

# INTRODUCTION

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Jayne Wark is an art historian at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design whose research and publications are in the area of contemporary art with a focus on performance, video and conceptual art. Her book *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* is forthcoming from McGill-Queen's University Press in 2006. Her new research project on the history of conceptual art in Canada was supported by a National Gallery of Canada Research Fellowship in 2005.

Roberta Lamb is Associate Professor, School of Music, Queen's University, with cross-appointments to Women's Studies and the Faculty of Education. Her current research is on American composer, folklorist and music teacher, Ruth Crawford Seeger. She hosts the "Girls' Night Out (But Guys Welcome)" series featuring women musicians at the Camden East Bookstore Cafe, near her home in Camden East, Ontario.

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"Women, Art, Politics and Power" originated in Quebec City in May 2000 when the co-editors met for the first time at the annual meeting of the Atlantis editorial panel. We were both new recruits to the panel, and after realizing we came from similar art and cultural disciplines, namely music and art history, we conspired to propose an issue of Atlantis dedicated to the arts.

Although Atlantis has often included creative writing and poetry, this would be the first time the whole issue would centre on this theme. Our aspirations from the start were to make this issue as broadly inclusive as possible, and thus to achieve the interdisciplinarity that is truly at the heart of women's studies. Our call for submissions cast a wide net, asking for contributions on visual art, craft, design, film, music and all the performing arts, as well as poetry and alternative literary forms. We not only invited scholarly papers that addressed how feminist art, in its many forms, has merged the aesthetic with the political in order to challenge existing ideas of both and to strive actively for historical change, but we also welcomed creative submissions in any and all art forms.

We also envisioned this special issue of Atlantis as having an aesthetic dimension in itself. That is to say, we wanted the issue to be visually dynamic and to incorporate innovative elements that would feature the creative work of our artistic contributors. From the start we wanted to include original artworks, music and performance. This goal was very successful in some ways, but we also faced disappointments. We had hoped to raise funds through the Canada Council and other organizations to supplement Atlantis' usual budget so as to allow us to produce a compact disc and to

include some colour photography and high-quality paper materials throughout the issue. As we discovered, however, there is an abyss between those organizations like SSHRC, who support scholarly journals, and the Canada Council, whose support for creative work does not extend to one-off contributions to a scholarly journal like Atlantis. But although our efforts via the Canada Council came to naught, all was not lost because, through initiative and resourcefulness of the women of Atlantis, some modest foundational support was secured for the extraordinary production costs.

#### The Creative Contributions

The creative contributions for "Women, Art, Politics and Power" comprise a rich collection of genres. First of all, a poem by Donna Gelagotis Lee. Kathleen McConnell (KathyMac) made an invaluable contribution as creative arts editor, and after reviewing the various submissions, she judiciously selected Gelagotis Lee's poem, "L'Italiana in Algeri," as appropriate to the theme of this special issue. Other creative contributions include an Artists' Pages section with the work of four artists, and an original song by Girlz Like That. Working closely with Cecily Barrie, Managing editor, we tackled several new production challenges to bring these contributions to you.

Bringing sound (music) into Atlantis extends the creative contributions from a print medium to the Internet, one that appears to be a first among similar journals. We are happy to be able to bring this new adventure to Atlantis readers. Karen Pegley and Roberta Lamb made up the jury panel that listened to several original music submissions. The panel considered originality, production quality and how well the music fit with the theme. Atlantis met many new challenges with this innovation. While the consumer public has been downloading tunes for some time, this is an entirely new venture for a scholarly journal. We sought

out independent musicians who would want to participate. As expected most musicians were unfamiliar with Atlantis and a journal's publication procedures, but they were as excited about the idea as was Atlantis. We had to come to terms with the how-to-do-it of the media technology. We had to understand and reach agreement regarding the copyright provisions for recorded music. In the end, we have one fine original song, "The Game," by the band Girlz Like That. Both Atlantis and The Girlz hope you enjoy the music to be found at the Journal website - [www.msvu.ca/atlantis](http://www.msvu.ca/atlantis) - and that it motivates you to consider the role of music in arts, power and politics.

The development of the Artists' Pages involved a rather elaborate process that began with the formation of a jury panel consisting of Susan McEachern, Mimi Fautley and Jayne Wark, all of whom are active professional members of the art community. Of the numerous visual art submissions, the panel selected four to appear in the Artists' Pages section. The premise of the Artists' Pages was that they would not merely be illustrations of artworks, but rather that the configuration of each piece and of the section as a whole would be a creative entity in its own right. To this end, Mimi Fautley, as "curator" of this section, worked closely with the artists to choose the most appropriate image(s) and design the graphic layout for each piece. Mimi also assisted the artists in the development of their statements so that these would stand as brief but informative frames of reference for the visual works. We are most grateful to Mimi for the time and effort she devoted to the Artists' Pages section, the outcome of which is an innovative and aesthetically elegant addition to this special topic issue.

