



*EDITORIAL: FROM WOMB TO NURKAN VALTAUS*

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*Visual Culture & Gender (VCG)* has come to term and we are proud, delighted, and eager to share our baby with the world. There are numerous people to thank, especially the authors, editorial board, supportive friends throughout North America and Europe, and the administrators of Northern Illinois University for their support. We greatly appreciate Hui-Chun Hsiao's assistance with the design template.

Our co-editorship is a collaboration with equal division of tasks and all decisions of a joint nature. For volume one, we list our names alphabetically and will rotate the order in each subsequent volume. Our editorial is also a collaboration with Deborah Smith-Shank's words of her specific experiences in purple font and Karen Keifer-Boyd's words in green font. Where we desire to diffuse to whom the text belongs we use black font. The ease of color text and more importantly images in color, and in inserting hyperlinks, video, and podcasts is a hallmark of online journals. One of our goals is to push this potential of multimedia in online publishing as we have begun with the video clips from the films of a German feminist filmmaker, Ula Stöckl, analyzed in Claudia Schippert's article.

Our second goal with the journal is to further its accessibility and inclusion of international perspectives. In this volume, Kryssi Staikidis provides us with perspectives of Mayan women artists. Miwon Choe explores her Korean family history and tells a personal and traumatic story of her great aunt, a remarkable artist and woman. Marissa McClure Vollrath, Linda Hoepfner-Poling, Viki D. Thompson Wylder, and John Warren Oakes provide different generational perspectives in the United States from young girls of contemporary times, to an art educator and

artist who began their careers at the forming of second wave feminism, and going further back to the impact of the 1940s GI Bill on the education of women artists. In future issues, we hope to have several articles in more than one language so that readers can select their most comfortable language for reading the article. Reviewing, revisions, and editing will still be first completed in English prior to the translation.

A third goal is to introduce artists and art that concern visual culture and gender, and further to have the art essay section serve as a site that encourages diverse styles and voices. Our inaugural volume begins this endeavor with the passionate perspectives of Future Akins-Tillett, K. B. Basseches, Barbara Bickel, and Cory W. Peeke. Cory Peeke's art essay begins to erode the absence of publications that recognize the work and ideas of gay, lesbian, and transgendered artists and writers.

One problematic absence that we notice in this edition of the international journal is that most of our authors come from North America. We hope that in subsequent years, more diversity of artwork, writing, and cultures will be submitted and included.

After serious consideration, we have decided to organize the journal according to an alphabetization of authors' surnames within each of the three sections: articles, art essays, and book reviews. The reason for the alphabetization started a long time ago in a small midwestern town in the U.S., at a large midwestern university, when Enid Zimmerman explained that feminist co-authorship is a collaborative and non-hierarchical joining of ideas. **I remember her battles with administrators as she fought for promotion while her second or third authorships on publications were devalued. It would have been so much easier to ask her co-authors for first authorship. Instead she fought for the notion of collaboration and it is in this spirit (and with a nod to Enid) that we alphabetize our authors.**

**I have been blessed to have the opportunity to co-edit this new journal with Karen Keifer-Boyd who is an angel. She is diligent and dedicated to excellence, and has more energy than anyone I know. I have been energized by the humor, good-sense, and speedy productivity of Debbie Smith-Shank.** We have worked collaboratively with all our authors on ideas and concepts as well as editing and it is through use of all our combined talents that *VCG* has acquired its attitude, affect, and attributes. This journal needs to exist. The ideas are important and still

timely after so many years of feminist struggle in the U.S. and abroad.

Since the late 1990s, I have taught a course called *Women Artists, Feminist Aesthetics and Criticism* (Smith-Shank, 2000). My students always have difficulties breaking the habits and socially constructed misogynist texts they have acquired. Their cultural biases stem from both formal education and immersion in Midwestern, middle class, Christian, heterosexual, and relatively privileged lives and cultures. The roles they assume and the beliefs they amass are not in and of themselves, negative, but because of the overlaid assumption of normalcy, there are few options to a myopic existence. During the class, most of the students open their eyes to gender issues and other positionalities.

