

ORIGINAL VISIONS

SHIFTING THE PARADIGM, WOMEN'S ART, 1970-1996



MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ
MARY BETH EDELSON
JANET FISH
AGNES MARTIN
PAT STEIR
CARRIE MAE WEEMS
McMULLEN MUSEUM OF ART
BOSTON COLLEGE

This publication is issued in conjunction with the exhibition *Original Visions: Shifting the Paradigm, Women's Art 1970-1996*, at the Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, January 26 to May 18, 1997.

The exhibition was organized by the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Alston Conley, Curator. The publication was supported by Boston College.

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(no. 2), Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Self-Portrait*, 1976, fiber and glue, 9 3/4 in. x 7 3/4 in. x 5 3/4 in. Anne & Jacques Baruch Collection, Ltd., Chicago
photo: Jerry Kobylecky

Back cover:

(no. 5), Mary Beth Edelson, *Fire Flights in Deep Space*, 1977, black and white silver print, triptych, 21 in. x 21 in. each, Collection of the Artist, New York

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DIRECTOR'S PREFACE

The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College is pleased to present, *Original Visions: Shifting the Paradigm, Women's Art, 1970-1996*, examining the contributions of six outstanding artists rarely shown in the Boston area: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mary Beth Edelson, Janet Fish, Agnes Martin, Pat Steir, and Carrie Mae Weems. One of the goals of this exhibition was to show a broader range of art by women than is usually represented. In pursuit of that goal, the Museum has arranged, by decade, contemporaneous works by women of different generations, working in a variety of styles ranging from abstraction to representation, and addressing a variety of issues from the feminist to the non-political.

This innovative conception owes its origin to the vision and enthusiasm of our curator, Alston Conley, who assembled a formidable group of professors in the Department of Fine Arts and the interdisciplinary program of Women's Studies at Boston College to serve as advisors and contributors to the catalogue. The essays were written by Conley, himself a painter, and by Katherine Nahum, an art historian. Interviews with the artists were conducted by Mary Armstrong, a painter; Lisa M. Cuklanz, a rhetorical critic; Jennifer Grinnell, an historian of women; and Marianne LaFrance, a social psychologist. A larger group including Mary Sherman, an artist, and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Lorraine Liscio and Judith Wilt, all literary critics, aided in the discussion of issues to be addressed in the exhibition and in the initial selection of the artists. We extend thanks to all of them for their keen support of this project.

Special acknowledgment is due the indefatigable Jennifer Grinnell, who, as the Museum's manager of publications and exhibitions, oversaw editing and production of this catalogue and

arrangements for loans. We are grateful to John Ombelets for his thoughtful and careful copy-editing of the text, to Monica DeSalvo for her handsome design of this book, and again, to Alston Conley for the inspired design and installation of the exhibition.

As always, we are indebted to other members of the Museum staff for their dedication to this project: Alice Harkins, Heather Fryer, Kerry Leonard, Rachel Mayer, Gabriella Palmieri and last but not least, to our ever-efficient administrator, Helen Swartz.

To locate and bring together an exhibition of such varied works has been complicated. Without the generosity of the many lenders, we could not have succeeded. We extend our deepest gratitude to each of them. It would have been impossible to realize this exhibition without the support and generosity of the administration of Boston College. We wish to thank, in particular, University President William P. Leahy, S.J.; University Chancellor J. Donald Monan S.J.; Vice President Margaret Dwyer; Academic Vice President William Neenan S.J.; Executive Vice President Francis Campanella; Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences J. Robert Barth, S.J.; Associate Dean of Faculties Richard Spinello; and Associate Director of Development Lynne Prosser. We also extend thanks to the Friends of the McMullen Museum, chaired by Nancy and John Joyce.

Finally, in addition to its scholarly mission, the exhibition aims to focus on the role of women's creative expression in a broader sense. It is hoped that an examination of the work of these six exemplary artists will inspire a greater appreciation in New England of the female contribution to our collective culture.

