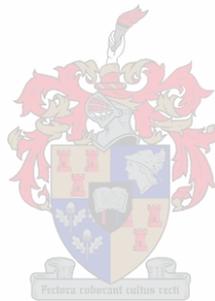


FUGITIVE PIECES:
EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF WOMANHOOD

by

MARLISE KEITH



Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the subject
FINE ARTS
at the
UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

SUPERVISORS: MS ELIZABETH GUNTER
MS JEANNETTE GROENEWALD
MARCH 2002

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

The research question of this thesis was: What is the nature of the social boundaries that define women as a group, how has this been depicted throughout the ages and, more specifically, in the work of South African artists, Vladimir Tretchikoff and Irma Stern, and what comment does my own work seem to make on these boundaries? The study used an analytical approach to pursue these questions, while the works of art were analysed according to the levels of interpretation suggested by Panofsky and Dietrich. The aim of this research was also to analyse my own body of work more theoretically within the context of postmodern feminist thought to determine how it resonates with earlier assumptions regarding women. For this purpose a comparison was made between, on the one hand, what Tretchikoff and Stern's respective depictions of women reveal about traditional conventions that hold women captive and, on the other, how my own work seems to question the boundaries that society imposes on women.

Both Tretchikoff and Stern were successful enough to raise public consciousness on issues that concerned female subjugation. Seemingly for very different reasons, however, they remained apathetic to the quest for women's liberation. The study shows that Tretchikoff's work reflects a blatant disregard of the identities and social realities of his models, and romanticises their constraints instead. Stern, on the other hand, could not have been unaware of the societal limitations imposed on women. Yet she chose to remain aloof. While she seemed to be able to move masculine requirements and the demands of society to the background to depict women as natural and almost free of stereotype in some of her works, she cannot be seen to have made a major contribution to the liberation of women. In contrast, I have found many similarities throughout the study between feminist thought of the Second Wave and the thought processes mirrored in my art.

In addition to the expected outcome, the study has shown that it is possible to trace developments in feminist thought in art.

OPSOMMING

Die navorsingsvraag behels die volgende: Wat is die aard van die maatskaplike grense wat vroue in 'n ondergeskikte posisie in die gemeenskap gehou het, en hoe is dit naspourbaar in kuns, en meer spesifiek in die werk van twee Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars, Vladimir Tretchikoff en Irma Stern. Laastens, hoe lewer my eie werk kommentaar op hierdie vorm van onderdrukking. Die studie volg 'n analitiese benadering in die ontleding van die geselekteerde kunswerke, soos voorgestel deur Panofsky en Dietrich. Die doel van die studie was om binne die konteks van 'n postmodernistiese feministiese raamwerk 'n meer teoretiese ontleding van my eie werk te maak om vas te stel hoe dit ooreenkom met vroeër aannames oor die vrou. Vir hierdie doel is daar 'n vergelyking getref tussen, aan die een kant, die kommentaar wat Tretchikoff en Stern se werk oor die onderdrukking van vroue maak en, aan die ander kant, hoe my eie werk hierdie konvensies blootlê.

Beide Tretchikoff en Stern was in die posisie om die publiek bewus te maak van die ondergeskiktheid van vroue binne hulle gemeenskap. Ten spyte hiervan, toon die studie dat beide apaties gestaan het teenoor die lot van vroue, hoewel om verskillende redes. Terwyl Tretchikoff se werk die toonbeeld van 'n blatante miskennis van die verskillende identiteite en maatskaplike realiteite van sy modelle is, en eerder kies om hulle toestande te romantiseer, kon Stern, as 'n vrou, nie onbewus gewees het van die lot van die vroue van haar tyd nie. Ten spyte hiervan, het sy apaties teenoor die ondergeskiktheid van vroue gestaan. Terwyl dit wil voorkom asof sy die patriargale eise van die gemeenskap op die agtergrond kon skuif om haar vroue as natuurlik en bykans vry van stereotipes uit te beeld, kan sy nie gesien word as iemand wat daadwerklik tot vroue se strewe na gelykheid bygedra het nie. In teenstelling hiermee, het die studie deurgaans 'n ooreenkoms aangetoon tussen die feministiese denke van die "Tweede Golf" en die denkprosesse wat in my eie kuns weerspieël word.

