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I started *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, a journal of contemporary art issues, in 1986 with Susan Bee, my co-editor. We had come back to New York City from a summer in Provincetown and felt more than usually repelled by the prospect of re-entering the art world. And it seemed that everyone we knew felt the same way. By the mid '80s the art world was completely overtaken by its forms of Reaganism. There was a totally materialistic atmosphere; it was the height of Neo-Expressionism and Neo-Geo; a cool, ironic, media- and language-oriented "postfeminism" had overtaken the feminist ideas we'd been involved with. There seemed to be a sudden invasion of theory into the language of art criticism. Many artists, particularly artists who had come of age in the late '60s and early '70s, felt excluded and estranged by this approach to art making and art writing. At this time I retooled myself, schooled myself in the language of theory in order not to feel intimidated and victimized by it. I began to write, just for myself at first.

My first essay was on the depiction of women in the work of David Salle. I went to school with him at the California Institute of the Arts. In fact I was on his graduate admissions committee! I can't remember if I voted for him, but I think so. Obviously, he got in.

I was in the Feminist Art Program at Cal-Arts, run by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago. It was the first of its kind in the country, and, looking back, I realize that it was not just boot camp for feminists, which is what I've always called it, but also a leadership training program if one wanted to take it that way. We received focused political training within an art framework. It set me on a path of trying to intervene, first, into the way visual art is taught.

Mira Schor: *Bridging the Gap*, 1985
40" x 112", oil on canvas

MIRA SCHOR

on shoestring publishing, feminist phallic power and gender revenge



Recently I've gone back over some of my experiences as a student and a teacher to write about gender abuses in teaching ("Authority and Learning," M/E/A/N/I/N/G # 8, November 1990).

I'm also interested in studying the way art history is written, and women and artists of color written out of it. Since Salle was at CalArts at that time, I knew that the way he depicted women in his paintings was not accidental or unconscious, that he was perfectly aware of how his works could be read, and that there was an element of gender revenge, in his work, against feminism. I was outraged by Salle's work and a lot of people I knew felt the same way, but we couldn't find our views anyplace, so I began to write about it. That essay took about two years and was a real learning experience in writing.

It had a long dossier of rejection. Journals either wanted the more typical "balanced" article: "some people say this but others say that," or journals such as *October*, for example, who didn't like Salle any more than I did, didn't approve of my point of view and my methods. I wasn't very theoretical and I was more annoyed at content than media: in other words, the problem for me was *what* he was doing, not that he was doing it in painting. For *October* it was more offensive that he was painting.

Well, it is taking me as long to tell this part of the story about starting M/E/A/N/I/N/G as it did to write the essay. Susan and her husband Charles Bernstein, who is a poet, both encouraged me to write and then tried to help me get the essay published. They both have a lot of experience with publishing. Charles was one of the editors of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and Susan has had experience in every aspect of book production, from proofreading to copy-editing to book design. She is a painter and, just as I've supported myself mostly through teaching and various labor-intensive, non-remunerative activities, that is how she supported herself. At first, Charles suggested that I put out the essay as a pamphlet; he said that was a time-honored format, but I had this vision of myself handing out hate literature at the corner of Canal Street and West Broadway so I didn't do it.

Susan and I met in Provincetown when we were children. Our parents, who are all artists, knew each other. We met again as adults in the mid '70s in Provincetown. Her parents, Sigmund and Miriam Laufer, stayed at the Windswept Inn, and my mother, Resia Schor, had bought a house on An-

Dove. In a sense, M/E/A/N/I/N/G was hatched on various Cape beaches. Finally that fall of '86 we had lunch at Magoos in New York and said let's do it. In two months we put out our first issue. That was five years ago and our 10th issue will come out in November.

We try to return the discourse on art to considerations of the art object, to have language flow from the object rather than have the object be an illustration of a theory. We can't afford reproductions, but that has turned into an advantage, because the writer has to really attend to the art object, and the reader has to pay attention to the text, instead of just checking out the ads and pictures the way one does with the glossy art magazines. We also want to return art criticism to the hands of visual artists. We've tried to provide a forum for voices and ideas not heard in mainstream art magazines. My

through the samizdat system of xeroxing.

