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Homonymous Projections

By

Jo-Ann J. Dellaposta

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM

SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

November, 1989

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Title of Thesis - Homonymous Projections

I, Jo-Ann J. Dellaposta, prefer to be contacted each time a request for reproduction is made. I can be reached at the following address.

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Date 11/21/89

For all of those who have strived to be more than the other.....

GRAZIE STAR A DIO

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INTRODUCTION

Certain aspects of my upbringing and particular myths effected the development of my personality. After abiding by rules of behavior, taught to me as I was growing up, I began to feel as though I was an individual defined according to the beliefs of a tradition that classified a woman as "the other".¹ Various behavioral characteristics were projected upon me. I didn't question their importance or worth in my own life; I accepted them as given.

I was taught how to be a woman, what it meant to be a woman: be quiet, soft spoken, conservative, neat, prim and proper. There are certain barriers which separate women from men, us from them. I was taught not to overstep these boundaries.

With the barriers should go many of the arbitrary definitions structured into our very language from out of the past: the classification of activities, roles by gender: the built-in assumption of maleness in certain words, the adjectives which still confuse and confine us in our thinking and make it possible for serious sociologists and psychologists to draw conclusions from "masculine-feminine" charts which are based on nothing other than conditioned concepts of what is "natural" (for whom?).²

The above paragraph by Lorraine Hansberry, enabled me to fully realize that the problems which I thought were solely mine, I actually shared with many women. The traditional woman, along with her upbringing and her home, has been a conditioned way of life that many have struggled to overcome.

Lorraine Hansberry had voiced her opinion in regard to the repression of women. Like her, I was eager to do the same.

I began a process of trying to redefine my individuality, by asking the question, "What really is important in my life?". At the same time, I was willing to express the anger, frustration and confusion that I had experienced. To articulate these emotions in my photographs, "Homonymous Projections", I used various ways of representation. I worked with the nude form and a projected image; I also relied on color, text, and painted back-

drops to render these emotions. To further enhance the strength of my work, I created an installation.

I worked with naked female body parts, using a female body for obvious reasons. I felt that a naked form represented a defenseless form, one that lacked support, one that was exposed to danger. The traditional, artistic nude, usually displayed for its beauty and glamour, was not a form that I wanted to use.

I chose to work with the parts of the body that I felt were most vulnerable: buttocks, breasts, legs. The body parts were detached from a whole, they were fragments, pieces that constituted a whole but weren't joined coherently. As these physical parts were disjointed, so were my thoughts. Due to the confusion of trying to decide what type of woman to be, I felt as though I was being pulled apart in many different directions.

I used slide projections as symbols of psychological projections. People externalize their unacknowledged feelings, impulses, and thoughts by projecting them onto others, usually those closer to them or those of lesser importance. Since women are part of that other less important gender, we are often subjected to fatal projections.

I began to collect images that related to psychological projections. These images were easily recognizable and those which I felt would trigger an emotional response in my viewers. They consisted of old personal photos, magazine advertisements of women, cartoon characters, and even images of empty space. They were known icons: photos of children, images of Walt Disney characters, etc. From these images, I made slides. Making the metaphor concrete, these images were projected onto the female body parts.

The color in my photos, like the images in my slides, were selected for the purpose of releasing an emotional response. I was trying to articulate the emotions of anger, frustration, and confusion. To do this, I used the colors blue, black, red, and orange.

I used text in this same manner, concentrating on one or two perfectly legible words and a few blurred words. Such words as choice, roots, won't, burn, and bleed are evident throughout my photos. As I began my project, I used many words and many different images for the slide projections. As I progressed, I felt that simplicity conveyed a stronger message. I edited to one or two significant words, and used only one image for projection.

Lastly, I constructed backdrops from paper, on which I painted or drew, then ripped or tore into pieces. I continued to use pieces and fragments to suggest a personal fragmentation, but the backdrops also signified my inner frustration, the voices in the back of my mind, the double messages. This was achieved through the images and text that were painted on the backdrops, as well as the positioning of it. The backdrop was always placed behind the figure that was projected upon, remaining in back of the physical, conscious being, as the unconscious mind or constant reminder.