'n Bykomende bevinding van die studie is dat die ontwikkeling van feministiese denke in die kuns nagespeur kan word.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the first place I should like to thank my parents and brothers for their unwavering support and belief in me, and my friends, for their encouragement.

I should also like to thank Prof. Greg Kerr and Dr Marion Arnold, both previously from the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Stellenbosch. Also from this institution are Mr Victor Honey, who deserves thanks for handling various matters on my behalf, a call beyond his duty, Dr Keith Dietrich, for providing all the necessary information and general assistance, and my supervisor, Elizabeth Gunter, for agreeing to take me on at a late stage of the project. Special mention becomes the late Dr Timo Smuts for inspiration.

The chance meeting and privilege to work with Ms Jeannette Groenewald can only be described as a miracle. My gratitude and admiration for her time, effort and intellect know no boundaries. I am grateful today that I decided to 'hang in there'!

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CHAPTER I

***FUGITIVE PIECES*¹: EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF WOMANHOOD**

1.1 INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of the Master's degree studies at the University of Stellenbosch, students are required to produce "a body of **practical work** directly related to visual research." and "a theoretical **thesis**"². To fulfil the first requirement, I created many works of art, 45 of which I selected for an exhibition, entitled *Fugitive Pieces*, at DC Art in Cape Town. It transpired that the exhibited works comment on issues such as the stereotyping of women, pictorial conventions and popular taste. The central theme, in which the works seem to question the boundaries that confine women to specific roles, was strong enough to be noted by artist and critic, Cobus van Bosch (*Die Burger* 4 January 2000: 4).

The exhibition reflected my engrossment with the confinement of women by society to specific roles. This, in turn, determined the subject of the theoretical study. I suspected that the dynamics created by Vladimir Tretchikoff and Irma Stern in South African art could be related to developments in feminist thought. My own practical work, however, seemed to make radically different comments about women in society. Several questions arose: What did the different depictions reveal about the boundaries that confine women? How did these depictions differ? How did they relate to each of our historical contexts?

The study does not propose any grand answers or revolutionary thought on issues such as feminism or postmodernism. In the light of these theories, Tretchikoff may, for example, be repositioned from a marginalised to a mainstream artist.

¹ With apology to and recognition of Ann Michaels, 1998. *Fugitive Pieces*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury.

² University of Stellenbosch, Department of Fine Arts. Master of Arts in Fine Arts: Information Brochure 2000: 3.

However, the main value of the study lies in the particular point of departure and the approach to the analysis not only of my work, but also of the work of two well-known South African artists.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

To examine the differences between the work of Tretchikoff and Stern and my own, I formulated the following research question:

How does feminist thought relate to societal conventions regarding women? To what extent does the pictorial art of the last three centuries reflect the position of women in society? What is the nature of the conventions that defined women as a group rather than as individual people before, during and after the first and second world wars? How are these conventions reflected in the depiction of women in the pictorial art of Tretchikoff and Stern? What comment does my own body of work seem to make on these conventions, and how does this compare with Tretchikoff and Stern's depiction of women?

1.3 UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

- ✦ Conventions change. The pictorial depiction of conventions seems to change accordingly. In this study it is assumed that the context within which artists work, informs their art in some way or other. While art can perpetuate certain worldviews, it can also, and increasingly does, explore the boundaries of convention. Artists therefore also seem to create due to specific driving forces. In South Africa, Tretchikoff's reliance on tradition, for example, led to phenomenal financial success. Stern's fame, on the other hand, resulted partly from a resistance to a traditional depiction of allegorical scenes (Berman 1983: 308). In contrast, my work seems only to ask questions. It explores the boundaries that confine women to specific roles, such as those revealed by Tretchikoff and Stern's work.