The individual contributions to this section relate to the theme of the issue in various ways. Suzanne Caines' Disrobing Her Dresser consists of a series of photographs that refer to her grandmother's

experience as an "Avon lady." Although some may associate Avon products and the ladies who sell them with the exploitation of women by the cosmetics industry, Caines turns that association on its head by focusing instead on the financial independence and social network her grandmother gained by selling these products. *Walking Woman* documents a performance by Margaret Dragu and Lorna Boschman. Its title recalls Michael Snow's well-known series of sculptures of walking women silhouettes that populated the grounds of Expo '67, but in this community-based event, members of the public were invited to become active participants in a dance/performance that toured around Vancouver. Peig Abbott's work also evokes the history of sculpture, though in a much more personal way. *Remnants*, with its larger-than-life-size female figure embracing a real tree branch, evokes archaic archetypes while also registering an intimate manipulation of material and surface. Luiza Kurzyna's print called *Fifty Fifty* is a humorous yet biting critique of the ongoing gender discrepancies of job wages and representation in the United States. In portraying her own mother as the first woman to be represented on an American bank note, Kurzyna also closes the circle between the supposedly separate spheres of private life and public achievement.

In addition to the creative contributions in the *Artists' Pages* section, we are honoured to have a work by the late artist Nancy Edell illustrated on the cover of this issue. *Operating*, which graphically depicts a woman undergoing surgery for breast cancer, was executed using hooked rug techniques. Originally trained in the arts of painting, printmaking and animation, Edell took up rug hooking when she moved to Nova Scotia in 1980 and transformed this traditional craft into a modern art form both by combining it with other mixed-media processes and materials and developing a repertoire of mythical, personal and often wryly humorous imagery that probed the divisions between art and craft, domestic

space and public life, and the sensual and intellectual. *Operating* stands not only as a salient example of how feminist artists like Edell have reinvented textile practices in recent times, but also as a poignant memorial to Edell herself, who died of cancer on June 9, 2005 at her home in Bayswater, Nova Scotia.

#### The Essay Contributions

As we had hoped and anticipated, the essay contributions followed a sweeping, interdisciplinary arc across the overall theme of this issue and included topics on music, ethnomusicology, community arts, art history, contemporary art and popular culture. Within this arc a general distinction became apparent between those papers that took up historical subject matter and those that addressed more recent developments in the arts. Accordingly, the first group of articles contains those with an historical focus, and the four articles within this section are arranged in a chronological sequence that begins in the late-eighteenth century and ends in the period just after World War II. The second group of articles is more cohesive chronologically yet broader in its thematic range, incorporating theoretical and analytical studies of subjects as diverse as the role of agency and interpretation in various performance practices and the ways in which feminist activism can fruitfully connect the art and law communities. The eclecticism of the five articles in this group notwithstanding, it became evident that all of them were concerned in one way or another with how art practices can or might engage audiences and publics. While the articles in this issue usefully encompass an international scope, most of them focus on Canadian topics, thus making a crucial contribution to scholarship on the arts in this country, but more than that, a contribution that is specifically feminist in its outlook.

The historical articles begin at the beginning, as it were, at least with respect to the participation of

women in the history of art in Canada. In "Femininity, the Picturesque, and the Canadian Landscape," Andrea Korda examines how two British women, Elizabeth Simcoe and Elizabeth Hale, registered their responses to the Canadian landscape in drawings and sketches in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Until now, the sketchbooks of Simcoe and Hale have been regarded primarily for their documentary value as visual descriptions of early Canada. Korda argues, however, that although the philosophical and aesthetic category of the Picturesque was the mainstay of British interpretations of landscape in this period, the sketchbooks of Simcoe and Hale reveal the specificity of how their inculcation of the attributes of fashionable and respectable middle-class femininity were challenged and eventually modified in order to encompass the strange, awesome and frightening power of the rugged and untamed Canadian landscape. Jennifer Josten's article, "Reconsidering Self-Portraits by Women Surrealists," propels us directly into the twentieth century with its paramount artistic preoccupation with self and identity. But as much as the idiosyncratic work of Frida Kahlo and Claude Cahun, the two artists upon whom she bases her research, appears to demonstrate a primary preoccupation with individual identity, Josten's study reveals how both these artists engaged with the political debates of their times and entered into polemical dialogues with their male counterparts in the Surrealist movement. Although Kahlo or Cahun remained, by their own volition, on the periphery of Surrealism, Josten argues that both were able to turn Surrealism's subversive avant-garde strategies to their own purposes, thereby effectively subverting Surrealism "from the inside."

