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Margaret Harrison: ‘You have to have a strategy to draw people into the work’

Pioneering artist Margaret Harrison shares memories of her early career as an activist for equal rights and pay and fair working conditions for women

by ANNA McNAY

Margaret Harrison (b1940) has been at the forefront of British feminist and activist art since her solo show of drawings and watercolours – including images of women as hamburger fillings and Captain America with fake breasts and high heels – was closed down on the grounds of “indecency” in 1971. Throughout the 70s and 80s, she collaborated with her husband, Conrad Atkinson, and other female artists, as well as working alone, to produce work documenting the plight of underpaid homeworkers, rape victims, factory workers and more. Her work Rape (1978) was included in the controversial 1979 Arts Council show, Lives, curated by Derek Boshier, where it attracted a lot of attention from the press and public alike.

With a recent revisiting of some of her early works, winning the Northern Art Prize in 2013, and a current survey exhibition, Accumulations, at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Harrison speaks to Studio International about some of her early memories and pioneering projects.

Anna McNay: Your first solo show in London, at the Motif Editions Gallery in 1971, was closed by the police after just one day for being “indecent”. You described it as “anti-pornographic”. It included drawings of women

equated with food (Good Enough to Eat, 1971); Captain America (1971), in which the comic hero is adorned with fake breasts and a star-spangled penis; and a drawing of Playboy's Hugh Hefner as a bunny boy in a corset. What was it that was so shocking about the works, and how did you feel when the show was shut down?

Margaret Harrison: It was a really weird thing. It was the period just after the so-called liberating 60s. I'd just had a baby and, due to hormone imbalance, I had no memory of any of the work I'd produced. I just sent everything in and the gallery hung it. It looked good and the opening was a success. When the show was closed down, and I went in the next day to talk to people, I was shocked. The woman who was running the space looked a bit white and shaken, so I didn't make a fuss. I just said I'd come back for the work. Word got out and it sort of went mad. The press were hanging around the doors of our tiny flat in Notting Hill Gate and I spoke to a few of them. But then it all just disappeared. The government floated the pound that night and that became the major news story. I remember Conrad [Atkinson, artist and Harrison's husband] saying to me: "If they don't float the pound, you're going to be on the front page of the Mirror tomorrow." I just felt ill! I know some artists would have made a lot of the publicity, but I just didn't want to talk about it ever again.

Then, when I went out to California in the early 90s, the director of the University of California, Davis – where Conrad took over as chair – got wind of this early work. He thought the students there would like it and suggested showing them a few of the pieces. I said OK and, sure enough, the students really loved them. They couldn't stop talking about them and I realised it was probably OK to show them again. At the time when I made the work, we were just getting into the debates of the early 70s about feminism and there weren't any roles models – you just did it. Of course, some of my drawings

Djust looked as if I was speaking up to pornography. I thought this might have been my mistake because previously I had just been talking to my friends and myself. We were in the bubble of Notting Hill Gate and London and we didn't quite realise what was out there beyond our own circle. Images were interpreted as if they had been made by men. I've thought about this since, and the reception and interpretation all depends on who has made the images; whose perspective is it coming from? The ones of the women in the hamburgers obviously could have been done by a man. There was a show on the radio at the time called the Jimmy Young programme, and Young had a recipe every morning and the discussion paralleled women to juicy, edible things. That's why I put the women in the hamburgers and sandwiches. Actually, there was no real difference between what I was doing and what men were doing formally, so it needed rethinking. I also did the reversal images, however, giving Captain America breasts, high heels, stockings and so on. What was interesting was that, when I asked the gallery manager what it was that people didn't like, she said: "It was the men. The images of women were OK, but they thought the male images were disgusting."

AMc: Because that was not something that people were used to seeing?

MH: No. Even though we had gone through that whole 60s thing with guys wearing women's dresses and performing in bands with makeup, it really didn't make any difference. There was still this notion that men were one thing and women were another. But we all know there's a whole range in between. Of course it was going on underground, but there was no acknowledgement in the mainstream. Throughout the 70s political movements, people were talking about sexuality and quite a number of women I knew became lesbians, even though they were married. I began to realise that there is no strict dividing line between sexualities. There's a bit of each gender in all of us. I guess, in my own way, I was trying to deal with that. When my friends and I went to the first big women's demonstration at the Miss

World competition at the Albert Hall in 1970, many of the people who supported us were from the gay community. There would be groups of men in wedding dresses or dressed as Miss World. It was good fun, actually; it was great. My friend, Alison Fell, and I went together. She had light bulbs stuck to her breasts and a little switch in her sleeve, which she pressed now and again so that the light bulbs would turn on and off (the Flashing Nipples). I was Miss Lovable Bra, in a pre-formed, black plastic chest – one of the ones you can get in the lingerie department. I stuck orange fur nipples on it and had a smile on a stick. It was totally mad and I was five months pregnant, so it was too dangerous for me to go inside the Albert Hall. I stayed outside, but actually it was even worse outside. The press were saying: "You're just jealous because you're ugly." But because you weren't doing it on your own, you felt safer; if other people could demonstrate, then you could, too.

In the whole of that 70s period, we all became involved in different kinds of politics. There would be meetings all around London and you felt you had to go to them, otherwise you wouldn't know what was going on. So you would join these groups – it might be Art for Change or it might be just a women's group or a straightforward political group against the Vietnam war. There were a lot of male American artists in Notting Hill Gate because they were trying to escape from America and the draft. They came with their partners, so we got to know a lot of women from the US, too. It created an atmosphere. I remember a friend of mine, Carlyle Reedy, an American poet and performance artist, who organised performances in a church hall. Performance art was becoming a big thing in the streets, church halls and alternative spaces. It was around you all the time and that's how it developed. Also, the art market had fallen apart. I was involved in a different kind of feminist politics and began to question what else I could do. What kind of work could I produce? There is a notion that conceptual art is what dominated the 70s, but I would dispute that. We thought conceptual art was just about discussing language and the format of production and was the mirror image of formalism. We wanted to find ways to picture the issues and to try things out. So we did, and it just grew and grew. There's going to be a show of conceptual art from the mid-60s to the end of the 70s at Tate Britain, which opens in April, and they've linked us all into it now. You learn to accept it but, at the time, we would be having very fierce discussions with, say, the art and language group at the ICA, who really did not like what we were doing. We weren't really interested in just doing things about language. We wanted to

do something about the subject of language. Most of the conceptual movement theories came from French linguistics, while we were coming from an Anglo-American experience, if you like, so it didn't feel as if it made that much sense. We weren't rejecting theory per se, it was just a different theory and we were looking at material theory by writers such as Raymond Williams. That's what seemed to make more sense to myself, and a few others.

AMc: So it was around this time that you helped found the London Women's Liberation Art Group?

MH: Yes, the first one.

AMc: Has there been more than one, then?

