

# art journal

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# art journal

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# Women's Work

A Lineage, 1966–94

Nina Felshin

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The recent tendency among contemporary artists to represent clothing as abstracted from the human body has been overwhelmingly dominated by women. A glance backward reveals that some women artists employed clothing as early as the mid 1960s and early 1970s. Gathered here are illustrations of twelve works that range in date from 1966 to 1994, accompanied by artists' statements. Together they represent a survey of feminist concerns in the visual arts from the mid 1960s to the present. The contribution of early feminist theory to more recent clothing-related work—by artists of both sexes, straight and gay!—cannot be overestimated. In their celebration of women's lives and experience—including “women's work”—1970s feminist artists recognized such traditionally feminine materials as fabric, methods as sewing, and forms as clothing as viable subject matter and formal means for art. Artists of the 1980s and 1990s, whose works acknowledge or adapt, among other things, the feminist critique of representation with theories of sexual difference, theories of psychoanalysis, and theories of construction/deconstruction of sexual and cultural identity are indebted to the formal precedent established by first-generation feminists; this is the common thread that unites all the artists on the following pages.

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SARAH CHARLESWORTH is an artist who lives and works in New York. She has exhibited widely in the United States and Europe and teaches at the School of Visual Arts, New York.

MAUREEN CONNOR has been referencing clothing in her sculpture and installations since 1975. She exhibits her work internationally and teaches sculpture and installation at Queens College, CUNY.

LESLEY DILL is a sculptor who lives and works in New York. She will have a one-person show at Frumkin/Adams, New York, in Fall 1995.

LESLIE FRY is an artist who lives and teaches in Vermont. Since 1977 her work has been exhibited in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela.

KATHY GROVE is an artist who lives and works in New York.

HARMONY HAMMOND continues to work with recycled materials in her mixed-media installation paintings. A professor at the University of Arizona, Tucson, she lectures and writes on feminist art.

MIRIAM SCHAPIRO, a painter, femmagist, sculptor, and printmaker, is a leader in feminist art and the Pattern and Decoration movement. Her work appears in major museums throughout the world.

MIRA SCHOR is a painter living in New York. She is co-editor of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, a journal of contemporary art issues.

JUDITH SHEA is a sculptor who began working with clothing in the mid 1970s. She is the recent recipient of the Rome Prize Fellowship and the Rockefeller Foundation Resident Fellowship.

ELISE SIEGEL is a sculptor who lives and works in New York. She has exhibited nationally and in Canada since 1979.

MIMI SMITH, a New York-based artist, continues to make work dealing with objects and issues in society. She had a retrospective exhibition at ICA, Philadelphia, in 1994.

YONG SOON MIN has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally and is assistant professor of studio art at the University of California, Irvine.

NINA FELSHIN is guest editor of this issue of Art Journal.





## Mira Schor

**T**he notion of femininity intrigues me. I live it yet it is alien to my sense of self. It is a role and costume that women are allowed, indeed encouraged, to put on and take off, to “change” throughout their lives. The dress as an image in itself in art, separate from costume in figurative painting, emerged from permission given by the feminist art movement to explore female experiences as subject matter for high art. The dress is a second skin, and in many contemporary artworks skin itself becomes another veil of costume.

In early works I combined the idea of “dress” and “book” to create narrow figures of translucent rice paper layers covered with handwritten diaries and dreams: the viewer could walk up to the dress and turn the pages, reading “her” like a book—or as much as my illegible scrawl would allow. Traces of intimate writing on the shape of a fragile paper dress figured the availability, vulnerability, and unreadable inner core of the feminine role. In recent work I have returned to my handwriting, now examined for its relationship to appropriated public text and for its abstract sign value embedded in the solid flesh of oil paint.

Mira Schor, *Dress Book*, 1977, mixed media on rice paper, 63 × 15 × 7 inches. Collection of the artist.