is important to realize from this case study is the unique way that Sherman has twisted self-portraiture to fit her own ends. Her work complements the diverse uses that are hidden in self-portraiture. Sherman intentionally objectifies herself to act in a predetermined role. Sherman's work transcends autobiography through her disguises and role-playing. Sherman's work also engages in public discourse by addressing women's stereotypes and women's identity.

CASE STUDY: Jenny Saville

Jenny Saville paints female nudes on a huge scale. Saville uses painting and photography to probe issues surrounding women's bodies. Saville presents a female body that has been rejected by mass media and fashion. She tries to make the statement that all women are beautiful, that beauty is independent of weight.

Saville, like Cindy Sherman, combats an oppressive stereotype. And like Sherman she uses photography to do so. But unlike Sherman she doesn't disguise herself. In *Closed Contact #12*, Saville presents her body to the camera by lying on a pane of glass to distort her self-portrait. The distorted body in these photos is squished against the glass and is distorted to seem larger, misshapen, fatter and in contrast to "Ideal Form" uglier. Because Saville has exposed her body through self-portraiture she suffers the same autobiographical criticism as other artists.

In an otherwise interesting review of Saville, art critic Dodie Kazanjian gives the following response to Saville's belief that her paintings show how women really are:

Really? I suppose I tend to see my own thighs this way, but Saville is neither fat nor thin - the word I'd use to describe her is *zafitig*.⁶⁴

It is easy to pick up on the negative tone in Kazanjian's statement, and all because she probably thinks Saville's photographs are less truthful because they're not autobiographically or anatomically correct. There's a humorous irony to this statement

and the situation it was constructed in, considering the subject matter of Saville's work - large women - and the critic reviews Saville for an article in *Vogue*.

Saville uses an antinarrative techniques such as eliminating the background in her images. And because of this technique her works escape autobiography. She does this by, literally pulling and squeezing her figure into every space in *Closed Contact*. So the viewer is confronted by the body not the space and time in which it exists.

Saville is able to use self-portraiture to address a model of thought that exists outside of her. She addresses the beauty stereotype of the "thin woman." It does not surprise me that Linda Nochlin compares her to other forms of art which have combated stereotypes applied to women:

Saville's work actually has more in common with feminist performance art and imagery of the photographed body-object than with that of an old-time paint-slinger like Freud.⁶⁵

In any case Saville does demonstrate innovation in self-portraiture because she pushes the notion of self-portraiture beyond its commonly understood boundaries. Saville's techniques are similar to those used by Sherman. She creates photographs that require a re-examination of the image of woman in today's society and a re-examination of who determines that image.

Like Saville, I wish to re-examine issues. It is the process of re-examination that has presented a subtle irony in my investigation of self-portraiture. In a way this paper is a status quo self-portrait. The issues discussed here are ones that I have faced as an artist who employs self-portraiture. My paintings are not intended to be autobiographical statements. They attempt to speak to the emotions found within the human condition. *Spent Energy* (2000), **Figure 2**, was a body of work that dealt with the feeling of isolation that can accompany self-reflection. These paintings do not depict my own self-reflection, but the act of self-reflection that a person may endure.

But many would classify my work as autobiographical, because I pose as the model for my paintings. In *Falling 2* (1999), **Figure 3** the androgynous, unidentifiable figure began as me **Figure 4**, a photographic self-portrait. When beginning a painting I use photos of myself taken by myself (Is this a common trend among women painters?) And like Sherman and Saville I manipulate myself into roles. In my photographs I can act out animated action poses. With role-play I can lose my own identity through movement.

Then my painting process allows the figures to transform further into an unidentifiable body. Like Bacon and Saville I exclude a background from my paintings. My figures always seem to be floating or standing in mid air. I avoid a background scene for much the same reason as the other artists I've discussed. I refuse to implement a narrative on my figures.

With painting I can depict an emotional event like self-reflection. The female figure when manipulated into certain gestures can connote the intimate process of self-reflection. And my depiction of self-reflection via self-portraiture can relate to the public in a general sense without my autobiography being present.

The issues that I have discussed in this paper have led me to believe that if I were to surround myself in a company of parallel thinkers among them would be Roland Barthes, Marsha Meskimmon, Cindy Sherman, and Jenny Saville. I use my own image in my paintings; I use self-portraiture to convey ideas. But like critics and artists named here, I do not want to be imprisoned by the limited notion: that by using myself in paintings inevitably reflects autobiography. My body is a vessel for much than just me and my image conveys much more than my autobiography.