MH: Yes, they seemed to pop up all the time. That was the very first one and it came out of a big meeting at Camden Studios, if I remember rightly. It was a meeting called by women in the media. It was a group of journalists and some women who were beginning to work in television. They sent out notices for artists and writers and anybody who was vaguely connected to cultural production. It was absolutely crammed. Out of that, a number of different groups were formed: women and literature, women and art, that kind of thing. One in particular, the Women's Postal Art Group, grew internationally. Kate Walker and Monica Ross were the driving forces behind this. The first group was fairly short-lived, but we did a couple of demonstrations and put together a banner for the National Women's Demonstration in Trafalgar Square. I was giving birth when it took place. It was totally mad. We did a show at the same time at the Woodstock Art Gallery. I was in touch with Sally Frazer and Liz Moore – who were also in the show – and later I went on to document the Women's Art activity for Studio International as a timeline between 1970 and 1977 [Notes on Feminist Art in Britain 1970-77, Studio International 193, no 987, 1977]. I had previously agreed to do interviews about art organisations for the magazine for a regular column. I asked Pauline Barrie (later, she ran the Women's Art Slide Library) if she would work with me. We had, in the meantime, formed a women's workshop at the Artists' Union, which really came out of the original Women's Art Group. I guess we thought there was no need for that group any more because other women started joining the Artists' Union. That brings us back to the whole notion of how and where else art can be situated, if you can't sell the work.

That's what we were thinking through in the union: what was art's role in society? Back then, the small galleries were all located on Bond Street. We worked on broadening things out for public consumption and I think that sparked the growth of alternative galleries. It really dates from that period.

A lot of energy went into that Artists' Union. For instance, Conrad did an exhibition about a strike in his village in the north of England. It happened to be a women's strike. I think there was one guy in it, but it was mostly women. It was in a thermometer factory and they'd been on strike for a whole year for better working conditions. Conrad was invited to do a show at the ICA and he said: "Well, I don't want to do a painting show, I want to do something about this strike in the north of England." Amazingly they agreed. I helped on that because I wanted to learn about what was going on and how I could make work that related to people. I did the interviews with the women and they were recorded on video. The ICA asked the Arts Council if it would fund a video and it said no because it wasn't an art form. Of course, we were all struggling for money. The video was shown on a little television monitor in the gallery. Afterwards, someone rang up from the Arts Council and said: "You'll be pleased to know we now approve the video as an art form." It broke new ground and we brought the strikers down to speak at the ICA with May Hobbs from the Night Cleaners Campaign. It was filmed, but I don't think we've ever been able to locate that bit of film. We were all very careless with things back then. Everything was done on the run. We invited Jack Cunningham, who was the MP for the area at the time, and I think we had one other MP, or even a member of the government. The people in Cumbria had been told: "If you don't stop this strike, we're going to take the factory away and we're going to transfer it to London." They never moved the factory. It is still there.

Mary Kelly was part of the campaign for the Night Cleaners, too. She had learned how to do the sound recording. It was the Strike Exhibition that led the way into Women and Work. Then another member of the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union, Kay Hunt, came to us and said: "I haven't done anything like this before, but I would like to do something about the factories in south London where all my family worked." It was a like a light bulb going on. This was the project. She set it up with the factory and I went in as the scout, laying the groundwork for what actually emerged in the end. Of course,

when it was shown at the South London Gallery, the factory owners were absolutely appalled. They tried to ban workers from going along. It raised a lot of consciousness.

In the meantime, I'd been asked by Battersea Arts Centre to do a show there. I became more and more interested in doing things about homeworkers and rape. I put it to the director and it was actually perfect for him. I did some work with Helen Eadie from the General Municipal Workers' Union [now the GMB], who happened to be married to an MP's son, which was very useful. I went with her to interview homeworkers and we went to see one woman who was assembling tax forms. It was government work, basically, but she was being paid two pence per form that she put together. She probably got about 50p out of an hour's work. Helen said: "I can tell my father-in-law about this." She did and he raised it in parliament. The worker's house was absolutely crammed from top to bottom. She had two young children and I think she had separated from her husband. This was the only work she could do. There was hardly any childcare available at that time. What Helen was trying to do was recruit women into the union to get them the right rates, and a lot of them did join. It was raised in parliament where nobody had any knowledge that this work had been outsourced so much. The homeworkers got the right rate for the job after that.

AMc: Oh, that's brilliant. It seems a lot of your art projects brought about social and political change for the better?

MH: This notion of what is art for, that it can't *do* anything … If you find the right context in which to make the art, a lot of people become interested in what you're doing. They may think they'd like to have a pretty watercolour on the wall but, after a while, they come round to thinking they quite like what you're doing as well. As far as the format was concerned, we had to try and find ways to make it work. Instead of me just doing documentation, I actually had two canvases for that piece. The women workers were shown in black and white photos, which I really wasn't happy with. I couldn't understand why we couldn't work with colour, but I think it was a style thing. It was linked to the whole notion of conceptual art. You had to print in black and white. I didn't want to throw away my drawing and painting skills either, so I decided I would work in essence on canvas. The rape piece was done in layers. It had bits of collage and text and it had case histories, but it was also still a painting, with reproductions of classic works. People responded to it. I think you have to have a strategy to draw people into the work.

I have kept that up ever since. The dialogue between the figurative work and the more investigative format still exists. There still is that dialogue between the painting and the information part, if you like.

AMc: At the time, the Arts Council, which bought Rape (1978), decided it couldn't show it in the Serpentine because it was a "family gallery" with free entry. It was, however, used by schoolteachers at the Battersea Arts Centre to introduce pupils to the issue.

MH: Yes. They used it and also the Rape Crisis Centre people came down to Battersea and held some sessions. They advertised for women to come in, and I think they gave them a room. They came in and they were able to discuss what had happened to them. It was also used by the local schools as a way of bringing up the issue.

The Arts Council used to ask a particular artist each year to buy for it and it was Derek Boshier that year. He wanted to put it on at the Serpentine. Then someone at the Arts Council started looking at some of the works that were going in the show. Derek wanted to do an exhibition that related to people's lives, so the exhibition was called, quite simply, Lives. They looked at Conrad's work first and threw out one of his pieces. He had worked with [the journalist] John Pilger and made a print to be presented to the Queen Mother on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of University College London, of which the Queen Mother was Chancellor. The print documented the thalidomide affair, drawing attention to the royal seal of approval given to a range of booze by the same company – Distillers – that produced the drug. I think there was at least one other piece. Then they looked at mine as well. There was a row and Derek said: "No. They're staying in. This is my show. I've curated it." So the show got moved to the Hayward Gallery, where you had to pay to get in and it was therefore thought to be less public. Once they did that, however, all the press cottoned on and wanted to know why the show had been moved.

AMc: So did it end up being seen by a lot more people than it originally would have been?

MH: The work went on show in the Hayward Gallery and my Rape piece was like the Mona Lisa – people were sitting six-deep in front of it. They had a rope around it and

someone told me there was a curtain over it at one point. It was ridiculous! So, of course, that was when people started looking at it and a lot of young artists became interested in that way of working. It began to have some sort of meaning. Rather than just painting a nice scene, or going for pop art and magazine culture or abstraction, they started to see they could construct other things around their own work. The Arts Council tells me that, for a while, Rape was the most requested piece going out on show. It took on a life of its own after that, really.