Christina Baade in "'Sincerely Yours, Vera Lynn': Performing Class, Sentiment, and Femininity in the 'People's War'" accounts for the female singer's iconic status as a BBC radio star during World War II. Baade

describes the quality of Lynn's voice and her history as first a child performer in working class venues and then as singer, a "crooner," in dance bands, where she adapted her style to accommodate the technology of the microphone. By 1940, she was contributing to the BBC's war effort by means of her conscious artistry as a popular singer and by embodying through her voice a femininity constructed within a nationalist agenda. Lynn projected unabashed sentimentality, nostalgia for the past, and hope that the desire provoked by memory would be fulfilled in the future. This study also places Lynn's role at the BBC within the larger context of female performance on radio in the 1940s, one that was complicated by resistance to the performative space being allowed to women and working class communities. Baade puts into question any nostalgia for Lynn's recordings as a "soundtrack" for people united by war.

The historical circumstances of World War II also figure importantly, though less directly, in Marilyn Baker's article, "The Later Years: Women Instructors at the Winnipeg School of Art in the 1940s." Baker recounts how the Winnipeg School of Art (WSA) hired a number of women instructors during the war years, thus providing an unprecedented opportunity, at least in Canada, for such significant participation by a group of women as art teachers. As Baker explains, these women benefited enormously both from the professional exposure and validation this experience accorded them, and also from the camaraderie of peers. Although the dismissal of all these women by 1950 suggests the typical outcome of the typical wartime scenario (women replace men in the workplace while they are at war, and are in turn replaced by men when they return from war), Baker's research shows that the situation here was complicated by the fact that the WSA itself was closed in 1950 and reopened as the School of Art at the University of Manitoba. This transition was accompanied by the hiring of a new, all-male faculty who, it can be

inferred, were seen to fit more appropriately with the School of Art's stated ambitions to elevate the professional and pedagogical standards of post-secondary art education.

The next category includes articles that are more contemporary in their scope and, as noted, are loosely connected by their focus on the aesthetic and political roles of agency, audiences and communities in various forms of art practice. The first two of this group, Sheryl Peters' "Templates for Activism: Creative Convergences in Feminist Art and Law" and Ellen Waterman's "Purposeful Play: Women Radio Artists in Canadian Campus and Community Radio" quite directly address the role of art in community building. Peters outlines the inception, history, and productions of a community arts project in Ottawa, Templates for Activism. In 1999, the feminist legal scholar Elizabeth Sheehy and the community artist cj fleury began the work of creating models ("templates") for activism that would bring together the feminist legal community and the arts communities to produce performance, video, temporary exhibits, poster art on the subject of women, law, and representation. Dozens of feminists have participated; the endeavour is ongoing and its co-created projects adaptable and reproducible. For instance, the performance of Hearings at the Rape Maze (2002) included the work and participation of the feminist law community, feminist artists, and women who have been raped. A component of that template, a poster entitled Paper Rape Maze, can be photocopied and posted. Peters argues convincingly that Templates dissolves the boundaries between research and action, the political and the aesthetic. Waterman's article also focusses on the fruitfulness of collaborative work to advance women's voices, this time within the audio-world of campus and community radio. Various attempts to foster women's inclusion at these stations have met with indifferent results, possibly, suggests Waterman, because

women's needs require a different sort of community, a different set of practices. To this end, she theorizes the strategy of "purposeful play," through which women can discover a sense of entitlement to their on-air voices. This kind of play is to be perceived in the work of various successful women radio artists in Canada and the United States. In addition, Waterman includes herself in this research with reference to her experience at an audio art camp, where women were represented equally, freed from housework and cooking, and encouraged to be open about their lack of technological knowledge. Within such a setting, women invent ways to produce audio art even as they learn to overcome their lack of knowledge and hesitations.

The last three articles are thematically linked by their shared interest in performance practices in music, popular culture and contemporary art. The first of these, Tomie Hahn's "Emerging Voices: Encounters with Reflexivity," argues that reflexivity is a crucial attribute and methodological strategy for doing ethnographic research. Hahn contextualizes the role of reflexivity within her discipline, and then advances its consideration with narratives that illustrate the complicated, unexpected revelations and even self-revelations that ensue from an openness to reflexivity's possibilities. During field research on traditional dance in Japan, Hahn's habit of participatory research was advanced when, to her surprise, the teacher required her to dance. The acquirement of bodily knowledge enhanced her comprehension of the personal and relational aspects of the art. Then again, a spontaneous, mimed iChat communication with another research subject, American composer Pauline Oliveros, creator of the international Deep Listening community, crystallized the collaborative nature of ethnographic research. Finally, Hahn relates that after years of investigating Monster Truck rallies, she was jolted by recognition of her unconscious reason for her research

interest. The article is concerned with the need for feminist research and art to create new practices and modes that challenge received notions about self and other.