1.4 RATIONALE

Discourses, like Marxism, Existentialism, Feminism and other intellectual movements, seem to have been accompanied in the past by a manifesto, a written declaration or rationale that describes the parameters or conventions of the movement. Well-known movements in art, such as Impressionism, Abstract Expressionism and even Pop Art, have been clearly delineated. While the parameters of these movements have been made concrete, recognisable and familiar, they have also tended to exclude and alienate.

In contrast, postmodernism “is rather a sceptical attitude or aesthetic that ‘distrusts all attempts to create large-scale, totalising theories in order to explain social phenomena.’” (Minda 1995: 224). Yet categories are imploded (Shusterman 1991: 209), arbitrary boundaries are explored, conventions are transgressed and previously marginalised people are afforded a central position (Tong 1998). Black people and speakers of non-dominant languages, physically challenged people and the elderly, HIV positive people and women have all entered the main stage.

This study concentrates on the subordinate role of women. It is important to note that I do not consider myself a feminist. Neither can Tretchikoff or Stern be viewed as such. Yet these two artists depict a great number of women and my work has commented on the boundaries of womanhood repeatedly. It is the stark difference between the comments made in my work and the assumptions that seem to underlie both Tretchikoff and Stern’s portraits of women that has given rise to the study.

Tretchikoff lived and painted at a time when women in the West had just succeeded in obtaining a vote. Perhaps because of this, but also because of the two world wars, feminist activity was experiencing a lull. Whether Tretchikoff was aware of this or not, is not relevant. His work, however, does not seem to reflect an awareness of feminist movements. Instead his portraits, painted in the tradition of the representative art of the late nineteenth century, idealise women, oversimplify and generalise them, and depict them as exotic rather than ordinary

women (Arnold 2000³). The women in his work are not depicted as individuals, but are representative of a popular idea of exquisite beauty and romantic roles. They are benign but aloof, admired but unapproachable. Yet the paintings seemed to satisfy the taste of the general public.

Stern responded to Tretchikoff's work vehemently, seemingly attempting to prevent his 1948 exhibition. According to Tretchikoff, she obstructed his entry into and participation in the South African art community. Despite this opposition Tretchikoff successfully exhibited in South Africa, America, London, and many more countries. Although his critics remained intensely negative throughout his career, claiming with every exhibition that his success would not be repeated (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1972: 173, 178), he held many financially successful exhibitions and the Louvre owns one of his works today⁴.

Stern was a pivotal figure in South African art. Her reaction to Tretchikoff's work probably sprang from her status as a 'pioneer South African modernist'. Arnold (1996: 79), for example, argues that modernism provided Stern with the vocabulary to impose her artistic identity on the South African art scene. It is known that Stern received her training as an artist in Germany and travelled extensively (Schoeman 1995: 105). She would therefore have been exposed to European modernist thinking. According to Arnold (1996: 79), for women of the time this entailed, among other things, a pursuit of independence, a search for identity, a rebellion against social conformity and cultural transgression. Stern's work is, however, a continuation of a mode of representation, indigenous to her time, history and place.

According to Arnold (1996: 78), Stern was a woman who responded passionately to the world and used her painting as a means of self-discovery and personal revelation. This much is clear from her depiction of women. However, the women she painted do not seem to be independent individuals. Instead they were clearly

³ Notes taken in conversation with Dr Marion Arnold, March 2000, University of Stellenbosch.

⁴ The crown of Tretchikoff's success was his portrayal of the Ten Commandments, known as *Majesty and Grandeur* (1978). Each painting was cast in gold by the South African

situated within a specific culture and seemed to accept the confines of their existence. In this sense Stern's work does not seem to transcend cultural or gender boundaries. Arnold (1996: 78) specifically mentions her patronising attitudes to Africans. It seems that "her responses to people were often coloured by her romantic nature and absorption in self" (Arnold 1996: 78). Yet Arnold (1996: 77) argues that the use of Stern's career in the art world to dispute charges of cultural discrimination against women justifies her inclusion "as a case study, [for] applying a feminist methodology to determine what this line of inquiry reveals of a woman who is seemingly well known, and of her work and the ways in which it has been interpreted." The argument holds for this study as well.