Chapter 3- Mine

I'm a painter. It's what I do. I'm defined by the things I make. *I'm not* the thing on display. Rather my work is. The art that I make is important. It will take you away from life momentarily. They will make you think about why I made them. They will show you beauty, and ugliness. They make a comment on life on society. And since I make them that makes me part of the show.

People want to know about me. I guess this is because I'm the locus; I'm the production line and the supervisor. I call the shots. So I'll tell you a few things about me and about how I see my paintings. But I'm also going to tell you about other things that have shaped me. I will tell you about what I take from the Canadian landscape, about the games I watch, about the people I see. Because by telling you these things it may help you to understand me and why I make what I make. I'm not going to use big words or flowery sentences either. I'm going to give it to you simply because that's how I think about these things. The complex stuff that happens with the brush in my hand, not with words in my head. I'm not going to cover everything, this is not my life story just a few things that may give you an insight to what I see when I fill the hours between painting and sleeping, because in the end all of these things go into my paint.

I was having a conversation with a friend. He told me: " look you're a painter because you put that brush in your hand put the paint there and that's what you call yourself!" In short he's right. Painting, for me, means I go into a room and mash paint around. Sometimes it's intuitive and other times I have a plan. In the end I make something I call art. Broken down that what this is about. I make paintings therefore I'm a painter. There's something else there too, some call it talent, some call it the artist's touch but that's not something that I can call it. That thing, that's for others to bestow on me.

One thing I've noticed is that this work only gets complicated when others see it.

Then the questions start. It's sort of like when people meet me. I'm Terra, nothing complicated, just a person. It gets complicated when people want to believe that there's a mystery to me. When people want to get into me and figure me out that's when it gets complicated. But I'm no mystery just a Canadian girl who likes hockey, drives a pick up. A girl who can shoot a gun. I can spit, I care about others, I have an education. I can construct paintings and deconstruct mine and others, I know some art theory, I keep up on the art world, I'm cultured and with all this I can find a place to fit in. A place to surround myself with others who take care of me and who I take care of. I found a place. I made my paintings. They're mine.

I was raised by two commercial artists. I had my hands in paint from day one. My mother told me that when I was a baby the living room furniture consisted of a homemade silkscreen press, drying racks, and light tables. When I was a kid my parents made signs for everything from checker cabs to police cars. What I do doesn't really have such an immediate use. But it's basically the same. Process-orientated work in a room, alone, filled with fumes, brushes and paint. The biggest difference is that I make what I want. But we'll get there in a bit.

I get bored easily, and in order to feel fulfilled I constantly search out new experiences. I like to try new things. I'm tentative though I never really dive into a situation. I go in slowly, I let the situation close over me instead of forcing myself into it. I like to see the good in people but I usually pick out all the bad things in them too, in the end these are the things that I hold on to. The bad things, because I can forget them easily. I can get caught up in the romance of a person. I believe that things never end, that events, people, relationships, places they just change, and in turn that changes my perception of them. I've been to the edge mentally. I push myself to work up to the last minute on just about anything weather it's a painting or my makeup. I spend a lot of time alone. And this is by choice.

Life is simpler when you are alone. It's easier to get places, easier to get things

done, easier to do what you want to do. And easier to take when you're not doing what you want. I love people, not everyone, but when I decide to love them I always love them. Even the people, who I've had the roughest times with, still have a place inside me. I'm extremely emotional, emotional to a point where others probably look at me and think I'm nuts. Actually there are a lot of people who think I'm nuts and that's probably because I do what I feel. If I don't like a situation I leave. If I want to be somewhere else I go there. I don't stand on ceremony for people I don't feel obligated too.

I think that generally we surround ourselves with who and what we need. I for example have found that really I need very little. A few friends, well chosen I might add, my family, and my paint. It seems to me that if you allow things to edit themselves out of one's life, life becomes much simpler and enjoyable, the same goes for painting.

Now you might be thinking "hey what gives you the right?" but here's the thing. You spend two years locked in a room with nothing but the radio for company and guaranteed you will be amazed at what goes on in your head. I've proven to myself that not only can I think myself in circles but also in squares. But when I think it doesn't come out in words it comes out in paint.