AMc: You've recently revisited some of your early works, stating a need "to both reflect and extend the subject matter of my own work into a more realistic relationship with the problems of working people". How have you gone about tackling this?

MH: In 2004, I was asked to do a show at a place called Intersection for the Arts in the Mission area, which backs on to the gay area of San Francisco. The gallery had not been able to find a real meaningful way with the visual arts to relate to the gay community and it thought my early works would relate to that group. I was talking to the curator and he said: "We've got a group of young gay artists who are meeting at the moment. Would you mind if I showed them this portfolio?" I said that was fine. He showed the portfolio to this group of young artists and they said: "Now we know what to do!" They'd been asked to produce work on the underground in San Francisco so they did a series of artworks and they just moved body parts around. They took a cue from my work, but they made their own work. Of course, they all came to the opening of the show and were very enthusiastic. The whole gay community came along as well. It was great because that meant it moved beyond the question of what is female and what is male. It tackled all those grades, if you like, about sexuality and gave a kind of permission. I didn't have to give them permission because San Francisco is San Francisco, but it meant that there was a whole field where they could say this was mainstream. I realised I could start working around those themes again.

I made some new pieces for that show where I started looking at images of women produced by other artists, too. I did one of a young woman looking at an abstracted Picasso. In his painting, she's very rounded but abstracted, her head is tiny but everything else is big. I took the head of a young woman from a fashion magazine wearing this giant pink bow in her hair, but then I drew her realistically with the right

size hips and pink shoes. I did another piece of a naked woman hugging a tube of sweeties – probably Smarties – obviously penis replacement. It's based on a Mel Ramos work. I added in the back of Dolly Parton looking at the woman. She's got her hands on her hips and she's just looking with a gesture that says: "Oh, yeah!" Dolly Parton, I have to say, is a genius. There is a song called Harper Valley PTA. You'll have to listen to it because it's absolutely brilliant. She's singing about a woman who is being criticised. Her daughter's been sent home with a note from the Harper Valley PTA to say they would like her to meet them. So she goes along and they say that she, the mother, is dressing unsuitably – she's wearing her skirts far too short. The song tears all of them apart on their double standards, like who is sleeping with whom, and who is a drunk. It's an absolutely brilliant piece of work. I love it. So I thought I'd put it together with the Ramos piece.

I also took Manet's Olympia and replaced the figures with other women. I made three pieces based on this. In one, I put Marilyn Monroe with Michelle Obama as Olympia. In another, I had Scarlett O'Hara waiting on Mammy (from Gone with the Wind) with the flowers. I like to play around and develop things.

AMc: Accumulations, your current exhibition at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, surveys your practice from the 80s to today. How difficult was it to select which works to include?

MH: It starts with my work from the 80s, but it also goes up to the present day, I guess, and there's a new piece as well, which draws on Hieronymus Bosch's painting, The Garden of Earthly Delights. I think the show looks great. The young curator, Alix Collingwood, has done a really fantastic job. We recreated the fence from Greenham Common for my piece, Common Reflections (2013), and we put mirrors behind it to reflect things back and as a reference to one of the actions at Greenham when women surrounded the fence and shone mirrors into the base. I was awarded the Northern Art Prize in 2013 for this work and another piece called The Last Gaze (2013), which is set around a painting based on the 1842 poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelite painting of The Lady of Shalott by JW Waterhouse (in Leeds Art Gallery). It is realised as a double reflected image in black and white and colour, collaged with many contemporary pop culture images, including Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Grace Jones. The paintings are accompanied by a collection of wing mirrors, further picking

up on the narrative of the poem, as well as the idea of the gaze and women as objects, constrained by rules.

AMc: What did it mean to you to win the prestigious Northern Art Prize at this stage in your career?

MH: It was rather astonishing, but it is great that a woman of my age can still be recognised, especially as the art world is always so keen to focus on the next sensation – in many ways, it parallels Pop Idol and The X Factor in its attitude. One of my best friends, Nancy Spero, also had late recognition, so it seems to be a new pattern. I have noticed more women of my age and older receiving attention. Maybe it would have been better a little earlier, but the Northern Art Prize, and the Paul Hamlyn Prize, which I received a bit later that same year, have meant that I can be more relaxed about producing new work, and they have validated me as an artist to a wider public, even if my work was already in the Tate and the V&A. I didn't much like the newspapers' use of headlines such as "Pensioner Wins", though – they demeaned the award.

AMc: Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art is currently running a campaign to raise money to keep The Last Gaze. How important is it to you that it should stay in the gallery?

MH: It has actually bought it now. I'm really pleased because it's an excellent museum for the work to be housed in permanently and it was its previous director, Kate Brindley, who nominated me for the Northern Art Prize. I have just received a letter from the current director, Alistair Hudson, saying that people are really excited about the show. Now that the gallery is attached to Teesside University, we'll be getting a lot of students in. They don't really run an art history course per se there: they have practice-based courses and I think they have an art in context course, so students can relate to the work quite easily. They have a curating course as well, so it's good in all sorts of ways. They're getting a lot of people through, so I'm pleased about that.

AMc: Do you still see your work as having an educational purpose, then?

MH: I think all art has an educational purpose, in one way or another. It has the capacity to go far beyond the moment in time when it is first shown.

• Accumulations is at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art until 24 January 2016.
• Harrison's works is also on show in Unorthodox at the Jewish Museum, New York, until 27 March 2016, and in All Men Become Sisters at the Sztuki Museum, Lodz, Poland, until 17 January.
• She will be included in Conceptual Art in Britain: 1964-79 at Tate Britain, London, 12 April – 29 August 2016.
• In 2017, Harrison will have a one person show in Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao.

PRINT

Dooley, Michael. “Beyond the Graphic Novel: Gender-Bending Superhero Feminism.” *Print*. January 8, 2016. http://www.printmag.com/illustration/graphic-novels-superhero-feminist-artist/

Beyond the Graphic Novel: Gender-Bending Superhero Feminism

By: **Michael Dooley** | January 8, 2016

We’re no longer in Jack Kirby Land, kids: in one of British artist Margaret Harrison’s series of sexually charged superhero watercolors, Captain America is transformed into a muscle-bound, breast-enhanced Tom of Finland action pin-up, his star-spangled costume accessorized with a skirt, stockings, and high heels. In another he’s reflecting on Wonder Woman in a mirror while the Avengers’ Scarlet Witch rages below. These illustrations are also meant as indictments of male misogyny and rampant militarism, in the satirical vein of James Gillray and other political cartoonists of her native land. Harrison’s career spans more than four decades, and her work is now being celebrated with a retrospective catalog *On Reflection: the Art of Margaret Harrison*.

“Captain America 2,” 1997.