After having taught this course for many years and to many students, I assumed that with the wealth of feminist imagery available and the exponential teachings of my students to their students, and so on, that beliefs about art and art education had changed to include women artists' stories of their angst and triumphs. I assumed that stories of gay, lesbian, and transgender folks would be heard and their artworks would be acknowledged. Most decidedly this was not the case. In 2005, I taught a course, *Feminist Aesthetics and Criticism*, to a group of art teachers who knew who Georgia O'Keeffe was, but that's about it. They were disturbed to hear ideas and issues resulting from a reconsideration of art/history that is inclusive of gender issues and feminist practices. They didn't know what to do when confronted with explicitly gay art. Apparently, inclusive discussion of women artists, artists of color, artists who are disabled, or who do not fit within a heterosexual and privileged discourse is still outside mainstream academic and cultural discourse. And certainly outside most K-12 public school practices.

In my explorations of the potentials and limitations of the Web for feminist art activism, I have found that exposure and critique of patriarchal structures and thinking makes a difference when connections are made both to and between specific local sites. In finishing *VCG* volume one in Finland, I learned of a Finnish concept, *nurkan valtaus*, which concerns revisioning a local site, or taking over a site with art that gives the site new meaning. Important to a movement toward a just and fair world to all gender identities is to expose the systems and networks that prevent this, tell of the lives that have struggled for justice and respect,

and re-envision the future—to *nurkan valtaus*.

Is it possible to make additions to the field when we reconsider and recontextualize existing codes, signs, and artifacts by looking beyond the obvious for their hidden stream cultural narratives. All cultures impose an assumed unity on a diversity of codes and have a naturalizing function, thus making the *status quo* appear as unchanging and enduring, so traditional pedagogy and content in art education has been naturalized. Imagining differently requires content as well as context which empower thinking, positing, and imagining education and art practice as a gender-collaborative enterprise. The authors in *Visual Culture & Gender* do just that. We can find themes in volume one that challenge the *status quo*; and the authors help us see differently—the past, present, and future. Our brief overview of the articles, essays, and reviews below provide a way to consider three themes that interweave throughout *VCG*'s volume one.

### *Spirituality*

Future Akins-Tillett constructs a spirituality directly tied to her artwork as she attempts to challenge stereotypes and promote a healing presence.

K. B. Basseches considers the responses of viewers to her photographs of her husband. There are so many layers in this discussion that include aging, male beauty, homophobia, heterosexuality, and love.

Viki D. Thompson Wylder introduces us to the medieval notion of Books of Hours through Judy Chicago's recent book on the same topic. The notion of breaking the day into segments of spiritual time translates into a reverence for not only our human natures, but reverence for others who share the planet, particularly Judy Chicago's cats.

### *Mothers*

Miwon Choe facilitates/increases knowledge and empathy for

those artist mothers/aunties who have come before us and paved our way.

John Oakes outlines a historical trajectory of male empowerment in art schools. Are we still in the thrall of the GI Bill and mother stigmas?

Linda Hoepfner-Poling gives us a textual snapshot (as well as some very interesting photos) of our mother-sister Georgia Collins whose work has continued to influence a generation of feminist art educators.

Claudia Schippert investigates how and why an award-winning feminist German filmmaker has been unaccessible for study, and brings out missing scholarship and a critical analysis of several films of a mother of films, Ula Stöckl.

Kryssi Staikidis takes us to Guatemala where she apprentices to a traditional Mayan painter. The stories she paints with her female mentor are in contradistinction to the abstract expressionist painting and sole authorship she was taught in the U.S.A. What new visions will we see when we learn from mothers outside our home?

*Secret-ive/secret-ion bodies*

Barbara Bickel explores the notion of self, art, and research as pedagogy as she describes and gives us glimpses into a self reflexive exhibition of her artwork. The messy coincides with the spiritual aspects of her work and forces us to reconsider notions of public and private spaces, rites, and body.

Cory W. Peeke, while not specifically addressing the messy body, does consider messy ideas, particularly stereotypes. His artwork considers the role color takes in identity constructions as well as racial and sexual prejudice.

Marissa McClure Vollrath gives us a glimpse into the visual world of young girls, and she also grants readers permission to revisit girlhood drawing memories. The girls she taught made “secret plans” on how to survive negotiating private fantasies and public expectations.

We invite you to share your ideas with us about the journal and to submit your own work for a future issue. You can reach Debbie at [debatart@niu.edu](mailto:debatart@niu.edu) and Karen at [kk-b@psu.edu](mailto:kk-b@psu.edu).

**References**

Smith-Shank, D. L. (2000). Teaching and learning in ART 580: Women artists and feminist art criticism. *The Journal of Gender Issues in Art and Education*, 1, 81-94.