My final presentation was an installation. I had hopes of creating an intimate, yet unbalanced environment, an environment which I felt was mine, an environment that was inhabited by a woman. Alone, my photos couldn't complete a message. Actual, physical space was needed to reinforce the meaning of them. The space depicted in my photographs was transformed, in larger scale, to my installation: empty, solitary, confined.

"Homonymous Projections" conveys a sense of frustration, anger, and confusion that has driven me toward creating my art.the vision of a woman, wild with more than womanly despair.....³

CHAPTER 1

ROOTS

In our beginnings is our essence.¹

As a young child, my greatest influence came from home. Through the teachings of my parents, as well as the examples which they set before me, I had developed a character similar to theirs. I learned early how to be quiet, lady-like, and submissive. I also learned masculine traits of power and aggression.

Throughout my childhood, as I'm sure this was common for many young girls, I received double messages. (They continue even now, however they also come from places outside of the home.) Although I was taught masculine traits, I was directed toward practicing female ones. Little girls are taught to be little girls, women are taught to be women. Never cross the boundary between female and male.

Because the behavior I was taught at home and those that society reinforced were similar, it's no wonder that I became stifled. Inside my home there was seclusion; outside, women were also secluded.

Since I decided to present my work in the form of an installation, the sequestered room that I created was a symbol of the world that I had inhabited. Like me, many women shared the same confinement. The space was small and solitary, closed off from the outside. This home was occupied by images and objects which exemplified confusion, anger, and frustration.

I tried to redefine my individuality as one divorced from traditional ways, but somehow the ties were stronger than I ever assumed were possible. It was as though someone was physically restraining me. Slide #1 best exemplifies this feeling.

In this photograph, I chose to present what was a mental and emotional constraint in the form of a physical one. A child is held by the wrist, representing the control placed on a woman's life from childhood. This gesture signifies a forceful act; the powerless wrist is clenched in someone else's

hand, with a lack of control.

I projected this image onto female body parts and a backdrop, similar to the way the "good girl" image is projected onto females in their daily lives. The female figure struggled to emerge from behind the projection. As young girls, and as women, we are expected to uphold a pure, calm, nonconfrontational image. Women have been trained to measure effectiveness in terms of love and approval, not conflict or resistance.²

Within the installation, I put this 20" x 24" image in a corner atop a child's vanity, just as little girls are put aside, out of the way in a corner. (slide #1A) The framed image, obviously out of proportion with the vanity, suggested an imbalance. At first glance, this set up could appear normal, however with a closer look, one would realize that there was something wrong with this traditional scene.

Underneath the vanity, broken and shattered pieces of glass lay scattered on the floor. (slide #1B) This was an additional expression of outrage.

Slide #2 is another image which depicts frustration and confusion. A headless figure sits on a ledge in front of a window. The figure lacks a persona or an identity. Women weren't important enough to have such human qualities. To the right is another figure, larger, pinkish, and transparent. The transparency shows movement, an energized frustration, and confusion.

The window in the image (as well as the one placed in front of it - slide #2A), is a symbol of escape and change. I felt the desire to escape from the nothingness experienced at home. That same nothingness, devoid of humanness, is another projection directed toward women.

Similarly, the image in slide #3 also portrays a transparent figure which, because of its blurriness, appears to be moving. To the left of the word "Roots", this figure is either moving in one place, thrusting its head back in frustration and anger, or meshing with and becoming one with the background. Regardless of where this figure stands in relation to the background,

it obviously stands apart from "Roots", separated by a somewhat muted blood red streak. The word "Roots" is a symbol of my personal experiences, my roots; it also represents the roots, the female tradition, that all women share.

This image in its final stage was affixed directly to the wall. I painted the surface of the print in a few corners, extending it outward onto the wall, so that the wall and the image were one. (slide #3A) Neither was allowed to be separate. To a certain degree, this symbolized my controlled upbringing; I wasn't allowed to be separate from my home. It was also representative of the constraint that traditional and conventional roots have had historically on women. We have been taught to be dependent.