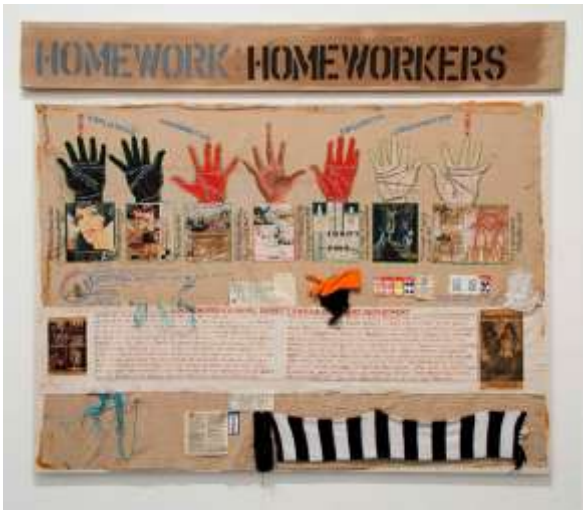
A pioneering feminist, Harrison co-founded London’s Women’s Liberation Art Group in 1970. The following year, her first solo gallery show was shut down the day after it opened for alleged indecency. Specifically, police deemed her Hugh Hefner — portrayed as a big-breasted, corseted *Playboy* bunny — to be offensive, apparently oblivious to the inherent irony of their actions against this already-ironic work. Undeterred, her art remains socially engaged. Among her most powerful are those that juxtapose texts with images in compelling cultural critiques. “Homeworkers,” a mixed-media assemblage, is a masterful, intricately composed indictment of female labor exploitation. And this year’s “Beautiful Ugly Violence” exhibition at New York’s Feldman Fine Arts Gallery included narratives by domestic abuse convicts which were typewritten and overlaid with delicately subdued wash drawings, often of seemingly innocent household objects, and arranged in comics panel sequences.

As police once forced Harrison's gallery owner to remove her paintings, the book's author, Kim Munson, had been forced by Apple not long ago to remove "objectionable" cartoons from an underground comix history iPhone app she'd produced [story here]. This and other commonalities, such as a shared passion for workers' rights, make Munson's accompanying commentary and interviews with the artist empathetic and engaging as well as informative.

right side panel of "Getting Very Close to My Masculinity" diptych, 2013.

sketch for "Women of the World Unite, You Have Nothing to Lose But the Cheesecake," 1969.

details of “Beautiful Ugly Violence” exhibit, 2015.



“Homeworkers” with detail, 1977.

Staff. “Top 10 – Feminist Artists.” *Artlyst.* December 27, 2016. http://www.artlyst.com/features/top-10-feminist-artists/8/

Top 10 – Feminist Artists

The feminist art movement emerged in the 1960s with women artists taking an interest in how they differed from their male counterparts. It was most prominent in Britain, USA and Germany and has since spread. Feminist artists pointed out that throughout recorded history males have imposed patriarchal social systems in which they have dominated females. Significant in this patriarchal system is the preponderance of art made by males, for male audiences, sometimes transgressing against females. Men have maintained a studio system which has excluded women from training as artists, a gallery system that has kept them from exhibiting and selling their work, as well as from being collected by museums. Although this is somewhat less in recent years. The Tate in the last year has promoted an active exhibition programme to redress this balance and to reassess the careers of several women artists. Artlyst has put together its top 10 feminist artists.

4. Margaret Harrison (b1940)

Yorkshire born feminist artist who studied at the Royal Academy Schools. She founded the London Women's Liberation Art Group in 1970. In 1971 an exhibition of her work was closed by the police for its 'pornographic' depiction of men (Hugh Hefner as a naked bunny girl). In 2013 she won the Northern Art Prize.

Corcoran, Heather. “Rebel Yell: The Lifelong Activism of Two British Artists.” *Artsy*, January 20, 2015. https://www.artsy.net/post/editorial-rebel-yell-the-lifelong-activism-of-two

FEATURED BY ARTSY

Rebel Yell: The Lifelong Activism of Two British Artists

January 20, 2015

When Margaret Harrison’s first solo show in London was closed by police for indecency in 1971, it became a pivotal moment for the artist that incited a career filled with activism. It might come as no surprise, then, that her partner,Conrad Atkinson, has also faced difficulty with censorship, including having a piece on Northern Ireland’s Troubles rejected by Belfast’s Ulster Museum in 1978. For decades the pair, who work independently of one another, have used their art as a tool for rabble-rousing, highlighting social issues through a blend of conceptual art and controversial subject matter. Their current side-by-side shows at New York’s Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, “Conrad Atkinson: All That Glisters” and “Margaret Harrison: On Reflection,” look back at a lifetime of provocation through a selection of drawings, paintings, and installations dating from the 1980s to the present day.

Among Atkinson’s contributions to the exhibition are his newspaper paintings, sketched or altered papers—including a partially obscured front page from the *New York Times* dated September 11, 2001—that serve to highlight the way that the media shapes (or manipulates depending on whom you ask) the truth. A similar approach is given to the artist’s own U.S. naturalization papers, which he transforms into a statement on immigration with the childlike insouciance of a student doodling on his homework.

Ever since that first London show, Harrison’s activism has been more focused on feminism, including pinup-inspired sketches that placed male figures like Captain America in poses and outfits typically reserved for consumption by the male gaze. At Ronald Feldman, Harrison’s installation *The Last Gaze* injects Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott”(1832) and the painting of the same name by John William Waterhousewith the added tension of the awareness of viewing and being viewed, with the addition of car rear-view mirrors. Other works include delicately rendered paintings that treat potentially dangerous objects in the style of high-end jewelry advertisements and department store scenes that updateÉdouard Manet’s *A Bar of the Folies Bergère* (1881-82) with modern examples of working women on display.

Harrison has noted that in the decades since their debut, the controversial images from her first show have come to represent more the broadened options for self-expression available today than the radical statements on gender they once were. Likewise, the works by both artists in this exhibition serve to show how activism can more things forward, in art and beyond.

—Heather Corcoran

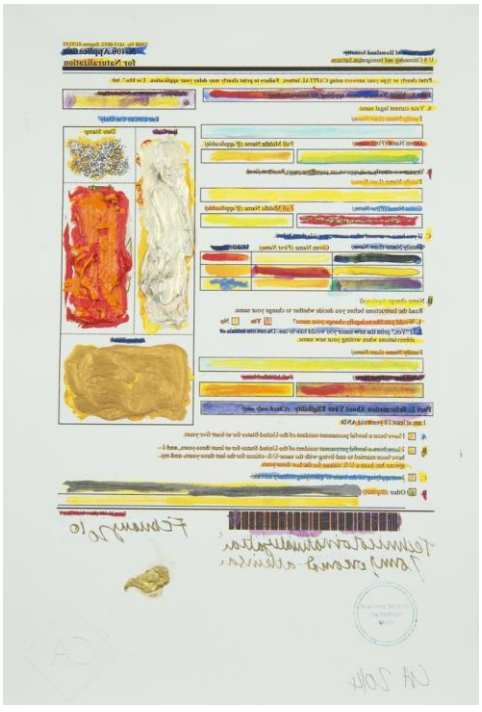
"Conrad Atkinson: All That Glisters" and "Margaret Harrison: On Reflection" are on view at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, Jan. 10–Feb. 7, 2015.