Getting back to surrounding oneself. I like to watch people, I suppose it's because I paint people, at least that's where it starts. In the end though I don't believe that my paintings are about people. Not about any particular individual anyways. In the end my people become a symbol, a husk even that just holds my paint in place. I think as a painter you have to start like that. With some sort of inspiration. But where you go after that is the process, the journey. Now I'm not too good at documenting this journey. I certainly don't do it in words. But lately painting for me has just been process. I haven't been able to find a way to finish things so I just paint over them and start all over again. The same friend that told me about why I was a painter told me something else too. He said: "If I could, I would take all these paintings you've made (meaning the ones I paint over) and put them somewhere and save them for you." Maybe this is what I need.

However I don't have the luxury of that person. Nor the luxury of the expense of material. And to be quite honest with you there's no point in photographing them for me right now either. I can, if I want to, go back and make them again. Or if someone is really interested they can peel back the paint skins on those canvases to find out what's underneath. But I know what's there. I've chosen to see the last layers. What he said though made me feel good. It's nice to be appreciated, lately that doesn't happen a lot. And I don't go looking for what others think right now.

I've built my own little community with books and paintings. I've taken to reading Emily Carr's journal *Hundreds and Thousands*. In it I've found that she expresses many of the same feelings I've had. I've taken a few selections of her writing because in her words I find explanations that I haven't been able to compose. This quote on process, on finding the end result is one of those selections.

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I am always asking myself the question, What is it you are struggling for? What is that vital thing the woods contain, possess, that you want? Why do you go back and back to the woods unsatisfied, longing to express something that is there and not able to find it? This I know, I shall not find it until it comes out of my inner self, until the God quality in me is in tune with the God in it. Only by right living and a right attitude towards my fellow man, only by intense striving to get in touch, in tune with, the Infinite, shall I find that deep thing hidden there, and that will not be until my vision is clear enough to see, until I have learned and fully realize my relationship to the Infinite. ⁶⁶

Just as Carr goes back to the woods, I find myself always going back to the figure. I can't tell you why yet. But I still go back there. I will have a better idea as time goes on I suppose. But for right now I know these few things. There is a strength in bodies that everyone can relate to. And I see people relate to each other. Perhaps, this is the thing I would like to possess. I see people compare themselves to one another. There

is mystery upon mystery in there. Time passes inside bodies. Memories accumulate there. People come out of other people. People gather around people. There are feelings and emotions but there is also skin and bone, hair and everyone is different. I have a love for these things I don't know why but it's there. Also, like Carr I believe that if I keep at it, life and painting that is I will find out why. I might not find the exact answer but I'm not so sure that there is one. But really it's the dissatisfaction that keeps me coming back to my canvases. Don't get me wrong; I'm not displeased with my work. But the things that I see when I look at people. The things that interest me I haven't figured out how to put all of them in the paintings yet. I don't know if I've even been able to identify them all yet.

Like I said my process starts by watching people, then I go and paint them. But remember what I said about surroundings? Let me get back to that. These "people" I paint I edit them out. As I go on I like to see how much editing I can do before I actually lose the point- of inspiration that is. I don't like to abstract the figure and change it into something else, I like the shapes to call back to the people I started with. But I've found that to just make them look like real bodies, that just painting them the way they look is not enough, so I change them. I've started to surround my people with more people and they blur and merge in to one another. When I see these shapes I can see the people but I can also see the surface. People and surface, surface and people. It undulates beneath my brush, beneath my hand. In my head. There is no single discernible person anymore. Now there is more than one. Surrounding.

At this point I've got an image and for me this has always been the hardest part. How do I make the image more? How can I make my figures relate to my ground? How do I surround them with the other things I know? The other things they know?

For a while it didn't matter how much paint I worked with around these images. When I connected my figures to the ground it had to be in a way different than how I made the images (paint). So I turned to collage.

Collage for me is really just another way to paint but the feeling of it is

completely different. For one it's more physical, it's more hands on- there are no brushes. Also it's a way to not only work on the painting but through it and behind it. It's almost like I surround these images with a buffer a zone that protects them from whatever may happen around them and it's here that my image breaks down and becomes something a little more. I have experimented with paper and fabrics in the past, but it's just been recently that I have discovered the beauty of vinyl. I really like this material. If you think of it vinyl is perfectly suited to my needs. Materially it's pliable, easy to work with, but thick enough to cover, durable enough to be cut, ripped, sewn and glued. Metaphorically it's pliable. It's an artificial man-made skin, which in my mind goes quite nicely with my hand made organic images. I sew this stuff. I glue it. I cut it to hug around my people. Vinyl has a pattern in it, that's freakishly real, I mean it's made to look like the real thing like leather. Like a dried hide. Like skin. It also gives me that breathing space where I can play with design, with sewn lines, different tones and layers. And even when collage doesn't find itself into my work I relate my painted grounds to collage. Because these painted grounds are usually bare, flat areas that cut out the figures just as collage does.