1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research is to *analyse* my own body of work within the context of postmodern feminist thought, and to *examine* how this resonates with earlier assumptions regarding women. For this purpose a *comparison* will be made between what Tretchikoff and Stern's depiction of women reveals about traditional conventions that hold women captive and how my work seems to question the boundaries that society imposes on women. The overall aim is to gain some distance from my own work and to *explore it more theoretically*, specifically against the background of feminist thinking.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 SELECTION OF ARTISTS FOR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The work of Tretchikoff and Stern was selected for analysis in this study for several reasons:

Historical mint and the Louvre of Paris (Documentary, *Red Jacket*, SABC 3, Sunday 19 April 1998, 22h00) has bought a replica.

- both worked in definable periods, which makes a comparison between their depictions of women relatively easy against ‘the watershed of SA art history’ (Kerr 2000⁵);
- having experienced extensive media coverage and criticism, both were well known;
- both were pictorial artists, among other things;
- both produced prolifically, specifically also work in which women were the only or the main subject;
- both created dynamics to which my work responds, which makes a distinction between their work and mine more readily identifiable.

Since men are even today generally expected to objectify women and women are believed to understand the subjectivity of women, the choice to include both a male and a female artist in the study may be seen to complicate matters. However, from a postmodern perspective, gender is an arbitrary boundary. The study therefore refuses to pander to categorical assumptions regarding male and female perspectives. Instead, it examines the perspectives of each artist within their historical, social, intentional and technical context.

1.6.2 A FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

Since the 1970s, feminist art history and criticism have become an important branch of art history, and have entered into the mainstream discourse. According to Nochlin (1989: xii) there has been considerable resistance, especially against the more radical varieties in the visual arts. Despite the fact that scholars have been accused of undermining the ideological and aesthetic biases of the discipline, however, Nochlin (1989: xii) views the development as positive, explaining that the very aim of feminist art history is to make trouble, to question and to “ruffle the feathers in the patriarchal dovecotes”. She adds that “feminist art history at its

⁵ With apology to Prof. GJ Kerr, who used this expression in conversation with me in April 2000.

strongest, is transgressive and anti-establishment practice". It is meant "to call many of the major precepts of the discipline into question" (Nochlin 1989: xii).

From its early stages, feminist art and criticism have therefore confronted such inherent contradictions as those between 'women' and 'art', 'man' and 'woman', 'nature' and 'culture', 'analysis' and 'intuition', and the way in which they have been replicated in art history (Chadwick 1996: 8). New languages have been created by combining theory and practice, breaking disciplinary boundaries, repositioning authority and developing tactics that reconfirm the "relationship between agency, power, and struggle". The increase of literature related to the "construction and intersection of gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation also contributed to the development of feminist art history" (Chadwick 1996: 15).

According to Arnold (1997: 2), a feminist methodology suggests that gender plays a significant role in art making and its critical reception. Feminists challenge patriarchy by suggesting that if society organised power relationships, it could redefine and re-make them. In studying gender politics ("the ways in which the social construct of gender has become the basis for socio-political inequality") she considers ways in which both femininity and masculinity have made an impact on human relationships in political, social, economic and cultural structures and institutions. Accordingly, she argues, a feminist methodology would enable us to determine how gender affects visual creativity.

Determining how gender affects the creation of art is, however, not the focus of this study. Instead, if my work must be the point of departure of the study as required, and it does seem to express the questions I have regarding the boundaries that constrain women as some critics have said, a more intriguing question is how it resonates with developments in feminist theory. According to Chadwick (1996: 15), women artists often work in media outside the conventions of painting and sculpture as a way to establish an 'anti-establishment practice'. The fact that I seem to express myself through an alternative medium is, at first glance, the most distinguishing feature of my work in comparison with that of Tretchikoff and Stern. While both Tretchikoff and Stern reveal the constraints

with which women of their time seem to have been confronted by conventional methods, my work departs from convention both on a technical and a thematic level.