Margaret Harrison
Beautiful Ugly Violence (Gun), 2003
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Conrad Atkinson
Allen Ginsberg's Shopping Trolley, 2014
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Conrad Atkinson
The All Tree Journal, 1991
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Conrad Atkinson
Sun, 1987
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts



Conrad Atkinson
Conrad Atkinson's Naturalization Form, 2010
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Margaret Harrison
He's Only a Bunny Boy But He's Quite Nice Really, 2011
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Margaret Harrison
Certified Organic, 2007
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Margaret Harrison
I. Magnin, San Francisco (1), 1993
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Margaret Harrison
Fenwicks, London (1), 1993
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Margaret Harrison
Good Enough to Eat, 1971
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

Margaret Harrison
Beautiful Ugly Violence (Hammer), 2003
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

ARTFORUM

Smith, Tara B. “Critics’ Picks: Margaret Harrison.” *Artforum*, October 2014.
http://artforum.com/picks/id=48715

CRITICS' PICKS

Berlin

Margaret Harrison

SILBERKUPPE
Keithstrasse 12
September 13–November 1

Margaret Harrison, *Take One Lemon*, 1971, lithograph on paper, 25 x 20".

Margaret Harrison’s latest exhibition is an anachronistic experience. Walk into the gallery’s back room and peek at the septuagenarian British feminist artist’s naughty lithographs, displayed in suggestively half-open drawers. There are two from 1971, the year Harrison’s first-ever gallery exhibition was shut down by the London police—a drawing of a corseted but otherwise nude Hugh Hefner as one of his own bunnies was apparently just too much. The lithographs’ preoccupations are braless merry widows, scarlet nipples, and food: An engorged lemon being squeezed by a pinup spurts glistening droplets in*Take One Lemon*, 1971, while in *Good Enough To Eat*, 1971, a fleshy bombshell stands in for the meat in a British rail sandwich, her upturned palms submissively curled atop a slice of a hard-boiled egg. These are startling pictures. They are rendered with the skill of a young artist trained in painting and drawing in 1960s London, as two sensational acrylics of spineless sea urchins on canvas, *Echinodermata I* and *II*, from 1966 attest. There is malice in *Beautiful Ugly Telephone*, 2004, which gets at the banal entrapment of corporate life. The work is part of a series called “Beautiful Ugly Violence,” which presents paintings of ordinary objects—a kettle, scissors—that have been used as weapons against women. In the bruise-colored *Marilyn Is Dead! (blue-grey)*, 1994, the icon of female sexuality evokes a Victorian memento mori picture of a dead child, her signature snub nose and full lips recalling the girl’s life cut short.

— Tara B. Smith

theguardian

Sykes, Alan. "2013 Northern Art Prize goes to Margaret Harrison." *The Guardian.* May 28, 2013. http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/the-northerner/2013/may/28/art

2013 Northern Art Prize goes to Margaret Harrison

The northern equivalent to the Turner Prize was won by the septuagenarian Cumbrian, celebrating her '50 years at the frontline of art and activism'

Part of Margaret Harrison's The Last Gaze at Leeds Art Gallery

This week, the veteran Cumbrian artist Margaret Harrison was the winner of the sixth Northern Art Prize, picking up a cheque for £16,500. Unlike the Turner Prize, which is awarded to "a British artist under 50", there is no age discrimination in awarding the Northern Art Prize.

For the prize exhibition at the Leeds Art Gallery, Margaret Harrison created two new works.

The Last Gaze is based on John William Waterhouse's The Lady of Shalott, which hangs in the gallery's permanent collection. The double portrait, which shows modern imagery of Elvis and assorted superheroes with a mirrored copy of Tennyson's unhappy heroine, can also be viewed via a series of car mirrors.

In Common Reflections, the artist has recreated a section of the perimeter fence at Greenham Common, using concrete, wire fencing, corrugated zinc and mirror panels, and hanging the fencing with a variety of domestic items – clothing, teddy bears, kitchen utensils, shoes and some family pictures, including Margaret's daughters and a grandson.

The judges, who included Turner Prize-winning artist Tomma Abts, commented:

The judges acknowledge the challenge involved in considering artists at very different stages in their careers. After much deliberation, we have decided to award the Northern Art Prize 2013 to Margaret Harrison for vital new work that reflects on her 50-year career at the front line of art and activism.

Harrison's Common Reflections (2013) at the Northern Art Prize exhibition in Leeds

There is also a vote for the public's favourite artist on the shortlist, and this year also voted for Harrison - only the second time in the prize's history that the judges and the public have agreed on the winner.

Margaret Harrison was born in Wakefield in 1940, and moved to Cumbria when she was seven. She studied in Carlisle, where she now lives, London and Perugia.

In 1970 she co-founded the London Women's Liberation Art Group, and she was a member of the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union. Eight of her works belong to the Tate and her works are also in the V&A and Arts Council collections.

Rosalind Nashashibi's A New Youth

The other shortlisted artists - Rosalind Nashashibi, Emily Speed and Joanne Taham & Tom O'Sullivan - each received £1,500.

The prize has been running since 2007. Previous winners include Haroon Mirza, who also won a Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale two years ago, and who is currently exhibiting his works at the Hepworthin Wakefield - later this year he plans to create a light installation to illuminate the nearby 1,000ft highEmley Moor transmitting station, the UK's tallest freestanding structure.

• *The Northern Art Prize exhibition continues at the Leeds Art Gallery until June 16*

Sussman, Matt. “San Francisco, Margaret Harrison, Intersection for the Arts.” *Art in America* 98, no. 6 (June/July 2010): 194-195.

Margaret Harrison: *He's Only a Bunny Boy But He's Quite Nice Really*, 1971/2010, watercolor and graphite on inkjet print, 16¾ by 9½ inches; at Intersection for the Arts.

SAN FRANCISCO

MARGARET HARRISON

INTERSECTION FOR THE ARTS

However indebted to the practices frequently associated with feminist art of th '70s, or sympathetic to feminism's critiqu of gender and power, "feminist" art toda tends to be described as such in passin and with a decidedly softer punch. With declamatory title, "The Bodies Are Back, British artist Margaret Harrison's recent show issues a convincing rebuke to thos who regard feminist art solely in the past tense or downplay the continued necess of envisioning a world in which the balan of power no longer skews against wome

The "bodies" in question are mostly from around the time of Harrison's first solo exhibition in 1971. British police deemed her drawings, particularly an image of Hugh Hefner as a near-nude Playboy bunny, "offensive," and shut dow the show. A re-creation of that piece (the original was stolen), *He's Only a Bunny Boy But He's Quite Nice Really*, is include in "Bodies," as are original works and preparatory sketches, recent re-creation and photolithographs of other early piece (many of the original incarnations have been lost) and new works on paper that thematically connect with the older efforts. The effect is pronounced: "Bodies" is not a historical survey but rather a gathering of Harrison's long-running commentary on the politics of representation.