We have also been taught to measure our worth by the relationships we engaged in. Slide #4 represents the dependent relationship that we were trained to become a part of. The male figure holds the female figure, (situated in the middle of the photo, depicted by two Walt Disney characters). A young boy is trained to make it on his own, to be independent. As young girls, we are trained to see our value only in the partnerships we form.³

Prince Charming comes along sweeping us off our feet. Behind his handsome facade, the Prince is truly the patriarchal ideal that we are taught to expect. He is the protector, provider, and controller, the empowerment of our lives. (I've used hands in this final piece, slide #4A, to suggest power and control. Two black hands extending outward, away from the wall, held the photo.)

It was appropriate for me to look back at my upbringing, to discover the effects that it's had on my individuality. For me, behavior learned at home, (ways of conducting myself as a female), were reinforced by society. This may not be true for every woman, but there is a common, general background that all women share. Traditionally, women were separate from men, and in that sense, our roots are the same.

CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONAL ROLE PLAYING

Conveniently, I've ended the last chapter discussing slide #4 which refers to controlling relationships. With this subject, comes the concept of role playing. As an actor learns to recite his lines on cue, so in daily life we learn the appropriate words and behaviors for each occasion.¹

Traditionally, the family is seen as the basic unit of society where the woman's role is wife and mother and the man's role is provider and protector.² I've chosen to use the characters from Disney's Snow White to depict this relationship. In slide #4, Snow White and the Prince stand erect. Though there is no indication that Snow White is a wife and mother, she still depends on the Prince to hold and protect her, just as wives are taught to depend on their husbands. There are incisions however, which carve these figures in half. Through these divisions, a human figure emerges.

As I've strived to reach beyond traditional roles, to adopt more feminist ways, it has been difficult to overcome my previous training. An archetype that exerts profound influence on a child is likely to continue to do so even when the child has grown up. Memories fade from consciousness but are held in the unconscious.³ My unconscious voices are represented by the blurred writing that extends throughout this image.

I had assumed the good girl role because that was expected of me. Perhaps this passivity in me was represented, in whole, by my installation. The images that occupied the walls were vivid, alive, visceral; however, the surrounding space was bare. At home, I was expected to behave according to tradition. An expression of anger toward this attitude existed on the gallery floor in the hallway. The photos seen in slide #5 are images of a woman's torso amidst violent red lines and brush strokes. This vibrant color can be perceived as blood, shed in a struggle to overcome a force which has held me down. These images took on an aggressive strength unlike that of the good

girl character. Still, they were placed outside of the home space.

The role playing that began for me, at home, existed in social settings as well. A woman is expected to play a subservient role without protest. From childhood, she is trained to be passive, quiet, fastidious, prim, and neat, a mannequin, not a human being.⁴ Masculine, assertive qualities are not acceptable in a woman.

The photo in slide #6 shows, once again, an image of a prim, neat, and delicate good girl. The image of this woman was framed, a confinement. Together, the image and the frame symbolized an unchanged attitude.

Within the area of the neck, actively reaching and grabbing, is a hand. The shadow of the hand creates a jagged edge so that it appears as though the neck has been sliced. In my mind, this terminates the good girl tradition.

In slide #7, tradition (or the traditional woman), is depicted by a Renaissance sketch which signifies antiquity, a tradition that should no longer be practiced. As with the other images, this image reveals a figure emerging from behind the traditional woman. One can see this as the figure emanating from or veiled by tradition. With a custom so ingrained, so restrictive, there's no wonder that the individual (woman) could become concealed.

To emphasize the issue of confinement, this image was displayed partly matted (slide #7A). It was only partly matted to suggest change in the tradition, freeing of the constraint.