Analysing my own body of work within the context of postmodern feminist thinking, and examining how this resonates with earlier assumptions regarding women, therefore requires the development of a historical framework against which the boundaries that seem to confine women as they are depicted by the artists mentioned above, can be identified. Accordingly, my hesitation to apply a specific feminist methodology stems from the central premise of the study, which holds that the constraints, under which women have existed since the middle of the nineteenth century, may be detected in art. As the study is concerned with the manifestations of conventions as revealed in the depicted images of the selected artists, the tools that art analysts have traditionally used are appropriate.

1.6.3 METHOD OF ART ANALYSIS

1.6.3.1 Panofsky

Panofsky (1955: 54) identifies three levels of interpretation. He sees the first level of interpretation as “primary or natural subject matter”. This he divides into “factual” and “expressional” components that are identified by “*pure forms*” (certain configurations of line and colour or certain shapes of bronze or stone), which represent natural objects, such as human beings and animals, providing a “world of artistic motifs”. A record of these motifs in an artwork is a pre-iconographical description. The American artist, Mark Rothko, who experimented in “colour –field” abstraction during the 1940s and 1950s (Stangos 1991: 195), could be described as pre-iconographical.

Panofsky’s (1955: 54) second level, “secondary or conventional subject matter”, consists of the *connection of motifs with themes* or concepts. The identification of the resulting symbols, images, allegories and stories is what is normally referred

to as iconography, the branch of art history that analyses the subject matter or meaning of the figurative arts (The Oxford Dictionary of Art 1997. Sv “iconography”). Meaning is derived from a wide variety of areas such as religion, philosophy, social and political history, literature, stereotypes and gender. Mark Chagall makes ample use of symbols and allegories, supported by colour.

Panofsky (1955: 55-56) identifies the third level of analysis and interpretation as the *intrinsic meaning and content* of an artwork. It is determined by the underlying beliefs that reveal the basic attitude of a nation, period and/or class. The intrinsic meaning can describe the religious or philosophical opinion practised by an individual artist and condensed into a work. Compositional methods and iconographical significance inform these opinions and principles. According to Panofsky, symbolic value of a work of art is conceived by its forms, motifs, images, stories and allegories, all manifestations of underlying principles. The analysis, discovery and interpretation of the symbolic values can often be unknown or otherwise intended by the artist (Panofsky 1955: 57).

It is this placing of a work of art into what would today be called *context*, that Panofsky defines as iconology from 1955 onwards. In the Dictionary of Art (1966. Sv “iconography”), iconology is defined as a method that results from iconographical analysis, interpretation and the attempt to explain the “very existence” and the “entire meaning” of a work of art. Iconoclasts see the characteristics of artworks as symptomatic of a specific culture and perceive the artist’s individuality as greater than tradition. It is on this basis that this study examines the culture/conventions in which women have existed over time, albeit a relatively short time.

1.6.3.2 Dietrich

Dietrich (2000)⁶ also lists three sets of criteria for the evaluation of artworks: content, form and context. Elements that have been identified by Dietrich as elements of *content* are subject matter, iconography and symbolism. Locally,

icons and symbols characterise the work of Braam Kruger⁷, for example. Dietrich describes *form* as the compositional devices of which a work of art consists, including scale, colour and paint. The analysis of elements such as scale, the size and shape of a work of art contributes to the interpretation of the work. The balance of the visual components and the choice of medium also inform the viewer, art historian or student. The immensity of the land art of Strijdom van der Merwe⁸, together with his minute detail, as well as his juxtaposition of imposed and natural/land colour (and shapes) spring to mind in this regard. The works of Henri Matisse and the Fauves⁹ also illustrate the impact that colour can have on a work of art. Locally, the work of Robert Hodgins¹⁰ is also noted for the strong use of colour. The historical context in which artists work, is also revealed by technique (Dictionary of Art, 1996. Sv “iconography”). Accordingly, the third dimension that is necessary for interpreting artworks is *context*. By this Dietrich means the intention of the artist, the environment in which the work is produced, the biographical background of the artist and the context in which the work is presented. The public’s reception of the work and their interpretation is also determined by this context.