Harrison's intention has frequently been to scramble the terms of John Berger's famous formulation, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." In watercolor, graphite and colored pencil, Harrison freely appropriates Vargas-style pinup art, comic books and commercial illustration, re-presenting the centerfolds, superheroes and models as regendered critiques of the visual sources she draws from. A watercolor riff on Captain America (1971/1997) depicts the WWII-era character in partial cheesecake-style drag, with garters, high heels and pendulous strap-on breasts. A series of 1971 watercolors, cheekily titled "Good Enough to Eat," literalizes women-as-objects-to-be-consumed by sandwiching Betty Page clones between slices of bread.

Harrison's new work, much of it created last year, turns a gimlet eye on the art world, with mixed success. Her three takes on Manet's *Olympia*—in which various celebrities, living and dead, are swapped in the racially defined roles of reclining nude and servant (including Michelle Obama and Marilyn Monroe, respectively)—feel like so much empty pastiche. By contrast, the 2010 watercolor of a beaming Dolly Parton sitting beside Allen Jones's *Table Sculpture* (1969)—which provocatively uses a topless female mannequin on all fours as the base for a glass top—juxtaposes two kinds of plasticized femininity (though Dolly's is presumably of her own making) while also sending up Pop artists' objectification of women. It's refreshing that this pioneer hasn't lost what many of her feminist contemporaries were accused of lacking back in the day: a sense of humor.

—*Matt Sussman*

Shackelford, Penelope. "Harrison brings universal themes to her art." *Dans Enterprise*, April 15, 1993, pgs. 5-6.

ART

Harrison brings universal themes to her art

By PENELOPE SHACKELFORD
Enterprise art critic

Margaret Harrison is a person worth getting to know. Hidden behind this quiet wisp of a woman is a large vision and an equally large capacity to share that vision through her art work. Working as arts coordinator, she is part of the new breeze that is flowing through the UC Davis Art department.

ART REVIEW

Although her seminal work in the women's art movement in Europe put her on the art map in 1970, the present exhibition at the Nelson Gallery, "Selections," is her first West Coast showing. The introductory exhibit includes the well known "From Rosa Luxemburg to Janis Joplin — a message" mixed media painting done in 1977, acrylic paintings from "Land/Landscape: Australia/England" done in 1982, two large canvases from "Greenham Common" formerly installed at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City in 1989, as well as an installation of new watercolors titled "Perfumed Politics and Cosmetic Bodies." The latter was created for the Nelson Gallery space.

Harrison is a masterful painter. Her skill and technique reflect innate ability as well as her training at the Royal Academy Art School in England. All of this is important, but perhaps not as important to Harrison as the context of her work: real life.

The work is "site specific." Located in place and culture, the offerings are straightforward, objective paintings of her experience as well as the experience of others. One cannot help being drawn in by their lyrical qualities. They are beautiful.

However, beauty can masquerade as well as inspire, and the social and political issues that concern her are more and less visible in the elegance of the works. The issues in "Selections" — land use, weapons of destruction, women's concerns — are, interestingly, also the timely interests of the citizens of the city of all things right and relevant.

"Greenham Common" deals with the multileveled misuse of common land (land intended for public use) taken over by the Defense ministry of England during World War II. After the war, the land was not returned to the local council; it fell into disuse and eventually was leased as an American Cruise missile site. The use of the fine art of landscape painting as a tool to reveal the horrors perpetrated by weapons of war sets up a dialogue of dichotomies that characterizes Harrison's work.

"Australian Landscape" also sets up a discourse on land use in black and white Aboriginal history with landscape as a source of beauty. While these exquisite visual works served as social catalysts in foreign countries, they also seem to have meaning for the citizens of Davis. Within the gum leaf motif of the landscapes is a didactic message summed up in two Aboriginal words, "Parra" and "Pamma".

Pamma refers to the way in which the indigenous peoples draw power from the land. Parra refers to the European way of taking power over the land. A Davis developer has suggested a shopping center twice the size of the current ones, while a former mayor has worked to form a land trust: a ring of open, wild land around Davis. The trust, like the English commons, is intended for public use. Alternatives must coexist.

As for Harrison's theme of weapons of destruction, it is ironic that many of us are drinking bottled water. Our water, as well as our lands, are full of chemical weapons of destruction that many of us are unwilling to take into our bodies. Harrison's universal message about land use is a global concern, but it will only be effective for us if we actively connect it with the Davis life.

"Luxemburg to Joplin" and "Perfumed Politics" also tie into the Davis life. The phrase, "Anonymous was a woman" dominates the Luxemburg canvas. However, eight famous women painted across the top of the canvas in Mt. Rushmore style were anything but anonymous.

See HARRISON, Page 6

HARRISON

Continued from Page 5

They became who they were at great personal loss and several of their lives ended in tragedy.

Annie Besant, for example, was known around the world as one of the most remarkable women of her day. Radical agitator, strike leader, union organizer, champion of science, social and educational reformer, prolific author, the first woman to wage battle on birth control, labeled greatest woman orator of the 19th century, president of the Indian National Congress, spiritual teacher to Jawaharl Nehru, and head of the Theosophical Society are among her astonishing array of achievements.

She was a woman who went through remarkable transformations in full public view.

Besant did all of this at great personal loss. The English courts took her children away from her and refused to let her see them until they were grown.

Whether Besant and the others were victims of what Robert Hughes has recently termed, "the pale, patriarchal penis people," or victims of simply their own issues is arguable, but that women have suffered and have frequently worked anonymously is an historical fact.

An issue of oppression surfaced recently in the Davis life when the city's largest employer decided to close down its Women's Resource and Research Center as an economic move. It is odd that, as the Center prepares to close its doors, the National Institutes of Health has funded the UC Davis School of Medicine to participate in a national study of womens' health.

The perfume persons, on the other hand, are truly anonymous. The installation room is truly exquisite. In the '30s, Itten, the color theorist, found that the deep forest green used on the walls of this installation was a color that women rejected as they associated it with cheap bars and pool halls.