The layering process of collage is akin to my painting process. I've never been an impasto painter. For a while I think I was just drawing. But now I have found a paint method, which describes the way, I see people. I paint in layers thin washy layers. The tones are quite subtle up close, but from further away they become volumetric. The tonal shifts imply mass, the textures imply skins. The colors are always the same: earth tones ruddy browns, muddy grays, stony whites.

For a while all I did was draw. I wanted to learn how to render, and then I made paintings trying to work images up to a point where they become quite representational. No one saw those. I realized just because I could make something look real didn't mean it was. And just because I could represent a person didn't mean that I captured any thing about people. So I decided to let the paint make the paintings I started sacrificing arms for a mark that felt more like what a body should be, instead of marks that look like an

arm. I let feet look like pillars. I let stomachs look like weird topographical maps. I started looking for what I needed. If I had to pick one thing about the figure to use, if I couldn't have anything else I would settle for the silhouette. The silhouette, the line that encompasses the body has got to be the most amazing thing. It's the boundary. It's the point of containment. It's where the body becomes tangible. And the space around it intangible.

My people share their silhouettes. In doing this they become a bigger vessel containing this paint I've put on. But they are not people made of paint, because the paint is like something, it's like dirt, it's like rust, it looks rotten in places, fresher in others, it's built up thinly and slowly. Glazes over glazes make colors look different, indiscernible. They make your eyes go funny if you look at them too long. They are like the people I see. The people on the street in the bars, restaurants, shops. They're in little clusters so tight you can't separate them, to the point where they look almost all the same. And they surround themselves with things, with events. They're about contact about touching and involvement. Have you ever sat close to someone over a long period of time and found that your foot, or knee, or hand was touching them, you just didn't realize it? Because the whole time you thought that thing you were touching was a table leg or perhaps your own arm or hand? It's perception. Sometimes I think we miss a lot of the contact that we're having, sometimes I think we overlook how much like everyone else we are. Yes, I believe in individualism and all that, no one is exactly like another. But pared down, in our simplest form we are all very much alike with similar desires and needs. We just decide what we surround ourselves with. When I was lost in my paint. A friend sent me a quote from the bible "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known (Luke 12: 2 NIV). Jesus. I've been looking for something in my paint, I feel sometimes like I'm panning for gold sifting through the silt on my studio floor. Sometimes I feel like I'm digging myself into a hole. But it's been right there all along. The paintings have been made in the back of my head for quite a while I just had

to be able to see them. I was the first and only person to see them. Now I've just made them. As best as I can anyways. My vision blurs sometimes and I make them through feeling. It's almost the same feeling process as when you come out of the last dream before you wake. When the unconscious is just giving way to will and at this point you lose the dreamy quality quite a bit but it's still there enough to feel. But also at this point you can will the characters into doing whatever it is that you want. After a time though things get in the way, memories, daily business just start to overlap and obscure my vision. I have to mine them away.

Emily Carr wrote about these glimpses in her journal too. She said:

I think perhaps it's this way in art. The spirit of the thing calls to your soul. First it hails it in passing and your soul pauses and shouts "Coming." But the soul dwells in your innermost being and it has a lot of courts and rooms and things to pass through, doors and furniture and clutter to go round and through, and she has to pass through and round all this impedimenta before she can get out in the open and catch up and sometimes she can't go on at all but is all snarled up in obstructions. But sometimes they can only go a little bit of the way together and sometimes quite far, but after a certain distance she always has to drop back. But, oh, if you could only go far enough to see the beauty of the whole complete thought that has called out to you!⁶⁷

I agree with Carr. When beauty calls and you see it, it stops you. Beauty is powerful, beauty makes it go on. It makes me go on and I paint for these glimpses. I wrote this to tell you that it's in there and in here.

In a way these people I've made could be just a representation of the idea that we are all just products of our environment. My people they merge into one another becoming a bigger shape. Have you ever noticed people pick up habits of those that are around them? Take the good old boys, you know the kind that like hockey, drink beer,

play baseball and drive trucks. These guys have a secret language I can't understand. The same goes for girls. I'm not a particularly girlish girl but when I get around my best friends I'm amplified. All of a sudden my laugh seems higher and I'm way more concerned about make-up, clothes and boys.