Nancy Netzer

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Anne and Jack Baruch Collection Ltd., Chicago	Joost Elffers, New York	PaceWildenstein, New York
The Collection of the late Edna S. Beron, Boston	Alvin and Barbara Krakow, Boston	P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York
Mary Beth Edelson, New York	Marlborough Gallery, New York	Riverfront Office Park, Cambridge
	Robert Miller Gallery, New York	Private Collections
	DC Moore Gallery, New York	

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This exhibition was shaped through a collaborative effort by faculty from both the Women's Studies Program and Fine Arts Department of Boston College. Several of the faculty volunteered to meet and discuss the concerns and themes addressed by this exhibition. I am grateful to Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, Lorraine Liscio, Mary Sherman and Judith Wilt for their time, ideas and interest at the formative stages. In addition, I would like to thank Mary Armstrong, Lisa M. Cuklanz, Jennifer Grinnell and Marianne LaFrance for their continued involvement and participation in the catalogue. In their interviews with the participating artists, each has brought unique interests, passions and insights to the project. Likewise, special thanks are due to Katherine Nahum for her involvement on many levels, especially her research, essays and editorial prowess.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my colleagues at the Museum: exhibitions and publications manager Jennifer Grinnell, for her commitment, attention to detail and perseverance which helped bring this project to fruition; director Nancy Netzer, for her continued support of this exhibition; and the staff—administrator Helen Swartz, undergraduate research fellow

Gabriela Palmieri and graduate research assistant Heather Fryer—who assisted with the myriad details that kept the exhibition on track.

I am grateful to the Boston College Office of Publications and Print Marketing and design director David Williams for our catalogue and invitation, and especially to Monica DeSalvo for her graceful design and John Ombelets for his thorough copy-editing.

The life blood of exhibitions are the artists and galleries that lend their artworks for display, and particularly the private lenders who share their collections with the public, despite the resulting blank walls in their homes. We owe a debt of thanks to all of them, and to those who assisted with the loans, compiling information for the exhibition and the catalogue: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Dr. Elissa Arons, Anne and Jack Baruch, the late Edna S. Beron, Scott Catto, John Cheim, Elaine Cobos, Mary Beth Edelson, Joost Elffers, Janet Fish, Arnold Glimcher, Marc Glimcher, Michele Heinrici, Alvin and Barbara Krakow, Heidi Lang, Agnes Martin, Jack Mognaz, Mary Morris, Pat Steir, Brian Vaas and Carrie Mae Weems.

Alston Conley

ORIGINAL VISIONS

BY ALSTON CONLEY

The exhibition, *Original Visions*, brings together six women artists: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mary Beth Edelson, Janet Fish, Agnes Martin, Pat Steir and Carrie Mae Weems. Their pursuit of individual expression over a period of a quarter century, and in some cases longer, has brought each of them to a high level of accomplishment documented in numerous exhibitions, and constituting a record of achievement by women artists not found any time earlier. This exhibition and catalogue explore the complexity, variety and development of their work.

The history of sexism in the visual arts, as well as in art history, has now been well documented. Women have been denied the education, support and access to the financial rewards that were necessary to accomplish and sustain a high level of achievement in the most competitive arena. Linda Nochlin in the early 1970s challenged the "whole erroneous intellectual substructure upon which the question, 'Why have there been no great women artists?' is based,"¹ and she opened the doors for a new generation of feminist art historians to deconstruct prevailing biases and to present new paradigms. Lucy Lippard noted during these years that women's exhibitions "as a framework within which to exhibit good art... are no more restrictive than, say, exhibiting German, Cubist, black and white, soft, young or new art."² The wealth of art, and the variety of new art forms produced by women subsequent to such comments, necessitate an examination of the presentation of women's art. Historically, curators organized shows without the rubric "an exhibition of male artists," and presented their often discriminatory views under the pretext of quality. An all-woman show, such as the one presented here, serves as a celebration of the work of six women artists, as well as an educational role, by presenting individual exemplary artistic achievement and potential role models for our students, and, in particular, female students.

