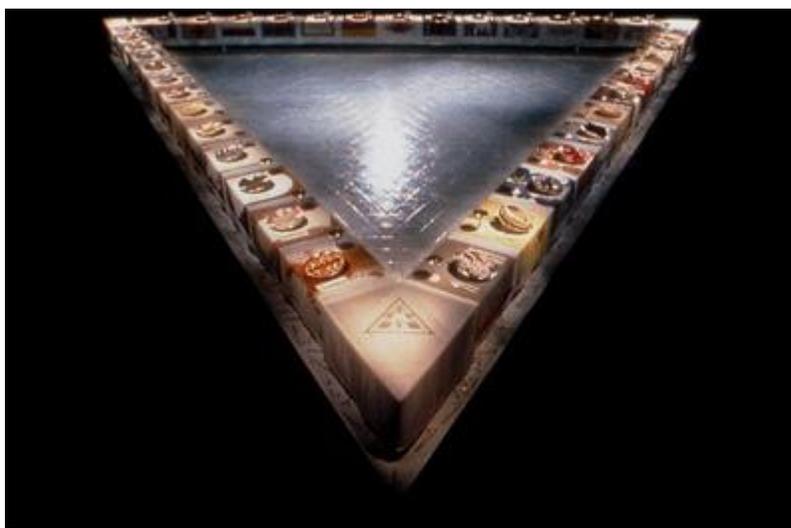


MONDAY, OCTOBER 9 2006

Forgetting the F Word: Part One of Two



Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-1979
Installation view

Image copyright The Brooklyn Museum

The following article is the first of a two part series that will discuss the panel discussion Forgetting the F Word, which was moderated by Renée Vara and included speakers Maura Reilly, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Danielle Mysliwiec, artist and activist, and myself. A podcast documenting the discussion will follow the post Forgetting the F Word: Part Two of Two.

A while ago I thought it might be interesting to try and figure out which artist a contemporary art maker could name as an influence that would discredit them the quickest. A friend answered Judy Chicago, and no sooner were those words uttered, than the problem was solved. There are probably those who believe that this reaction is a result of deeply engrained social values that privilege men and evoke hatred and fear of women in society as a whole – certainly there are cases where this is true – but let's face it, Judy Chicago, while historically important, is not at all relevant to art making today.

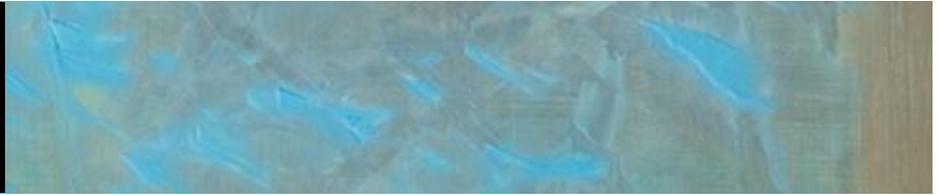
With this information in mind, it is not surprising that when art professionals hear that the Brooklyn Museum is installing Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, nobody is going to take issue with it, but by the same token, if the first response of the Museum when asked what they are doing

to promote feminism, is revisiting Judy Chicago, the institution should expect more than a few raised eyebrows. Not that any were openly raised at *Forgetting the F Word*, a discussion panel I was part of, hosted by Renée Vara a week and a half ago. The idea that the conversation about feminism is important seems to inspire all sorts of qualifications before stating anything critical about the movement. Of course, so does being part of a panel you plan to critique.

Let me begin then by acknowledging that panel discussions about feminism are always important, but also, that the conversation I was part of, by and large, went no where. There are a couple of reasons for this, the largest being that it is a mistake to spend large amounts of time discussing statistical data we are all aware of. It's boring for the audience, and one member (Trong Nguyen), noticeably irritated by the conversation, ended up telling the panel members that the numbers cited of male and female representation in commercial galleries were more or less old news. He offered the suggestion of researching gender statistics on the people continue to make work after school, or those who come to art from different fields, which was a good one, but given the "you suck" tone of his voice it's not much of a surprise the panelists didn't respond well. He also put forth the thought that the museum's first feminist exhibition effort could be a show of all male feminists, at which point Brooklyn Museum curator Maura Reilly declared that she wasn't going to dignify the comment with a response.