There are also dark parts to people and in my paintings. These dark places, they're hidden usually. But these places they're not ugly just because they're dark. I think that in many cases they are really the things that make a person go on, and get stronger, wiser.

One of my earliest memories, and it is a dark one, is of my father leaving. My parents were never married but they stayed together for quite a few years. When I was seven my Dad took me out for lunch explained the situation - he had to go away. My parents *always explained everything* to me, and then he left. My Mom had to pick up the tears, had to tell me it was okay. But my Dad he was the first man to break my heart. I've cried over others but when I cried over him it hurt the most. I will always remember watching my Dad drive away that day. It changed my life. I hate it when people leave me. I don't mind being alone, but my favorite part of any event is the getting there, not the leaving part.

But this sense of left behind is a place where I'm comfortable too. You see when you're left behind you receive a wonderful sense of privacy because people don't really like to look at what they've left, it hurts them. So when you're back there - left behind- you get a little forgotten, but you can do stuff, try stuff that maybe you wouldn't have done if everyone was watching. Even though the memory of my Dad leaving is traumatic for me, the events of my fathers' absence are not. He came back to Calgary years later I visited him a lot when I was young. He and my Mom are great friends. He and I are very close, in the end it turned out almost perfect.

So that's a bit about how I grew up. Where I grew up is also important. I grew up in Canada. I'm Canadian. I love this country for the safe streets, friendly people, a

slower pace of life, the democratic-socialist politics and the most beautiful scenery in the world.

I have a friend who like many people in their twenties loves to travel. He's been all over the world, and when he comes home for a visit I go camping with him. He never stops saying how beautiful this country is. And it is. I haven't traveled abroad, but I have traveled this country. Let me tell you there's not much more you could ask for. What would you like to see instead? Make the water bluer, or the trees on our mountains greener? I think not. The rawness, the ruggedness of this land is surreal. And it's clean. An hours drive from Calgary and you're breathing in the cleanest air in the world, purified just for you by hundreds of thousands of trees. There's nothing else like it. Others have told me so and I know that the wild here is unparalleled. I suppose it's just a thing that you know.

But back to the story, my friend, he's a good old boy the kind I described above. But he's seen a lot, experienced a lot too. However, he loves to come home. When we go camping he drives an old Land Cruiser and we go up into the mountains. Now growing up in Alberta with little cash can be a blessing. The land here is free. I've often wondered why I was never a land artist. It's not because of lack of inspiration that's for sure. It's hard work to get far enough into the mountains where you can feel that there's no one else around, but it's worth it. And it's these experiences that drive home the simplicity of life.

Out there, in the mountains, it's cold at night, it doesn't matter how hot the day was it's cold at night. There's snow out on some of those peaks all year. Hell there's snow out there that's a few years old. Snow that's never been melted. It gets cold at night. When it's cold you need warmth. A fire is fine for a while but when you sleep it's better to sleep with someone to share the heat. This is not a love thing, this is survival, there's power in numbers, strength in it, warmth too.

A major part of a Canadian winter to me is hockey. I love hockey. I don't play

but I love to watch. Now, I don't know every rule, I don't follow the players I'm not a sports nut. But I do love the game. I like the fact that it's men who play in the NHL. I don't care how that sounds but it wouldn't be the same for me if it was co-ed at least not in the kind of game I like to see. I like to see the game where the home team wins. I like to see a game that's hard fought. I like to see a game that has a few fights. Hockey is sport where body checking is taught. And taught at the age of fourteen to fifteen. This physical contact is strategic to the game. I understand that to be a player, a real player, you have to take a lot of blows and you still have to be able to play the game, to think and to get out there on that ice and do your part so the team wins. That's hard work, there's a lot of physical and mental endurance that goes into this game. It's pretty exciting to see two or more guys colliding on the rink on purpose and to see the results of those impacts. The noise if your close enough will jar you and the cuts and bruises on their faces after the game remind you of how hard they hit. I see these men as titans, as warriors. It's not a blood sport there's a lot more to the game, but that rawness, that brutality on the rink is exciting.

I remember the year the Flames won the Stanley Cup. I was too young to be out at a bar and my Dad wasn't here to take me to the game. But everyone in my family watched that game. Even my Grandmother loved it. When the game was over all I had to do was walk to the end of my block to see the excitement in the city. People were out on their balconies. Some were waving flags. Car horns were honking. It was awesome. It was awesome because for a moment (a few hours for some) everyone was happy about one thing. We had won. It was a vacation from life. The feeling of the team was out. And that is an awesome feeling, because you know people a little better after you share with them. There have been other great games in this city besides that one: great Stampeder games - we've won the Grey cup, we even had the 1988 Olympics here. But none hit me the same as that game that night. I've watched the Flames since then always hoping that they'd bring another night like that. But with all the money in the States good luck. The

real deal is gone.