Across the country, a large majority of the undergraduate art students are female, while most of their teachers are male. Although the numbers of female art faculty members have grown since the early '70s (when only two percent of art faculty were women),³ the low ratios of female-to-male faculty still hold. A similar situation exists among art history students and faculty, and discrepancy of opportunity also exists for all women who pursue careers in the field. Despite an improvement in the exhibition opportunities for women in the last quarter century, a situation far short of equality still exists today.⁴ Women, compared to men, are exhibited less frequently in major galleries and museums. They are given fewer major survey exhibitions. The pertinent statistics have been culled and promoted in posters, political actions and books, notably by the *Guerrilla Girls*. This politically active group of feminists who maintain their anonymity by wearing gorilla masks when in public have become the conscience of the art world.⁵

The lack of women as role models, in exhibitions and as teachers, has had an undermining effect as characterized by Eva Hesse, one of the best artists of her generation, in a letter to Ethelyn Honig in 1965. A woman is "at a disadvantage from the beginning...She...lacks conviction that she has the 'right' to achievement. She...lacks the belief that her achievements are worthy. Therefore she has not the steadfastness necessary to carry ideas to the full developments...A fantastic strength is necessary and courage. I dwell on this all the time."⁶ If the doors, opened since the '70s, remain open for succeeding generations, it is because of continuous political engagement, organized exhibitions, critical reevaluation, historical revisions and new paradigms presented by feminists, and especially women's pursuit of their own original visions.

Agnes Martin's (b. 1912) first influence when she was studying in New York in the 1940s was Abstract Expressionism. This avant-garde movement tried to reconcile Surrealism's spontaneous tapping of the unconscious through "psychic automatism," unlimited emotional content and modernist abstraction free of utopian visions, while rejecting the politically concerned subject matter of the '30s. Abstract Expressionism became the dominant school of the '50s through discussions at the Tenth Street Club, through new venues for exhibition and through critical acceptance during the post-war period of rising American world influence. The New York School had earned international acclaim by the end of the decade. Martin's exposure to this work in the early '50s (she returned twice more to New York) led to her assimilation of the ideas of Abstract Expressionism. Her less gestural style allowed her to be recognized along with the '60s Minimalists, who found literal meaning in the physical attributes of pure form and rejected symbolism, or any reference outside the art object. In 1967, Martin, by then a mature artist, left New York and sought isolation in New Mexico. She never experienced or embraced the '70s feminist movement.

Janet Fish (b. 1938) was schooled in a late phase of Abstract Expressionism, yet she moved on. While aware of the Pop Art imagists of the late '50s and early '60s, she developed a representative style based on the observation of domestic items, especially those demonstrating the percipient effects of light on transparency. After three decades dominated by successively more reductive schools of abstraction, a revival of imagery and representation emerged during the '70s. While feminism was not the subject of her painting, the feminist revelation that "the personal is political" is apparent in the choice of Fish's subjects.

Pat Steir (b. 1940) also studied art during the peak of the Abstract Expressionist movement, but was influenced by a nonconformist figuration. Although not the subject of Steir's art, gender may be a subtext of her appropriation of historical styles that excluded women. Both Minimal and Conceptual Art of the '60s influenced her imagist paintings, a synthesis of contradictory concerns. Conceptual and Minimal Art are related in that both emphasize

the underlying conceptual basis of art, and both concur with Marcel Duchamp's rejection of the dominant "retinal" orientation of early Modern painting and sculpture. The Minimalists relied on reductive forms and material qualities to make an object of thought. The Conceptualists eliminated the object altogether, and used textual discourse, sometimes combined with documentary photographs, to convey their associated ideas. Conceptualists (along with Performance artists) challenged the entire commercial structure of museum authentication and gallery promotion of art as a commodity.

Mary Beth Edelson (b. 1934) embraced the '70s women's movement, making feminism the subject of her art and her performances. Performance Art grew out of divergent influences, including the '60s "Happenings," experimental dance and improvisational theater. Edelson's rituals created new myths through individual or group activities that were meant to fulfill collective social, political and spiritual needs of women, and project positive gender images. The use of photographic documentation of her ritual performances reveals the influence of Conceptual Art, while manipulations of figurative photo images are occasionally associated with the earlier genre of Body Art.

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953) uses her socialist and feminist political beliefs, informed by the Black Consciousness movement of the civil rights era, to shape her art. Her earliest work was documentary in the tradition of street photography. Although interested in reinventing the leftist photo essay, she rejects the documentary style established in the '30s and '40s by the Farm Security Administration photographers as presenting distorted views by outsiders. An alternative tradition was disclosed by the publication during the '70s of *The Black Photographers Annual*, examining the work of three generations of Black photographers stretching from the Harlem Renaissance to the Kamoinge Workshop of the '60s. Weems was especially inspired by Roy DeCarava, whose photo essay, *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (1955), included a narrative by Langston Hughes. Weems's own use of narrative has ranged from the personal to the folkloric. Largely eliminated from modernist art of the first half of the century, narrative and some political content was revived in the '70s.