1.6.3.3 Final Comment

According to the Dictionary of Art (1996. Sv “iconography”), form and content are invariably linked and the study of art is incomplete if formal elements are not studied in relation to their content. This integrated approach of course holds for all the other levels and categories of interpretation mentioned above. The more levels of interpretation accessible to a viewer, the richer the viewer’s experience will be. That “the entire meaning of a work of art” can be known, however, is not a

⁶ Dr Keith Dietrich: Notes taken during individual Master’s level discussion.

⁷ A well-known South African artist and personality.

⁸ South African land artist situated in Stellenbosch.

⁹ Fauvism is characterised by freedom of the use of colour and free interpretation of familiar subjects used by French artist Henri Matisse (Stangos 1991: 19).

¹⁰ Robert Hodgins, a South African artist who isolates a main subject in his paintings as human frailty especially in its “unattractive manifestations”, such as vanity, greed etc. (Williamson 1989: 54).

position that I could support. The vast possibilities of reinterpretation are, for example, illustrated by the work of Joseph Beuys or Jean-Michel Basquiat, both of whom provided the world with a volume of intricacy that will probably transcend history.

This study therefore uses all the applicable methods of art analysis to expose the conventions that have restricted women as they have been depicted in the art of the selected artists.

1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

A comprehensive study on feminism, modernism and postmodernism, and South African art history, falls outside the scope of this study. These movements have been researched broadly with the emphasis only on those areas pertaining to the central premise.

1.8 SEQUENCE OF CHAPTERS

Since Chapter One contains the aim, rationale, underlying assumptions and the methodology employed in this study, Chapters Two focuses on feminism. A brief historical account of the development of feminism is given with particular emphasis on postmodern feminist thought and its possible influence on the conventions surrounding women depicted in art. Chapter Three tests the hypothesis that the social subjugation of women is revealed in artworks from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. Chapter Four examines some of work of Tretchikoff to investigate what the boundaries were that confined the women he depicted, while Chapter Five analyses Stern's works for the same purpose. In Chapter Six my own work is analysed in terms of the boundaries it reveals. A summary of the main findings and a short reflection on the relationship between my own work and that of the two well-known South African artists follow in a postscript.

CHAPTER II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEMINIST THOUGHT¹¹ FROM THE MID-EIGHTEENTH TO THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study does not allow for a comprehensive introduction to feminist thought. As a real risk therefore exists of over-generalisation and the omission of important facts, the aim of this chapter has been limited to an examination of the social boundaries that have confined women since their loss of productive value during industrialisation and, more specifically, feminist responses to this subordination.

2.2 WOMEN'S RESISTANCE TO OPPRESSIVE CONVENTIONS OF THE MID-EIGHTEENTH TO MID TWENTIETH CENTURIES

2.2.1 LIMITED EDUCATION

Tong (1998: 12) ascribes the beginning of liberal feminist thought to industrial capitalism, when labour began to be drawn out of the private home and into the public workplace in the latter half of the eighteenth century. She notes that this change most affected married, bourgeois women, who were left at home, with little to do. Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote from 1759 to 1799, noted that women were not permitted to make their own decisions, as a result of which they had no freedom. Instead, they were encouraged to indulge themselves, emphasise beauty and please their men and children, which discouraged the development of reasoning powers and virtue (Solkin 1993: 186, Tong 1998: 12).