But in hockey money doesn't rule the game. There are devoted fans who ignore or look past the damage that has been done to Canadian NHL teams by the States and that's what makes it great it's the love of the game. My Dad and I are some of them. We go to the games a few times a year. My Dad comes and picks me up in his truck, we head down to the Stampede grounds. We don't usually talk a lot, mostly we smoke and listen to the radio, watch all the people walk fast through the winter night. Every game we get the same thing two beers (those are for me, my Dad doesn't drink), a cup of coffee and a big tub of popcorn. I don't eat before I go to a game, because think of what two beer and popcorn does in your stomach. All the little kernels that are eaten blow up from the beer and I usually feel like a blimp by third period. Then I have a coffee and drive home warm and sleepy in my Dad's truck. Listening to the traffic outside the window, smoking, listening to the radio. It's a good feeling, a shared feeling.

I've watched Mario Lemieux closely for the past two years. He came back from retirement not only to own and run The Pittsburgh Penguins but play too. This man is amazing and people know it, people come out to see him play. He's a legend you know. But that's why I like hockey because it's about greatness. It's about being really good at something and when you're that good people notice. And not just notice but it makes them happy, it gives them something to believe in something to support and something to share, which like I said before makes people know each other a little better. I mean when you look at the world and think about what it is that makes it go round its power. And it's good to share the power; it's good to help bring people up if you can.

Everyone knows about power. Everyone has some. Kids have power over their parents and vice versa. Rulers over the masses, that's a two-way street as well. Patrons over the bartenders and at the end of the night, at last call, the bartender can kick you out. It's just that different people find different ways to power and different kinds of power, some good some bad. Where that power comes from, that's the thing that separates me

from feminism, from self-portraiture, from lots of theories in the art world. I'd say that power comes from within but I don't really believe that, it comes from outside too. I'm at this weird point in my life where I'm realizing how much power I do have and how much I don't. I think in some ways power is about obligation. If you are the one in charge others are obligated to follow. But I don't feel obligated to do anything. When I do things they're always because I have decided to do them. Now, on the flip side I don't have a lot of people that are following my orders either. So I'm low on the obligation ladder but also on the power ladder. It's a weird kind of freedom, not having anything and not having anything to lose. And really that's where my empowerment comes from. Painting is my main output of power right now. It's the way that I affect people, my audience.

Now, I'll tell you one last story. One last slip of an experience that will allow you to understand what I've been getting at here. I watched the sky one night. It was about a year ago. And the reason I know the time was because the same night happened again this year. It always rains during Stampede week in Calgary. Some years are terrible, there's so much rain that it puts damper on the whole event. But this summer it's not like that. Last summer was pretty good too. Even though the rain comes here it's like a desert in this city. It gets hot, granted it gets cold at night but sometimes, it gets hot here. When it gets hot in Calgary there isn't a lot of reprieve. We don't have an ocean, or a lake, we have a river but it doesn't do much for cooling off. There's mosquitoes by the river, the bottom is rocky and there are really no gradual slopes down to the water. The Bow and Elbow rivers just cut a path and that's where they have stayed. They are sharp rivers, with clear water. But understand they're not big rivers, for anyone who lives around water these are more like streams.

These nights, they're important. Because I remember them. I remember them clearly. Maybe I remember them clearly because I saw it twice. Both nights were preceded with a day that ran to about thirty-three degrees Celsius and the city was just baking. Stampede like I said was here, and every night of Stampede there's fireworks. I try to find look outs

that aren't teeming with people, because I like an unobstructed view. One of my favorite places to go is a hill in Crescent Heights, most people sit on the ridge directly facing the Stampede grounds, but I've found that if I head west through a tiny park there's a small summit with three benches where if you look left you can see the fireworks and if you look right you can see the mountains or where they would be if it was light out. Directly in front is downtown, with oil towers, and pipeline buildings.