Weems's examination of racial stereotypes have precedents in an earlier generation of black visual artists. Some of Weems's emblematic combinations of images with text examine the racist and sexist representations presented in the culture and through media. Other narratives explore the rich folklore representing personal and shared histories of black culture in America.

Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930), a Polish artist, was shaped by her childhood experiences during World War II and post-war communist Poland. When she studied at Warsaw Fine Arts Academy in the early '50s, it was dominated by Stalinism and an orthodox Social Realism against which she rebelled. Avant-garde Polish Constructivism and utopian idealism from the prewar period survived in a circle of artists and intellectuals around Henry Stazewski (1894–1988). For Abakanowicz, his influence wasn't stylistic, but attitudinal; she was inspired by his ideas, his commitment to experimentation and his uncompromising morality. Nonconformist art was barely tolerated during the creative upheaval of the post-Stalin era, and many artists fled the continuing communist censorship. A '60s exhibition of Abakanowicz's paintings and small weavings in Warsaw was closed for its "formalist" tendencies. Encouraged to make a large weaving to submit to the international jury for the first *Biennale Internationale de la Tapisserie* in Switzerland, Abakanowicz's concerns challenged the prevailing craft tradition of artisans who wove from others' cartoons. Abakanowicz approached weaving as an artist, directly creating works in response to the materials, forms and her imagination, challenging accepted disciplines in both the craft and art world.

During the '40s and '50s, the "formalist" approach to art criticism, developed around the Abstract Expressionist and later Minimalist schools, established those artists within a critical tradition. Dominant for two decades, formalism was successfully challenged by new concerns that allowed for greater experimentation and reinvestigation of content. These diverse concerns eventually became known in the '70s as "pluralism," reflecting the lack of a single dominant artistic ideology. Feminism and international trends have been major influences in broadening the artistic discourse that took place in exhibitions. Content has expanded to

include, along with the private expression, conceptual linguistics and political concerns, as well as more recent post-modern ironic reflection. At the same time, there has been a reinvestigation of representation and figuration as forms with expressive content. Political art, in eclipse since the '30s, has had a revival in the early 1990s exploring the issues of gender, race, class and identity. The pluralism embodied in this exhibition is possible because of feminists' and internationalists' insistence to be heard in earlier decades. These artists represent six "originals" whose exhibited "visions" are amongst the most innovative of the last quarter century.

Notes

1. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," 1971, in *Woman, Art, and Power and other Essays*, New York: Harper and Row, 1988, p. 176.
2. Lucy Lippard, *Prefaces to Catalogues of Women's Exhibitions, (Three Parts)*, I. 1971, "Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays On Women's Art*, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976, p. 38.
3. Ibid. p. 44.
4. For a discussion of obstacles presented to women artists earlier in this century see Ellen G. Landau's article "Tough Choices: Becoming a Woman Artist, 1900-1970," and for documentation of continuing career discrimination see "Career Markers," by Ferris Olin and Catherine Brawer, both in *Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-85*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1989.
5. For a selection of political actions and posters documenting sexism and racism in the art world see *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls*, New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
6. Quoted in Lucy Lippard's, *Eva Hesse*, New York: NYU Press, 1976, p. 205.



plate I (no. 3)

Magdalena Abakanowicz

Incarnation Series: Magduwa, Magubi, Magdeta

1988

bronze, unique

25 in. x 25 3/4 in. x 25 in.

Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, New York

photo: Robert E. Mates



MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ

CATHERINE MORRIS

Magdalena Abakanowicz emerged as a powerful and rebellious artist in the 1960s when her weavings were exhibited both internationally and in her native Poland. Although sometimes misperceived as "feminine" craft, these monumental webs of coarsely woven, or rich, fleshy fabric, could stretch from ceiling to floor, hang pendulously threatening, or create mysterious environments that the viewer was seduced to penetrate. The forms were woven of startling materials—sisal, rope, hemp, flax, wool and horsehair—and, like *Les Desert Rouge* (no. 1), the smaller-scale example in this exhibition, they could be brightly colored; but often Abakanowicz worked naturally colored material into tactile, darkly looming presences that filled gallery spaces and challenged categories of art. Abakanowicz's *Abakans* are weavings and sculptures, and when produced in large scale, they become installations.