Granted, Nguyen's idea is limited due to its "one trick ponyness", but I have to say I was surprised by Reilly's response because it ignored the more important issue brought up by Nguyen, which is that radicalism no longer exists in the art world. Had it not been the end of the evening, we could have spent the next two hours discussing this idea, and generated some ideas with practical application. It really seems to me that the starting point of this discussion should be examining how to make feminism work in a system that doesn't have enough flexibility to allow for its existence.

Look forward to tomorrows post, Forgetting the F Word Part Two of Two: Covert Feminism, Cyber Feminism, and the Powers of Social Networking.



Forgetting The F Word: Part Two of Two

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12 2006

The following article is the second post of a two part series that discusses the panel Forgetting the F Word, which was moderated by Renée Vara and included speakers Maura Reilly, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Danielle Mysliwiec, artist and activist, and myself. A podcast documenting the discussion can be heard [here](#). Read part one of two [here](#).

The question no one got around to answering at *Forgetting the F Word* is how do art professionals make feminism work? Sadly, in this environment covert feminism seems to be amongst the most effective methods of “activism”. In other words, a curator with a feminist agenda no longer puts together entirely female panels because it is understood that associating yourself with the militant bitch movement doesn’t curry public favor, but they will curate a large number of women into projects that may not have anything to do with feminism per say. Women’s voices get heard, and they aren’t attached to the negative aspects that so many associate with the feminist movement.

I want to be clear that I’m not saying this is the best method of working I am simply observing that it is a practical solution to a climate that for the most part, isn’t interested in supporting the mobilization of women. Certainly, it is the one I would most closely align myself with. I am interested in seeing an integration of male and female activities and think it’s a problem that those who identify as feminists tend to be relegated to the “women’s issues” table, as though this is the only thing they have expertise in.

With that said, the Internet has proven time and time again that it is a highly effective medium for activists, because it is such a democratizing medium. If you have even a nominal amount of design skills, the costs of putting together a site are virtually nothing, and many believe that content is its own distribution mechanism. I generally buy into this doctrine, except for one small detail: there are not an equal number of high profile men and women publishing on the Internet. This suggests that the medium can not in fact, erase deeply engrained social biases.

The issue of course is never cut and dry. I made the mistake last year of claiming that there were very few women art bloggers, and Modern Kicks wisely corrected me on this, observing that compared to other fields, art professionals tend to fare better overall. However, my blogroll, (which has fairly consistently stayed at 37% women — not the best percentage in the world), does not represent the percentage of male to female links that go out within posts. Links within posts quite obviously mean a lot more than those that appear in a sidebar that only gets perused occasionally (a point MK mentioned as well.) I don’t have the time to figure out these

numbers, but as someone who pays very close attention to who is getting linked to and who isn't I can tell you that the stats will not look good.

Who knows why women don't get linked to as much as men - I suspect we're back to the issue of "deeply engrained social biases", since there are plenty of intelligent women publishing in the arts, but the point that the medium is not as democratic people make it out to be doesn't wholly explain why we have not seen it tapped effectively by feminists. The Guerrilla Girl's are an excellent example of this issue, as is illustrated by the last great Internet work they did in...1995. This may have seemed innovative at the time, but the fact that their site looks like a relic from the .com boom, makes them ineffectual as activists on the web. The site is not dynamic, and by this I mean there is nothing on the site that would allow a newsreader to alert a user when new content became available, and there is little to indicate that this is going to change any time soon.

As Cyberfeminists the Guerrilla Girls fail miserably. Of course this is not unique to them, as cyberfeminism as a whole seems to be a term that has faded away with the economic viability of the 90's bad girl. As I mentioned at *Forgetting the F Word* one of the interesting changes over last ten years that should be observed, is that academics and feminists like the Guerrilla Girls were amongst the first to embrace the Internet, but are now turning out to be the least innovative users of the bunch. It's hard to know what effect this is having on feminism, but a lack of widely available scholarship on the subject is never positive.

The good news is that there has been some activist activity recently on the web as seen by the Anonymous Female Artist, Broadsheet and Brainstormers. Function:Feminism is an excellent database of cyberfeminist work, which is part of a larger effort by the Feminist Art Project, at Rutgers University, and of course, the fact that the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art exists is incredibly important since it is the only institute of its kind in the country. What we have yet to see is work that truly mobilizes a mainstream audience on this issue. The medium of the Internet can be incredibly powerful, and to my mind feminists need to work at becoming little more viral if they really want to fuck shit up. I would think that it's only a matter of time before someone really picks up this challenge and runs with it — certainly the seeds are there.