Perhaps the good girl role is no longer personally satisfying or appropriate. Yet, we still play this role because tradition has had us playing it all our lives; the role becomes automatic. "So much mud is flung that some of it sticks".⁵

CHAPTER 3

MYTHS

Myths are not false stories but are expressively complex and essential psychic facts. They arise out of the sleep cycle of a culture the way a dream comes up in the sleep of an individual.¹ It is not reality that dictates to society or to individuals their choice between two categories: between women and men, female and male, right and wrong; society and the individual decide in accordance with their needs. Very often they project into myths adopted the values to which they adhere.² Their needs are attended to by way of myths.

We all project the unwanted, negative, hateful, unknown parts of ourselves³ onto someone. This is the easiest way of coping with our own insecurities. It seems, though, that women have accepted more of these projections. A myth is in large part explained by its usefulness to man.⁴

The one myth that I've found to be the most offensive and disturbing is that of Eve (the theological story of Adam and Eve), as responsible for the fall of mankind. Since her existence, every woman has been a major problem and a major burden for man. Since Eve, the apple signifies evil. And then to lay the fault on Patience's back, that we (poor women) must endure it all.⁵

The image in slide #8 deals with this myth of Eve. From a field of darkness (symbolizing evil/blackness), Eve erupts with apple in hand. On her face, rests a deviant smile.

To show my disgust, I've decapitated Eve's head, slashing her smile in half. Although I've carved away at the body of Eve, and through these slashes a figure comes forth, that figure is still connected to Eve. Though I despise the myth, I'm still a part of it.

Another image which was created as a result of my aggravation and frustration in dealing with certain myths, is the image in slide #9. This image, in its final form, was screwed to the wall. (slide #9A) The screws represent a controlling power, the strength of the myths which, in a sense, have held me

captive. Unable to break free, I actively struggle in pain, frustration, and anger.

Key words such as burn, bleed, and hurt are written all over this image. They repeat redundantly in a constant drumming manner, just as myths reintroduce their way into our daily lives. These potent words indicate the effect that myths have had on me. I feel that I've been crucified and battered by this illusion over which I've had no control.

While the topic of myths is a broad one, I've chosen to concentrate on the one which has annoyed me the most, the one which I've felt has had the greatest effect on me as a descendant of Eve. Psychic facts, myths that have been transformed into beliefs, are difficult to overcome. It is extremely difficult to advocate change especially if the change is of the mind. Myths are strictures⁶ which only curtail mental growing processes and separate one from another.

CONCLUSION

The images which I have discussed represent my feelings and emotions as they relate to the subject of the repression of women. While all of the images are created from anger and frustration toward myths, anger toward the good girl projection, etc., the only image which directly relates a message of confusion, is the one seen in slide #10.

The two figures illustrated here represent the two sides of a woman, the aggressive and the passive side, the feminist and the traditionalist. The passive side sits idle, lifeless, subjected to the traditional ways and practices. The aggressive side stands tall, large and erect, yet extremely vulnerable, a target for attack.

Behind the two figures are vivid and vibrant strokes of color. This signifies defensive anger. Still, these strokes of color are placed behind the figures, yielding to our passive side. In its final stage, I put glass over this image, (slide #10A). The glass, to subdue the frustration, to tranquilize the anger, was cracked. Though its purpose was to contain, the energy behind was too vigorous and lively. Our problems are real and our emotions, strong.

...Her hair stood back on either side a face bereft of loveliness. It had no envy now to hide what once no man on earth could guess. It formed the thorny aureole of hard unsanctified distress.¹

Though "Homonymous Projections" was a personal expression, the feelings and emotions on which the work was based, have been experienced by many women. We've shared roots as the other, traditional behaviors, and destructive projections.

As I began my process of redefining my individuality with indignation, so had I finally presented my representation. "Homonymous Projections" as a body of work, as an installation, conveyed a sense of anger, frustration and confusion that had initially driven me toward creating my art, a body of work which all women (but hopefully not exclusive of men), could emotionally respond to.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1978), pg. 157.

² Lorraine Hansberry, "In Defense of the Equality of Men," in The Norton Anthology of Literature By Women, ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (W.W.Norton & Company, New York, London, 1985), pg. 2066.

³ Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, "The Other Side of a Mirror," in The Norton Anthology of Literature By Women, ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1985), pg. 1162.

CHAPTER 1

¹ Nancy Friday, My Mother Myself (Dell Publishing Co., Inc., New York, N.Y., 1987), pg. 55.

² Gloria Steinem, Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions (New American Library, New York, 1986), pg. 390.

³ Friday, pg. 57.

CHAPTER 2

¹ Kenneth J. Gergen, The Concept of Self (Holt, Rinehart And Winston, Inc., New York, 1971), pg. 54.

² Steinem, pg. 363.

³ Nor Hall, The Moon And The Virgin - Reflections On The Archetypal Feminine (Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, 1980), pg. 156.

⁴ Lou Benson, Images, Heroes, and Self - Perceptions (Prentice - Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1974), pg. 51.

⁵ Steinem, pg. 389.

CHAPTER 3

¹ Hall, pg. 69.

²de Beauvoir, pg. 287.

³Hall, pg. 125.

⁴de Beauvoir, pg. 293.

⁵Amelia Lanier, "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women", in The Norton Anthology of Literature By Women, ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 1985), pg. 37.

⁶Hall, pg. 33.

CONCLUSION

¹Coleridge, pg. 1162.

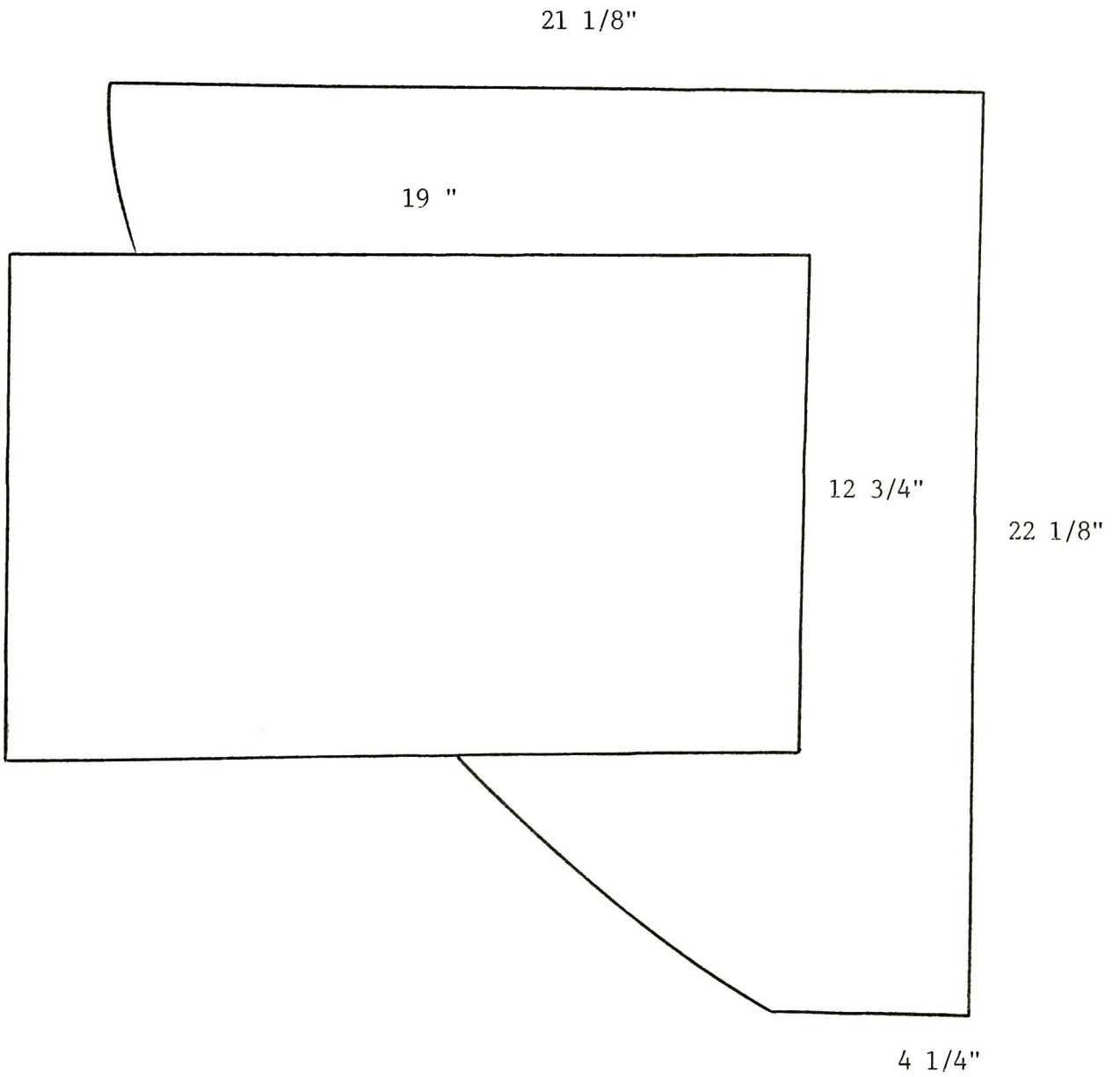
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APPENDIX A Final measurements and details.