In the '70s, Abakanowicz isolated skeins of rope as a material that could span distances and assume evocative shapes. She felt rope was "like a muscle devoid of activity...an echo of the banished organic world."¹

"Rope is to me the condensation of the problem of thread, the thread composed of many fibers whose number nobody tries to establish," Abakanowicz said in the early '70s.² It is not surprising that in these years she made a few self-portraits comprised of glue-hardened threads of fibrous linen, either busts or merely the head, like the *Self-Portrait* (no. 2) of 1976, in the current exhibition. The threads form a

floating, dense, vascular web that both suggests a mask and also stimulates the viewer to supply imaginatively the absent parts of the figure to the empty space.

The cycle of bronze "anonymous" self-portraits, called *Incarnations*, (pl. 1, no. 3a-c) evolved in the '80s. Bronze suggests the most noble and enduring traditions of sculpture, but Abakanowicz exposed its primitive and mutative qualities. Creating a mold of her face, Abakanowicz filled it with hot wax, producing a "positive" for the final bronze casting of the porcelain mold. She interrupted the pouring of liquid molten metal into the mold, or otherwise altered the hardening process to radically simplify the features—an eye socket became a shaded hollow, lips the mere continuation of a cheek bone—and their surfaces were left rough and discolored. Recalling Mycenaean funeral masks or impaled war trophies, the chins of these portrait heads are poised precariously on bronze uprights.

The small scale of *Incarnations* (pl. 1, no. 3a-c) gives no hint of the authority and monumentality of *Heads, Seated Figures, Backs, Embryology* (fig. 1), *Katarsis* (fig. 2), *Crowds* and *War Games* that preoccupied Abakanowicz in the '70s and into the late '80s. The *Heads*, made of sewn burlap stuffed with rope, stand roughly three feet tall; the *Seated Figures* and the simian, headless *Backs* are slightly larger. *Embryology* (fig. 1)—stuffed, stitched ovoid forms in burlap and ranging in size from egg to boulder—evokes wide associations to organic forms like potatoes, stones and feces.



Katarsis (fig. 2) is comprised of 33 tall, androgenous bronze figures ranged in lateral regiments at the edge of a private sculpture park near Florence. They are sexless and headless; their backs protrude while their hollow fronts expose the striations of the mold and projecting rods that are normally cut off after the casting process. Abakanowicz describes this group as "figures of man-trees, man-coffins,"³ revealing her surrealist predilection for merging morphologies.

War Games refers to huge timbers stripped of bark and bound by metal at their stumped ends. Supported horizontally by iron-frame tables, they suggest mutilated Titans, medieval projectiles, both the sword and the plowshare in giant scale. They condense nature and aggression.

Where does this art come from? In theme and expression it can be related to the German artists Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer; all three artists create unique and intense responses to the inarticulate horrors of the Second World War.

Yet Abakanowicz's series of traumas probably began earlier, when her parents' indifference drove her to seek solace in the forests surrounding the family's country estate just outside Warsaw. Her mother preferred her older sister and had counted on Magdalena being a boy. Endowed with a hypersensitivity to nature, curious about its inner workings, privy to the folklore of servants and the romantic tales of her father, a descendant of Ghenghis Khan, Abakanowicz was acutely vulnerable when, in 1939, German tanks churned into the family estate.

In 1943, drunk German soldiers shot off her mother's right arm and mutilated her left hand as she moved to open the door to them. "The

body was like a piece of fabric...it could be torn apart with ease," Abakanowicz realized.⁴

"The capable wise hand suddenly became a piece of meat, separate...I had seen dead bodies, but they somehow had always preserved their completeness in front of others. We had to wait until the morning to go by carriage to the small town where there was a doctor. She survived in spite of a terrible loss of blood and excruciating pain. When she returned from the hospital, maimed, I attempted to replace for her the hand she had lost...I only wanted to make up to her for the great disappointment of my gender. I wanted to be both needed and loved, if only now, to attract her attention and perhaps even praise."⁵



fig. 1

Magdalena Abakanowicz

Embryology

1978-81

burlap, cotton gauze, hemp, rope, nylon and sisal
approx. 680 pieces

Collection of the Artist, Marlborough Gallery,
New York

no. 1

Magdalena Abakanowicz

Les Desert Rouge

1984

sisal, wall hanging

53 in. x 40 in.