In discussing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational manual, *Emile*, Wollstonecraft agreed with his goals for *Emile*, but criticised the 'sexual dimorphism', in which

¹¹ The study focuses on the development of feminism in the West.

‘rational man’ formed the perfect complement for ‘emotional woman’ (Tong 1998: 13). Arguing that “[t]he truly educated woman will be a major contributor to society’s welfare”, Wollstonecraft claimed that “society owes girls the same education as boys simply because all human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities so they can achieve full personhood” (Tong 1998: 13-14). In 1792, Wollstonecraft pointed out that the restriction of the male to the public world and the female to the private world, encouraged men to judge themselves by public achievement, but allowed women to be excluded from ‘civil existence’ (Evans 1997: 26).

2.2.2 LACK OF POLITICAL RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

In the mid-nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor celebrated rationality in Britain, arguing that “if society is to achieve sexual equality, or gender justice, then it must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities as well as the same education that men enjoy” (Tong 1998: 15).

“[C]hallenging men’s alleged intellectual superiority”, Mill stressed that men and women’s intellectual abilities were of the same kind (Tong 1998: 19). However, he still assumed that most women would choose family over career, even under ideal circumstances, which he defined as “marriage [as] a free contract between real equals, legal separation and divorce easily available to wives and jobs open to women living outside the husband-wife relationship”. Taylor, on the other hand, challenged the traditional division of labour within the family, in which men earn and women manage the earnings.

In addition to economic power, Mill and Taylor Mill¹² agreed that “women needed suffrage in order to become men’s equals” (Tong 1998: 20). They saw the ability to vote as an opportunity to express personal political views and to change

¹² Mill and Taylor were married in 1850.

systems, structures and attitudes that contribute to oppression. In 1848 these ideas were upheld and expanded at a convention in Seneca Falls in the United States, which produced the Declaration of Sentiments, based on the Declaration of Independence, and twelve resolutions (Tong 1998: 20). Not only did the Seneca Falls convention help women to gain many important legal, political and economic liberties and equalities, but it also emphasised their right to public expression on critical issues of the time, in particular with regard to morals and religion (Tong 1998: 20).

Although specific restrictions were overcome with both the Seneca Falls convention and nineteenth century women's rights movements, many limitations remained intact. The movements were therefore, later criticised by Davis (as noted by Tong 1998: 21) as "a white, middle-class, educated women's affair" (Tong 1998: 21, Nicholson 1997: 69). The rise in outspokenness by black women in 1851 was cut short by the Civil War, after which the feminist movement gave way to the larger issue of the abolition of slaves. Although an 1866 convention, at which it was decided to establish the Equal Rights Association, had as its purpose the unification of black (men's) and women's suffrage struggle (Tong 1998: 21), the movement was dissolved before women had achieved the vote. The result is that from 1890 to 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, the National American Woman Suffrage Association "confined almost all of its activities to gaining the vote for women" (Tong 1998: 22).

In countries such as New Zealand, women gained the vote in 1893 and in Finland and Norway before World War I. Russian women were granted the vote in 1917 after the revolution, and other Western countries soon followed suit. Black women were, however, generally still excluded. Surprisingly, women gained the vote in France only in 1944 (*The Encyclopaedia of Democracy*. 1995. Sv "women's vote"). Although Arnold (1996: 158) mentions that Enfranchisement Leagues were established in all the main South African cities at the turn of the twentieth century, the Women's Enfranchisement Act was passed by parliament only on 11 April 1930. The concession did, however, not include black women, a political move that Arnold (1996: 3) ascribes to "[r]ace, not moral conviction

about gender equality...”. In fact, the political empowerment of white women was seen as a strategic move to reduce and oppose the ‘small black male vote’.

Between the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 and the advent of the second wave of US feminism in 1960, only two groups, the National Woman’s Party and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (BPW), promoted women’s rights. Although white American women had gained the vote, therefore, the importance of women’s rights had not been impressed on the consciousness and conscience of the broad population. Eventually, feminism lay dormant in the United States, and seemingly in other countries too, for nearly forty years. The reduced activities could perhaps be attributed to the disruptions caused by the two world wars. Be that as it may, when feminism was revived in 1960, feminists in the West had become more vociferous.