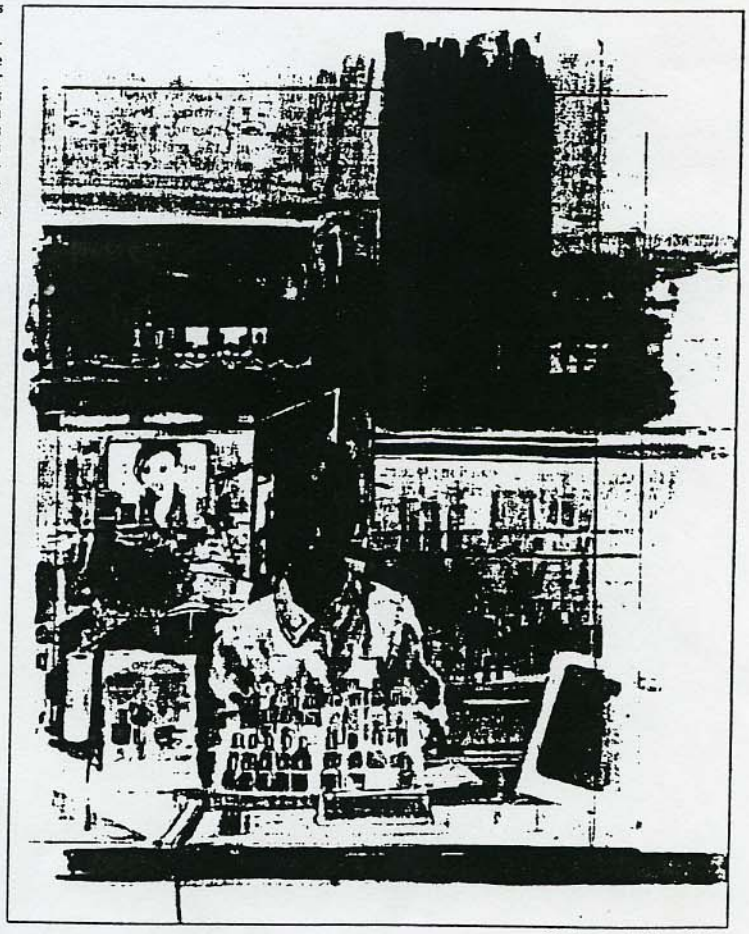
Today, this color is an authentic reflection of that used where Harrison did her research for this work: Bloomingdales and Macys in New York. The gilded gold frames are a humorous contradiction to the paintings of modern day cosmetic salespersons.

The series begins with a photograph of Manet's landmark painting, "Bar at the Folies-Bergere", and continues with several illuminated watercolors of old/young, black/white, male/female people behind cosmetic counters in a large department store.

The sales persons in the paintings are real people doing their job of selling just as was done by the woman at the Folies. They are not part of an advertisement package.

I, for one, am thrilled that Harrison has come to townbecause she believes that art and life are not separate issues. Her history is an active and productive documentation of this fact. ❑

William Shakespeare's Rollicking Comedy



Courtesy photo/Nelson Gallery

Detail from 'Perfumed Politics and Cosmetic Bodies,' mixed media installation by Margaret Harrison.

Art Monthly, Jan. 1981

Anonymous is a woman

The work of Margaret Harrison

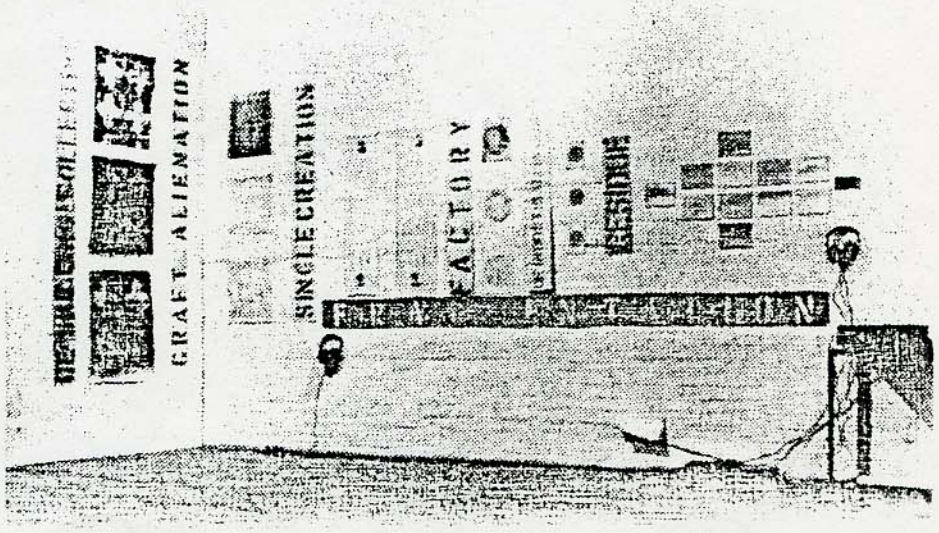
Community arts became discredited in this country due to the inability of their practitioners to implement a rigorous analysis of the essentially political structures (Local Authorities, Arts Associations and the Arts Council) from which they principally derived their funds. A similar limp liberalism prevails in the display of current women's practice in art, with a whole series of recent shows having as their common denominator the mere fact that they were done by women and nothing else that can be taken seriously in the way of a common political or aesthetic stance.

Among the few artists capable of articulating a consistent political standpoint and the kind of criticism that community arts have substantially avoided is Margaret Harrison who, ironically, is no mean craftswoman and one who has opted for the roughness of using compelling materials immediately to hand when she might have succeeded as a traditional artist. One looks to her for competent sustained analysis of current social problems, particularly those concerned with women's social role. Her constant knocking and long-term commitment have achieved significant results and not a little traditional success.

She was included in Lucy Lippard's 'Issue' show at the ICA, was at the Pentonville Gallery this January, and touring the North of England and Scotland in an exhibition circulated by Carlisle Art Gallery as one of a small group of artists who have for ten years been committed to exposing and resolving issues no more than lightly touched on by the aforementioned, and not entirely unwitty art work done in an attempt to effect social and political change, is surely the model for apprentice art-in-social-contexters to follow. It should also lead those devoted to survey exhibitions — like the recent 'Women's Images of Men' — to seriously question their value.

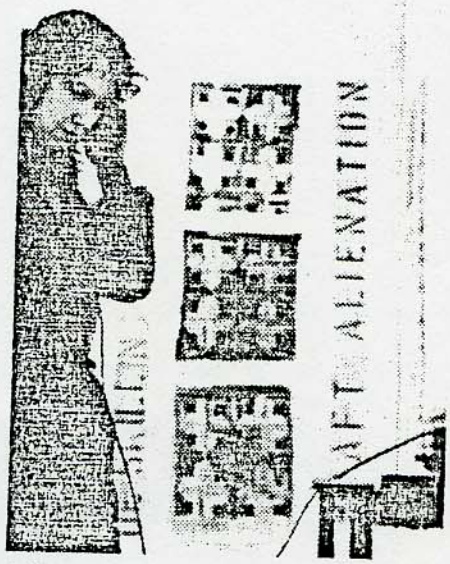
For a long time artists have had to cope with the media-created myth of what they were. Since the sixties art hype particularly, the personality of the artist, the work and its marketing have become inextricably interwoven. The promotion of personality, often at the expense of the work, is pernicious, reinforced as it is by the substantial refusal of a capitalist art market to accept either the notion of an anonymous artist or the collective work. The emphasis continues to be, more than ever, on the production of saleable objects, preferably witty new ones, by interesting, preferably photogenic, people. It is noticeable that media outrage is at its most vehement when there is a departure from the production of such objects; the suggestion is that such art is an intolerable eccentricity. The continuing failure of bodies of public patronage to accommodate forms of art eluding conservative classifications and the art schools' persistence in concentrating on the encouragement of those in which craft skills are pre-eminent, also reinforces popular unacceptability. The advantage of this weight of discouragement is that those artists who do maintain the use of work in the interests of political change are, if few, extremely deicated and hardy. They suffer from a multiplicity of handicaps, the principal one being that what should be their main source of patronage for what is, in effect, experimented work — the ACGB — is not politically neutral but has conservatism in-built and a conservatism moreover in favour of which it increasingly, and with less subtlety than formerly, exercises censorship. Apart from the obvious one, for the political artist, of finding a venue (it is salutory to remark that Harrison's present *embarasse de richesse* is no more than the gods' showering those whom they hate with gifts) the next greatest handicap is the need for the discretion and anonymity of the social scientist. It must be admitted that there are exceptions here: Steve Willats and the cricket correspondent of this journal have been more than overt and at times positively chic. Ironically though, artists in this area. Rickaby, Atkinson and, I would argue, P-Orridge, who have been most prominent, have become so because less than the usual suave censorship and fumbling has led to a forced media exposure. Anonymity then is a virtue in artists working in the socio-political arena and there is a resultant multiple irony, for one of the