Anne & Jacques Baruch Collection, Ltd., Chicago

photo: Jerry Kobylecky

no. 2 (p. 19)

Magdalena Abakanowicz

Self-Portrait

1976

fiber & glue

108 3/4 in. x 84 3/4 in. x 60 3/4 in.

Anne & Jacques Baruch Collection, Ltd., Chicago

photo: Jerry Kobylecky

Abakanowicz and her family fled their home in advance of the Soviet army and went to Warsaw, where the artist worked in a hospital caring for the wounded. She completed her high school education there, and, between 1950 and 1954, attended the repressive Academy of Fine Arts, where adherence to Social Realism was required.

After graduation, and in secret, she returned to the Academy at night to execute her own abstract "rain forest" paintings on bed sheets that she had sewn together. Their formats were huge, as large as the subsequent three-dimensional weavings that attracted critical acclaim.

Abakanowicz's art has been concerned with surviving war and the Communist regime in Poland; it is not ostensibly concerned with feminist issues, although vulnerability, fertility, gender ambiguity, the textures and interior spaces of the body and an identification with nature are implicit. Primarily, the art of Magdalena Abakanowicz ties aggressor to victim by building military regiments of decapitated androgyns, and it finds sympathies between seemingly distinct genera, like human tissue and fabric, felled trees and war amputees. Up until now, it has not expressed even a "skeptical, wounded, vigilant" utopianism;⁶ but since the demise of the Soviet Union, it may be moving optimistically in that direction.

In the current exhibition, *Six Small Figures on a Slit* (1992) (no. 4) seems lighter in mood. The burlap, resin and wood sculpture is part of Abakanowicz's series called *Ragazzi* and *Sages*. There adults or children sit or stand poised on wood beams that suggest that the ground might shift. Today in Warsaw it has.

Notes

1. Barbara Rose, *Magdalena Abakanowicz*. New York: Marlborough Gallery and Harry N. Abrams, 1994, p. 41.
2. Ibid.
3. Quoted in Michael Brenson, *Magdalena Abakanowicz's Sculpture of Enchantment*, Exhibition Catalogue, Marlborough Gallery, 1993, p. 5-6.
4. Todd Brewster, "Art of Anguish," *Life*, May 1984, p. 120.
5. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, New York: Abbeville Press, 1982, p. 27.
6. Michael Brenson Lecture at the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, April 22, 1992, p. 4.



fig. 2
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Katarsis
1985
bronze
33 figures
Collection of Giuliano Gori
photo: Arthur Starewicz

no. 4
Magdalena Abakanowicz
Six Small Figures on a Slit
1992-93
burlap, resin & wood
74 3/4 in. x 104 1/2 in. x 16 1/8 in.
Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, New York



AN INTERVIEW WITH MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ

BY MARIANNE LAFRANCE

MLF. As a research psychologist, I have studied how people use their bodies to intentionally and unintentionally indicate who a person is, their feelings and modes of relating. From my perspective, people need to use another person's gestures and expressions as a way to get "inside" a person's head. Your concave figures, such as *Seated Figures* and *Standing Figures*, appear to reflect this concept. Could you describe how you came to produce sculptures of bodies that look like cross-sections of human forms, and effectively impel viewers to look "inside?"

MA. We perceive works of art as well as other situations to which we are confronted with our entire bodies. I address myself to people's intellectual [interests] as well as feelings and emotions, to the unconscious and imagination...[For example] the *Seated Figures*, shell-like negatives of the bulk of the human body...deal with the problem of containing and enclosing. The cycles touch upon the question of empty space which can be filled by means of our imagination and with the sphere of the palpable, the rigid, which is an incomplete trace of our body's adherence to its material surroundings.

MLF. Your *Faces Which are Not Portraits* capture something universal about human faces. Your fiber self-portraits are, on the other hand, individual and particular. Could you describe what is the essence of the human face, that is, what is it that makes a human face human?