Slide #1A	-	20" x 24" matted and framed on vanity - 34" x 29" x 16"
Slide #2A	-	image alone - 17" x 11 1/4" matt - 17 1/4" x 11" - window - 9" x 6 1/2" matt board positioned in front of the image, 1 1/4" away from the image and the wall.
Slide #3	-	29 3/4" x 19 3/4"
Slide #4A	-	image alone - 15 7/8" x 23 3/4" hands which held the image, extended approximately 13" away from the wall.
Slide #5	-	numerous 16" x 20" (approx.) images covered a space of approximately 3' x 8'.
Slide #6	-	16" x 20" matted and framed.
Slide #7A	-	image alone - 19" x 12 3/4" 1/2 matt - 21 1/8" x 22 1/8" x 4 1/4" (see diagram, Appendix B)
Slide #8	-	image alone - 19 1/4" x 13 3/4" matt - 35 3/8" x 29 7/8"
Slide #9A	-	image alone - 16" x 20" screws - 3/4" x 3 1/2"
Slide #10A	-	image alone - 19 3/8" x 15 1/2" glass - 19 3/8" x 15 1/2" with crack extending down from the left figure and across from the left figure to the right figure.
Entire installation	-	approximately 500 square feet.

APPENDIX B Diagram of image in slide #7A.



Homonymous Projections

By

Jo-Ann J. Dellaposta

April, 1988

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martha Leinroth", is written above a horizontal line.

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PURPOSE

I will explore how stereotypical formations, combined with my upbringing and what I've learned of feminist ideas, influence and structure me as a woman and as an individual. Through my photographic images, I aim to translate and articulate my personal emotions and concerns in regard to these various issues.

BACKGROUND

As individuals in a society, we form our behavior from conventional beliefs. Ideas, principles, values, etc. are projected upon us continually and habitually, molding our thoughts and conduct. Included among that which conventional beliefs have affected, is the separation of male and female roles. For many past generations, the roles of men and women have been disjoined and in conflict.

As the process of molding one's self is notably time consuming, it is understandable how altering the structure of self can encompass just as much time. The Women's Liberation Movement in the 60's, began to introduce new ideas, changing slightly, the conventional structure of society. Today, as a result of these changes, equality among the sexes has increased and the integration of male and female roles is more apparent.

Although minor changes have occurred and feminist ideas are widely known, the fundamental situation between men and women remains the same. As long as we continue to operate on a patriarchal foundation, it will always be a struggle for women to achieve recognition and parity. Thus, in this day and age, women are forced to reiterate the same issues which were discussed more than a decade ago and which have existed for hundreds of years before that.