Last year on this night a storm was rolling in. Cloud cover at night here is rare and that's why the temperature plunges. There's nothing to hold in the heat that the city gives off at night when the sky is clear. But this night the sky was half and half a storm was coming in over the mountains to the west, to my right. The fireworks were on my left. The fireworks started. Fireworks are fireworks, explosions of color in a night sky. The Stampede puts on a good show. It lasts about twenty minutes and that's a long time to look at phantom flowers blooming in the night. However, on this night I got a double bill. You see the storm had its' own show. The colliding air masses produced thunder. This thunder though was far away. Far enough away that you could only hear the large claps. They sounded distant, like the thunder was behind closed doors. And the constant rolling was more like a hum. The kind of hum that's low and comes out of some electrical machine.

This machine was coming closer, but it wasn't ominous. Because in a way it was moving gracefully meandering along the foothills sliding into the valley that I make my home in. It had gray, misty veils that floated underneath. I could see where they came out of the clouds. The veils were like long panels of thin, translucent gauze that dissipated in treetops, hills, and rooftops. It wasn't threatening I suppose because I knew it was all puff and no blow. The clouds weren't the kind that had pouring rain in them; I could see that, they were too thin. But it had lightning. Heat lightning is what you would call it. This was an electrical storm, not a rain storm.

I sat there and from the hill I could see the radio towers on Signal Hill. Between me

and then the residential plane of Calgary was still. It wasn't that late so some houses were lit up, some windows just showed the ghostly glow of a TV. The only movement I could see, or decided to see was the street lights. From above, I watched the sea of light moving. The pulse of electricity pumping through them, and it beats, like a light bulb powered from a cottage generator. Because that's what they are, just on a larger scale.

The lightning that's what I want to tell you about though. Because while the fireworks went off so did mother nature. The bolts came out of the sky and looked like they were touching down. Other times, the lightning lit up patches of clouds and it look like great ships were anchored in the cumulus. But the bolts were big, substantial. In my vision they were triple the width of the radio towers. Now that's not a measurement, not in reality anyways. But I suppose it's a measurement of my vision that bolt, and those towers. It's a relationship.

When I look at a scene like this I wish I was a photographer, because the picture is there. The red towers on my right the sea of light between that ridge and my location the bolt of lightning touching behind the foothills. The composition is perfect. But that's not really what interests me. What interests me are the skins out there.

The skins that are distances between me and the other things. The skins that separate and join me to the life that's out there in the City. The skins that separate me from the people on the grounds. The people on the grounds have a skin that sounds like the midway, smells like beer, and is anxious, anxious to see who they'll meet, what they'll see. My skin is quiet, my skin feels the chilly wind. Inside my skin I'm thinking about the storm, not about the fireworks. But this big skin of storm also joins me to the Stampede people. I can't see these skins, they're elusive that way, but they're there, and I can feel them. That's what I want you to understand about me I'm a feeler. When I see something, interact with something, I feel and it's not on an emotional level. It seems more like a physical feeling. But this physical feeling does stir up the emotions in me. Now this is not ESP or some kind of telepathic thing. It's just an in tune thing that you get from being a watcher. I see

myself in these situations like a referee. You can't be a player if you want to make sure the game is played right. You have to be a watcher instead. But you have to watch closely. But I'm not a referee because they see a puck, or a ball, I see the skins. I feel the skins.

There are physical things like storms, like hockey games, like cities, like the wilderness that are skins, that cover all of us. And these big skins they are shared. Then there are emotional skins like falling in love or losing someone, or memories, these skins only surround the individual, because each one is different. But these skins touch other skins, sometimes they harden, sometimes they slough off. I have skins I've let others touch them, and I've touched others. I've seen others, that's what I do when I watch. But skins have holes and skins are thicker in other places. It's hard to tell where one begins and one ends. There's all these layers that connect and grow smaller and then connect again and grow bigger. We make skins too, skin is a regenerating material. So if you break it will heal. Your skin is the largest organ that your body has. It's bigger than your brain, bigger than your heart, it surrounds you.

Skins surround a body, because that's what skins do. And that body has a silhouette it has a line that surrounds it. I've tried to see it, and at times I think I have, but then I realize It's just another skin on my vision and that silhouette is lost. These glimpses are fleeting. Then the skins come back hard and slick and I have to start again, I have to mine them away. The skins are more about feeling than about seeing. More about knowing than learning.

Conclusion

When I entered this program I had questions. Questions about Feminism, about Self-Portraiture and about me. Here at The University of Calgary I have found answers to some of those questions. However, It's the paint itself that still makes me question. What I mean by this is that the nature of painting, the nature of a painter is to question. As a painter you question the things around you, you question what it is that you make in your studio. And these questions they do get answered, but with every answer there comes a new question, because for me the process is circular. Figure out something and all of a sudden you see more things that need to go through the same figuring out process. I suppose ultimately what I'm walking away with is comfort in knowing there are still things waiting for me to find answers to.