It has been both difficult and energizing to do M/E/A/N/I/N/G. The real difficulty is in doing everything else that I have to do to make ends meet. I teach, give lectures, write articles on art, and, occasionally, proofread. M/E/A/N/I/N/G is a part-time job for which I don't get paid. But I feel my painting has developed synergistically with my writing. Just as M/E/A/N/I/N/G was my way of reaching out to my community, my work has become more connected to a large discourse within the art world, and more accessible, although perhaps more disturbing also.

I'm not all that militant. But I won't say that something is black when it's white. Or I won't say anything, but I won't lie. My work says to patriarchal culture, "I see you." It is really simple, but apparently threatening to some. Right now I'm working on a

Regardless of one's age or degree of knowledge or personal authority, the role "teacher" gives power. Abuse follows. Some of the abuses of authority which I found as an art student, and which I have seen and heard of being perpetuated to this day, can loosely be grouped under the category of gender abuse, with a gendered imprint, as well as actual gendered narratives and players.

— from *Authority and Learning*
M/E/A/N/I/N/G # 8, November 1990

ideal is for visual artists to extend themselves beyond their own work to engage with other art works and broader issues, which relate to their work of course. That is what I've tried to do myself.

We do most of the production ourselves, without a staff. M/E/A/N/I/N/G gives meaning to the term *shoestring* (we're partially funded by The New York State Council on the Arts). Unfortunately, we can't pay our writers. But we do provide a forum for ideas which don't fit into market-oriented magazines, so people have responded warmly. We immediately felt we had answered a need and we get a very gratifying response from our relatively small but devoted readership. M/E/A/N/I/N/G is used a lot by art

large work influenced by images from the Gulf War, adapting the sexualized images I've been working with to deal with endless, self-perpetuating aggression. I'm working in modular sections and the work will be long and narrow, like a frieze which optimally would go around a room without a break, representing totally circular militarism.

I hear that some people think I'm one of the Guerrilla Girls. People think that because I wrote about them in *Artforum* and was on one of their posters, along with 499 other women artists! Since their identities are secret, even if I told *Provincetown Arts* that I was, I could be lying, and if I say I'm not, I could really be. But I'm not. It's great to be thought of as a Guerrilla Girl, without actually having to go out in the middle of the night with a glue pot, dodging guards

aesthetic in terms of color and texture, and I treasure the time I have here to paint, read, and write, uninterrupted. I remember the art scene here in the '50s and early '60s very vividly, although I was a child. I can still visualize Friday nights in the late '50s, with openings up and down Commercial Street. My father, Ilya Schor, showed at the HCE gallery, so I particularly remember Nat Halper. We lived next door to Henry Rothman when we first came here. He was such a type, a true bohemian. I miss seeing them walking down the street. And of course I miss Jack Tworokov tremendously. This was really an art colony in the sense that the people who came here for the summer were active participants in the art community in New York. There was a living link to the broader art world: Hans Hofmann is a genuinely important part of the history of American art and he attracted interesting students; Jack was one of the original abstract expressionists, and he was the chairman of the Art Department at the Yale School of Art & Architecture in the '60s. Red Grooms and Mimi Gross, Jim Dine, Alan Kaprow, and other pop and happenings artists worked here.

This continuity with a broader art activity has been eroded, partly because younger artists can't afford to come here now since Provincetown has been condominiumized. The only way I can be here is because I spend my summers with my mother. It is perhaps an unusual choice on my part, but it suits both our needs. When my sister Naomi isn't upstairs writing at her desk looking out on the bay, I write there, and I paint in a small room with starched organdy curtains which I love. My mother works downstairs.

Yet being an artist who loves Provincetown and either lives or summers here is somehow different from being a "Provincetown artist" and isolating oneself from the broader art scene. I'm not talking about careers but about ideas. I haven't found enough people who are involved in the issues which engage me at the moment: the status of painting at a time when other media predominate, the role of language in the visual arts, problems of racism, sexism, and censorship. But in a sense, in the summer, school is out for all of us, and I live for the cool swim in the bay at twilight after a rainstorm.

My parents came to America in 1941. As a result of their traumatic displacement from Europe, I crave roots and continuity. I was born in New York and I imprinted on Provincetown in my childhood. Put together, these two different environments have framed the terms of my inner life, and one