Being a "woman of the 80's" if you will, I am drawn to expose and deal

with these issues, not to become the voice of the feminist, but to ultimately achieve a personal understanding and sense of identity. As I venture out to find who and what I am, so to speak, I realize that this business which I confront is personal, yet universal for women in general. Therefore, with the consolation of knowing that I'm not alone in my attempted search, nor alone in defying stereotypical rules of behavior, I begin my task with more ease.

Although I consider myself to be a self-reliant, responsible and independent individual, there are certain rooted beliefs, customs and practices which influence my behavior. Having been hit with a kind of feminist anxiety and bombarded with ingrained ideas, I face conflicts with my own identity. I've constantly strived to resolve these conflicts, but to a lesser degree.

Initially, my quest began with my photographing the nude, human body. I was attracted by the beauty and elegance of the nude form, so I began to experiment with ways of photographing this form, ways that would enhance its beauty. Shape and lighting were factors that I dealt with.

After years of concentrating on formal qualities of the nude, both male and female, I began to perceive another level of meaning in dealing with this subject. I began to concentrate more on the female nude and started to realize and understand why the female (body) has been publicly displayed more often than the male. I am now aware of the values which have been projected onto women for so many years. Through the eyes of patriarchal society, women are seen as a myth, as the "other", as a separate entity from the male realm.

With this in mind, I began to photograph the female not as the "nude", but as the "naked body" receptive to projections. I now recognize that being a woman is not always "beautiful" and glamorous; my pictures depict the reality of this.

While continuing to photograph in this manner, I learn more about myself and the issues that I'm addressing. I've found, through searching for

ways to present these issues, that they can be quite uncomfortable to deal with. However, I command a strong sense of endurance and perseverance, knowing that I will eventually reach a better understanding of my own identity and role as a woman.

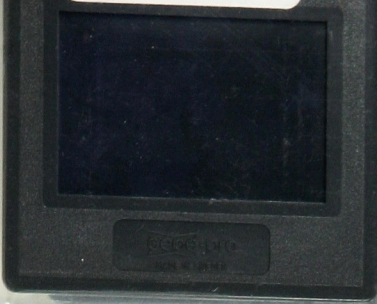
PROCEDURE

I will use projections onto the female body, where the body acts as a canvas for expressing abstract and realistic imagery. I've chosen to use projections, for as I stated above in my Background, ideas, thoughts, values, morals, etc. are "projected" upon us. I feel that this technique is the best way for me to present my thoughts and feelings. I am collecting various symbols and images that effectively represent stereotypical views of women, these will be the projections.

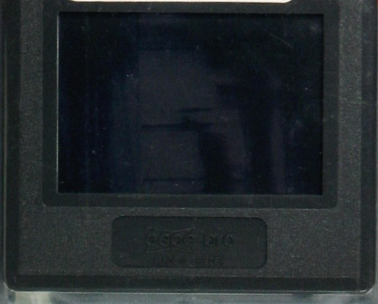
While the pursuit of imagery remains constant, I will also spend my time reading material which deals with the history and issues of the Women's Movement. Although reading literature is important for my investigation, discussions with family members are equally valuable, for if I am to understand my inbred ideas, I must go back to the core of it all, my family and cultural upbringing.

Along with my exploration of stereotypical views and inbred ideas, I will work out my process of form. Hopefully this will lead me to a greater understanding of the concept of psychological "projections".

DELLAPOSTA 1989
#1



DELLAPOSTA 1989
#2



DELLAPOSTA 1989
#3A



DELLAPOSTA 1989
#5



DELLAPOSTA 1989
#7A



DELLAPOSTA 1989
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DELLAPOSTA 1989
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DELLAPOSTA 1989
#4



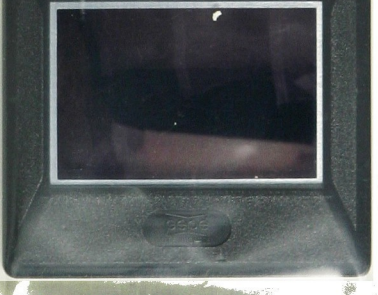
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