Where Hahn's paper centred on the question of how reflexivity is a crucial element in the process of interpreting performative practices, Brandy Wiebe's "Radical Ambivalence: Engaging Poststructurally with Performance, (Re)Envisioning the Political," investigates the role of ambivalence in the enactment and interpretation of such practices. Wiebe draws upon Judith Butler's poststructural theories of the instability of subjectivity and identity categories as the basis for a case study of the Vancouver-based performers Heather Robertson and Nikki Prime-French. Although their pop-cultural song-and-dance performances simultaneously invoke and contradict normative femininity with no clear indication whether they should be seen as emulative or subversive, Wiebe theorizes that their potential as feminist political intervention lies precisely in this ambivalence. As she argues, because the premise of a coherent agency as the basis for any given political intentionality is shown by poststructuralism to be a fallacy, the real strength of the performances by Robertson and Prime-French is that they are "doing politics" in and through the process of performing, rather than by means of an a priori position or intention. The result is that these performances, and their interpretation by audiences, enable a continuous negotiation and re-negotiation of what may constitute femininity and feminist politics.

By contrast, Heather Anderson's "Performing Postfeminism: Escaping Identity Politics?" takes a very different view of ambivalence in feminist performance and of its implications for interpretation by its audiences and publics (which, as Anderson points out, are not necessarily the same thing). This article examines the work of three contemporary performance artists -

Charmaine Wheatley, Jemima Stehli and Andrea Fraser - in a consideration of whether the use of their own explicit bodies and sexualities constitutes a conscious critique of the objectification of women or a naïve capitulation to its dominant patriarchal meanings. To be sure, this question has vexed the discourse on feminist performance art since its origins in the 1970s, but Anderson recasts it in an original light by framing it in the context of so-called postfeminism and third-wave feminism. By this means, she explores how female sexuality and sexualization have been confused and conflated within contemporary popular culture notions of "power feminism" and then relates this to the sensationalist and transgressive strategies that are pervasive in these three artists' work. Intrigued by the element of risk evident in their performances, however, Anderson does not condemn them outright, but rather investigates how their ambivalence is both a factor of, and a lens through which, contemporary women's unstable and contradictory relation to power must be viewed and analyzed.

#### Community Voices

The Community Voices contributions to this issue consist of short essays on two very different topics, although both ultimately express concerns about inequities still faced by women today. Lorraine Neal's "Canada's New \$50 Bill Highlights Women's Equality" takes issue with the irony that, given the dire statistics of poverty among Canadian women, so few women will ever lay eyes or hands on one of these bills, the face of which contains an illustration of the Famous Five who forced the British Privy Council to declare in 1929 that women are indeed persons. Her brief but incisive analysis of how the reality of so many Canadian women's economic conditions contradicts the lofty political rhetoric and fanfare surrounding the release of the new \$50 bill serendipitously echoes the sentiments

of Luiza Kurzyna's Fifty Fifty print in the Artists' Pages section. Anne Bertrand's essay, "Managing Non-Profit and Artist-Run Centres," also addresses how women are systemically disadvantaged, albeit in a relatively tiny sector of Canadian society known as the network of artist-run centres. Composed as an open letter to managers in the non-profit sector as a whole, Bertrand's essay exposes the ways in which the culture of volunteerism and the struggle for scant resources upon which this sector depends effectively perpetuate practices that undercut and exploit an already fragile labour force comprised mostly of women. Her recommendations call for renewed commitment to the hard-won gains of feminism and other social movements of the seventies in ways that foster more egalitarian participation and mutual respect among all workers in this vulnerable yet essential cultural sector.

We are pleased and proud to be able to present this collection of intellectually and aesthetically stimulating material to the readers of Atlantis. We certainly did not do it alone, and in addition to those we have already named, we would like to thank Atlantis editors Rhoda Zuk and Linda Kealey for their guidance and support, book review editor Adriana Benzaquen, the authors of the articles and creative work, and all those (and they were many!) upon whom we prevailed to review the articles and books. We are grateful to all those who contributed to this special topic issue, and we hope that "Women, Art, Politics and Power" will itself make a vital contribution to current feminist scholarship on art and cultural practice and to women's studies as a whole.