MA. The faces have their origin in my own face, in impressions taken in soft material. Warm, liquid wax blurs the actual features and creates new ones, capturing them as it solidifies suddenly. What remains are details of skin, a lip, an eyelash, unexpectedly literal. The wax disfigures, as does the passing of time...[The impression reveals] [m]any existences side by side, together with experiences etched into the skin. I look with surprise at what I remove from my face, what yields to my fingers. I strengthen the film of wax with gauze and canvas to preserve the important details. My face comes between the whirl of my thoughts and emotions, and the people who look at me, to whom I speak. The faces of *Incarnations* [pl. I, no. 3a-c] unveil elements of the inner chaos hidden behind the living face.

MLF. All of your figurative sculptures deliberately lack clear gender differentiation, yet, if I had to judge, they appear more male-like than female-like. Do your figures have a gender?

MA. Each form is a set of meanings, and as a set of meanings it is true. Nothing should be translated into concrete terms, reduced to a single plane of reference. This would annihilate the form as a tool of cognition.... My whole work is metaphoric, so are also the figures, which are neither dressed nor undressed, never literal like shadows or bark fallen off a tree, or...fallen off a mummy.

MLF. Several series, including *Becalmed Beings*, *Katarsis* [fig. 2], all four versions of *Crowd*, consist of a large number of similar but not identical figures arranged in the same space. Frequently, the arrangements suggest depersonalization and de-individualization; sometimes they seem to convey a sense of community or congregation. Could you describe how you use the spaces between the figures as well as their orientation to express how people relate to each other in collectives?

MA. It is almost repulsive to feel another human being so close as to be a physical threat. A human being turned into a crowd loses his human qualities. A crowd is only a thousand times duplicated copy, a repetition, a multiplication. Among such a great number, one person is extremely close and at the same time terribly distant. I summoned solitude and finally escaped inside myself.

I have been born as one of the crowd. This is a situation for life. One cannot revolt against it, as we cannot fight against our own face which is grown into us or against inborn instincts. Being aware of my dissimilarity, I wish to escape from the herd. Many would like to do the same. But we immerse in the crowd like a grain of sand in the friable sands.

MLF. Are you a feminist?

MA. I do not feel to be a feminist. Each person is a mixture of genes of both genders. I was all my life with my husband and brother. I worked with various museum directors while exhibiting. I never felt that there is a difference between me and men in execution of my art, and its perception by the public.

MLF. Your art has included abstract fiber articles, human forms cast in bronze, and stone wheels and wood trunks. Could you describe how your work has evolved through the '70s, '80s and '90s.

MA. When I look back [over the last three decades] I think I worked all the time around the same problem[s], I only expressed them through different materials, media. It was always metaphoric, concerning human condition in very general terms.

At the very beginning of every creative process, whether it is science or art, is mystery. One of the strongest motives of our time is the search for explanation, the need to explain everything away. Explanation is one of the means to tame the mystery of art. Talking about mystery has become indecent. Many people consider it as pure mystification or lack of intelligence. They want to identify mystery with a problem and a problem is something which can be reduced into details susceptible to explanation. Mystery cannot be reduced to details. It is a whole which embraces us.

MLF. What do you want to say about your work that these questions have not addressed?

MA. In everything I do...the constant factor and permanent necessity is to search for and reveal secrets inherent in structure, the structure being the phenomenon which all the organic world on our planet has in common, this mystery which can never fully be revealed

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WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER TEACH YOU ABOUT WOMEN?

make
friends

WHAT DID YOUR FATHER TEACH YOU ABOUT MEN?

taught me that even though
mechanically inclined,
boys, men could use
tools to work on cars
and I became a painter
of an auto mechanic

WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER TEACH YOU ABOUT MEN?

My mother said, "I'll give you the
same advice (tongue in cheek) that
my mother gave me, and her mother
gave her. Never let a man see you
without your clothes on. My great-
grandmother, with whom this originated,
had eleven children. She is also
famous for the saying, "A man can
only find one thing, and he can
find that in the dark."
He had to

WHAT DID YOUR FATHER TEACH YOU ABOUT WOMEN?

TO READ THEM

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