Figure 1. *Falling 1*, 1999. Terra McDonald

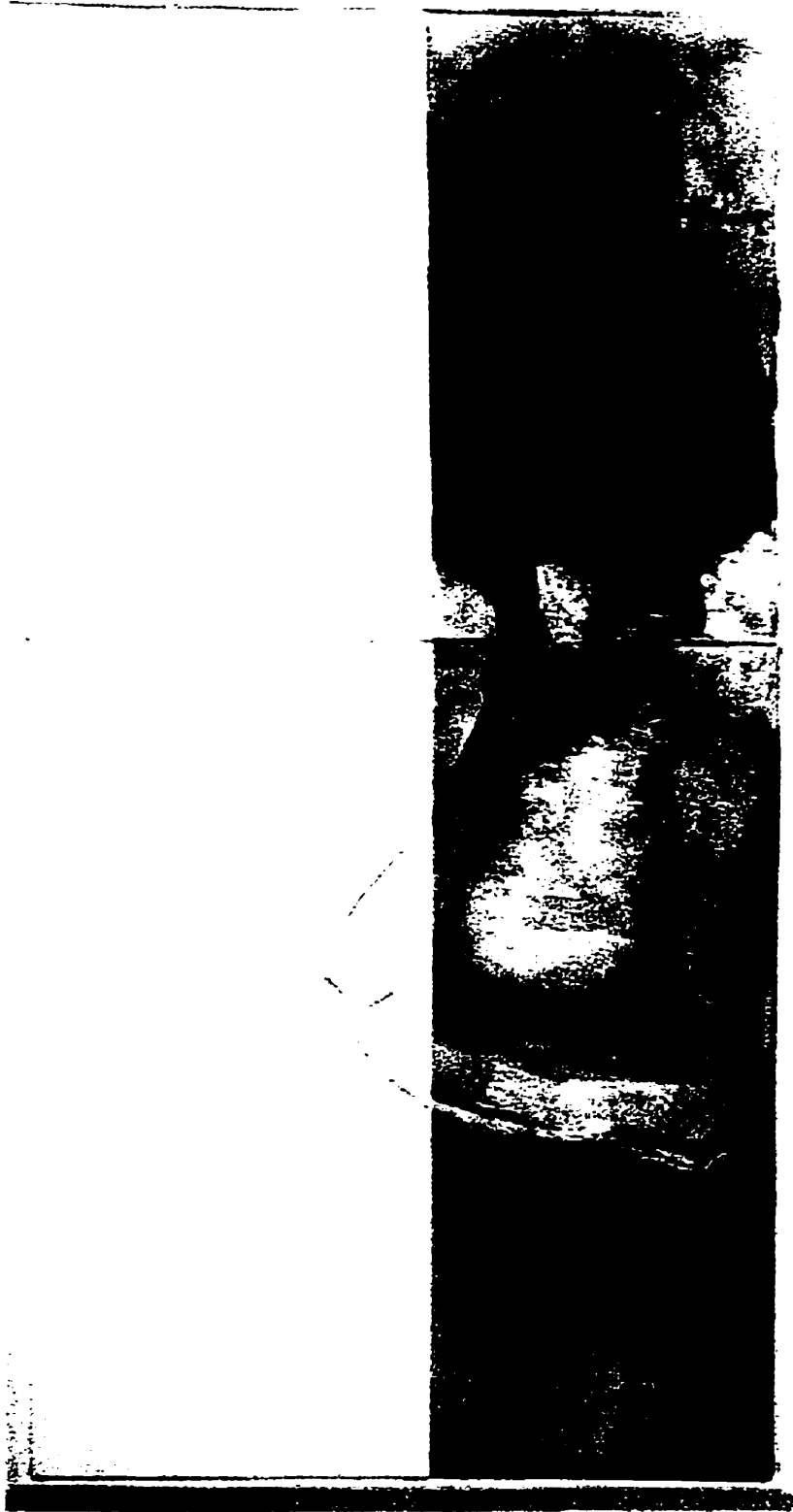


Figure 2. *Spent Energy*, 2000. Terra McDonald



Figure 3. Falling 2, 2000. Terra McDonald



Figure 4. *Self-Portrait*, 1999. Terra McDonald.

Endnotes:

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