The 'deskilling' project in 'Issue' at the ICA



successes of the subject of this essay — Margaret Harrison — is that she has succeeded in eliminating the cult of personality more than most. Irony, because she is among Britain's best-known women artists; irony, because her subjugation of a vivid personal image places her among those women who have contributed so much to society, much more than is generally known, but who are anonymous.

The phrase 'Anonymous was a woman' is Virginia Woolf's: it indicates the vast army of women who have quietly contributed through history. This contribution has been either unrecognized or their credit alienated by the men for and by whom history has been written. In her work 'Rosa Luxemburg to Janis Joplin — a message', Harrison articulated the various situations of celebrated women in society. This work is a summation of her various interests: feminism, socialism and art. Its message is grim and unequivocal but the medium does not lack humour. Indeed in almost all her work there is a humourous ingredient; it is perhaps that of the black, the grotesque, and the absurd. But she draws attention to human madness and cruelty almost gently. She indicates human frailty but hers is not a wistful indication; there is great strength and a belief that perfectibility, even if an eventual impossibility, needs more striving towards. For the universal message to



A listener at 'Issue', ICA

be communicated effectively Harrison believes that it must be specific to the particular place and to the particular experience of the recipient. In her Berlin show she emphasised that the situation of women is similar irrespective of arbitrary national boundaries. She included comparative figures for the proportion of women MPs in the German and British parliaments. QED. It was in this work too that another of her main concerns — the relationship of craftsmanship to art — was made evident: again there is a strong parallel with her feminist concern. Mere craftsmanship she would hold cosmetic. It is not the quality of craftsmanship in which art consists but its practice and concerns. Similarly, behind the idealized, centralized, female icon that it has suited men at once to elevate and to degrade women into being, are suffering, smelling, giving, thinking, creative people. In her 'Luxemburg/Joplin' piece Harrison vividly delineated eight women who made significant contributions to our culture. All but one died violently. The invitation is plain: to question the extent to which their deaths were the result of extra pressures brought about as a result of being a successful woman in a world run by and for males. In her contribution to the 'Women's Issue' of *Studio International* (1977), 'Notes on Feminist Art in Britain', Harrison quotes Shulamith Firestone: 'A woman who participates in a culture must be rated by the standards of a tradition she has no part in the making' and herself wrote of her perceptions of 'indications of progress by women in the making and rehabilitation of our recent culture and in the development of an historical perspective from which to define that activity, until now male dominated and orientated,

called art. For too long women have been hidden from history and prevented from participating. My survey, I hope, charts the beginnings of a feminist conciousness of these concepts and of a forceful and progressive struggle to write ourselves back into history'. And Margaret Harrison is certainly doing just that; her personal research has unearthed material which is the very stuff of PhD theses. But the shelf life of theses is long and she favours more immediate action. She can achieve the best results through the skillful exploitation of her art, she believes, so her researches are absolutely intrinsic to her activities as an artist and its results are at their most commanding when presented visually. She has received ample vindication of her view that her work is more effective as a socio-political catalyst for being visual. Harrison's paring away social prejudices represents a process of de-mythicisation and her themes are not merely relevant to sectorial or temporary interests but are universal and timeless. Her treatment of rape, for instance, which is a subject of a major work, is a case in point. Her concern is not just for its victims, or for women in general, but for what it makes of us all. What is rape but violence? And is not violence positively elevated in this society in a vast and immoral way? Yet, despite this, the choice of what kind of violence is meant to be shown in the media is as capricious as our squeamishness is arbitrary. Again, Harrison reveals our hypocrisy and again her success is her quietness, for she avoids the shrillness and strident histrionics which, sadly, seem to characterize less informed political polemicists. It is in her achievement of this balance and calm, while still retaining an ascorbic element, that her work's persuasiveness, its art even, consists. Her treatment of rape as a subject deliberately seems to avoid the strident assertion of moral outrage which characterises the salacious and immoral gutter and so-called 'quality', press alike. Her message is unequivocal, unlike theirs; sexist advertisements do not degrade women, they degrade us all whether miner, homosexual, housewife, black, outworker, old Etonian, shoplifter, child molester or High Court judge: suffering, oppression and least of all, ignorance are indivisible.

Margaret Harrison articulates the plight of a sick and decaying society and most of her issues are far from sensational and are all the more damaging for that reason. It takes a lot to interest even the liberal press in the exploitation of homeworkers — a problem which is boring per se. Still less is it possible to arouse interest in another of her concerns, the decline of natural craftwork (natural as opposed to the mimsy, self-conscious, middle-class, consumer

In 'Craftwork' she uses items selected to show the gradual 'deskilling' process which has profoundly affected most working class women. Industrialisation has almost annihilated a whole area of work done in the home by women and this for no monetary gain; its absence has led to an atrophy of certain forms of social intercourse too. Harrison refers to those handmade domestic items which were formerly the subjects of so much pride and care (a thing which most judges might not understand) but which are now factory made.

'The examination of a deskilling process through craft, I think, locates some of the differences in the problems and socialisation of women from different classes, to assume that there are common and universal problems of liberation for all women across class structures is a false conclusion, and although women of all classes do and have suffered discrimination the problems are by no means the same'. But the point is, that without research, without the exposure in unaccustomed and often embarrassing venues, like art galleries, of all these prejudices and problems by artists like Harrison, the

subscription to it will be the uncorrected norm. Without the courageous reiteration of the facts in a process of public education (facts that it suits a repressive society with a vested interest in dissembling to conceal, by dismissing them as 'boring'), whether the wrong is the exploitation of homeworkers by a greedy and uncaring society, the exploitation and degradation of women as sex objects, or the general erosion by the mass society of each individual's right to be creative and to live life abundantly, most folk will continue blissfully unaware of the full dimensions of the evil which surround them. There will always be a skilled and rapacious minority exploiting this ignorance. We are extremely fortunate in having that even smaller minority who are aware of this and who extend their skills as artists in the cause of social reconstruction. This is a fact so obvious that it should constitute universal knowledge. That it isn't is due to the fact that liberalism is really the English vice, or, if liberalism is not, then cynicism surely is.

Hugh Adams