

Appendix A

The participation of women artists at the conference on "Comparative Patriarchy and American Institutions"

Pascale Robert

What is the real place for the artist in our society? What happens if one combines the two realities: being both a woman and an artist? Could the work of women artists introduce a yet another approach to the rich, various studies presented in April 2007, at the conference "Comparative Patriarchy and American Institutions: the Language, Culture, and Politics of Neo-Liberalism" held at the Université de Savoie, in Chambéry, France?

At first, it is rather difficult to dissociate the two notions of being both an artist and a woman. Artists, in the general term, bring time to a halt, as the viewer enters the art work. Today, we are saturated with images from television, advertising on the internet. But still visual art stimulates an active approach to the environment, and entering the art work of a woman is to discover her sensibility, her own perception of the world; it is an essential experience for humanity. Our consciousness of the world must open itself beyond concepts, beyond words; it requires other forms of expression beyond the usual oral and written communications, which characterize most conferences. This understanding prompted me to share with the participants of this conference an art exhibition of paintings by Isabel titled "Woman reflection."

Isabel's personal search translates her own vision of the woman. She represents woman in figurative nudes absorbed into impressions of nature and its transformations: sky and clouds, foliage, shapes of stones...as woman, dissolved into the universe, existing as one element among the others.

« Abandon » a painting by Isabel

Her choice of shapes between abstract and figurative combines at the same time the artist's role as well as the woman's. This choice creates multiple visions following one's eye movement. She moves across the space, over her own representation, to accompany the gaze of the viewer. The visitor then becomes the actor. « I can even get a glimpse of something else. » Something new can even appear under his/her watchful eye. Inspecting the painting closely; then from far away could sometimes change one's sensitivity: one might discover in the background other representations; one could capture some detail, even though they are in perpetual movement. Isabel absorbs all the senses of a careful visitor, and brings them into an alliance of perceiving important ideas, by provoking a reflexion and a vision at different levels of a woman who creates. The meeting point is the open-mind. Only here does the painting, in all its phases, become a story.

Furthermore the paintings are exhibited in a unique place, and recreate an atmosphere which transports the visitors elsewhere, to a more complete world which appeals to all of our sensibilities, and not merely to our intellect. We are released to be "impregnated" by sensations offered by the artist. We can seize the opportunity or not; it represents a different path, a real alternative; because art is more

than a technique, it is a way to see differently. It provides a poetic vision of the world, an alternative perception of reality, an authentic experience of humanity.

The need for expression remains a human act, transgressing the genre barrier. The French poet, Antonin Artaud, explains it in his book, *Le Théâtre et son double*, when he writes: "We have the right to tell what have been told and even what has not yet been told in an immediate, direct manner that belongs to us in order to answer to today's feelings, and in a way everybody will understand."

I have been fascinated, as was Artaud, by the Balinese artists and their complete integration in the village community, their home where the marvellous dancers or the fabulous painters were also the "ordinary" peasants who worked in the rice fields.

In the Western world, in the so-called "developed countries," a special status has been reserved for the artist: he/she exists as a "category" of persons specialised in creativity. Nevertheless are not artists also persons who earn their living from art? If we refer to those thousands of writers, musicians, composers, dancers working at other jobs, sometimes more or less related to the artistic field in order to gain their sustenance; the answer is certainly no.

I believe that what makes an artist an artist is the capacity to project his/her perception of the world, to introduce a different approach to reality, whether it appeals to the viewer or not. In developed countries the artist has often been an outcast, a marginal, a rebel.

Art cannot be reduced to the production of just another commodity. Modern society where we live today would like to assimilate all productive activities, in order to increase the GDP (gross domestic product). Artistic production does not necessarily contribute to economic growth, but it remains essential to human development.

Returning now to the artist Isabel, she is a woman of multifaceted talents: a painter, a musician, a musicologist, an actress, a practitioner of *tai chi chuan*, and a teacher of transcendental meditation. Isabel learned how to develop a variety of artistic techniques from past encounters, events from different periods in her life, and she continues to create new expressions of her feelings in original ways. Today, her research in graphic art is her priority, although she plays the flute she brought from the Andes in a band in Paris. She is active defending the cultures of South American Indians and shares her considerable knowledge their music and cultural heritage at public concerts in Europe.

Since her early days, Isabel has followed a personal research focused on different medium to represent her art. From the initial inspiration to the completion, her art work follows the intuitive path of her intentions. In all her paintings we discover the conscious choice of different paper selected to deliver desired effects; the choice of water colours as this medium, which invites random movement to interact with her intentions; and along with water-colours, she uses ink and vegetal dyes such as tea or walnut stain, etc...

However, like most artists, she cannot earn a living with art work alone. She has indeed to share her creative time with professional activities far removed from her creative aims. I met Isabel through our involvement with art. We used to practise together *tai chi chuan* at the Luxembourg Garden in Paris, before it became a fashionable activity in France. The practice of *Tai chi*, the Chinese martial art, includes an important meditative discipline. At that time, I had devoted my entire life to art, specifically contemporary dance and choreography. I later participated in different art circles, and became oriented more to painting, sculpture, etc... and I eventually turned to other art techniques.

Since my youth, I have always pursued artistic activities, that were either more bodily oriented or more graphic. I, too, have been obliged to rely on other activities to earn a living, and as many single parent families I have the additional challenge of providing an education for a child. This may be a wonderful period in women's life, but it involves also much more time spent in routine household work, and less for art creation. This difficulty is confronted by every mother: how to balance artistic activities,

with professional and parental responsibilities; women, especially, are expected to perform multiple roles in society and are suffering from the lack of time.

However if being an artist is to see life "in different manner," then women will ultimately remain potential artists, for as Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in *Letters to a young poet* : "If daily life seems poor to you, do not accuse it! Accuse yourself not to be poet enough to summon to you all its richness ."

Drawing and montage by Pascale Robert

if you wish to contact the artist Isabel : isabelpintur@free.fr
or pascale ROBERT pascalerobert9@free.fr