2.3 WOMEN’S RESISTANCE TO SOCIAL CONVENTIONS OF THE LATTER HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

2.3.1 THE LIBERAL FEMINIST VIEW

The feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was distinguished by renewed ‘urgency’ and ‘radicalism’ (Evans 1997: 7). Nicholson (1997: 9) mentions that the first stage of this feminist theory saw several attempts to construct theories that would explain women’s oppression. In particular, the 1960s feminist protest was part of a general protest in which marginalised groups such as blacks and students, protested against established discriminatory beliefs and economic and social structures. With the eruption of the civil rights movement, feminists came to recognise the need to relate gender issues to those of race, class and sexuality. It was therefore seen as a major breakthrough when Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964. This Act forbids discrimination “on the basis of *sex* as well as race, color, religion, or national origin by private employers, employment agencies and unions...” (Tong 1998: 23-24).

Tong (1998: 33) differentiates between classical liberal and welfare liberal feminists. Classical liberal feminists suppose that if discriminatory laws and policies could be removed, women would be able to compete formally and equally with men. Welfare liberal feminists, on the other hand, believe in 'reverse discrimination' and support the selection of women over equally qualified white male applicants to schools and jobs. They suggest that women should be selected over equally and even more qualified white male applicants, provided the female applicants are able to perform adequately.

Feminist activist Betty Friedan is considered the founder and president of NOW, known as the first explicit feminist group of the twentieth century (Tong 1998: 24). This group challenged constraints of sexual discrimination in the social, political, economic, and personal spheres and included both radical and conservative liberal feminists. Liberal feminists argued that changes in society's political structures, in particular its laws, could eliminate or at least lessen gender discrimination, provided women were given the same educational and occupational opportunities as men (Tong 1998: 130).

The following demands listed by NOW (and quoted from Ferguson 1984: 109 by Tong 1998: 24-25) reveal the nature of the boundaries that affected women's lives most severely:

- I. That the U.S. Congress immediately pass the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution to provide that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex," and that such then be immediately ratified by the several States.
- II. That equal employment opportunity be guaranteed to all women, as well as men, by insisting that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces the prohibitions against racial discrimination.
- III. That women be protected by law to ensure their rights to return to their jobs within a reasonable time after childbirth without the loss of seniority or other accrued benefits, and be paid maternity leave as a form of social security and/ or employee benefit.

could be best achieved by emphasising “women’s ‘oneness’ as a gender or their ‘diversity’ as individuals, the ‘samenesses’ between women and men or the ‘differences’ between them” (Tong 1998: 26).

Some of the best-known feminists and writers in the West on the topic of difference and diversity were Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer (Evans 1997: 15). The development of the difference debate can be traced in Friedan’s three books, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), *The Second Stage* (nearly a quarter of a century later) and *The Fountain of Age* (1993) (Tong 1998: 24, 27, 42). Like most contemporary liberal feminists, Friedan gradually accepted both the ‘radical’ and ‘conservative’ viewpoints. Tong (1998: 26) mentions that initially Friedan had little patience for ‘obsequious wives’ and ‘doting mothers’. She did not, however, “demand [that] women *sacrifice* marriage and motherhood for a high-powered career”. In fact, she proposed quite the opposite to many groups of women: “The assumption of your own identity, equality, and even political power does not mean you stop needing to love, and be loved by, a man, or that you stop caring for your own kids” (as quoted in Tong 1998: 26). At this stage, Friedan ardently believed that women could assume significant roles, responsibilities and meet with all their obligations in the public world like any man, provided she had the necessary help. In *The Second Stage*, however, Friedan reconsidered whether women could cope with all their traditional roles as well as a career. She realised that the ‘superwoman’ of the 1980s had been as constricted and oppressed by the two standards of perfection as the mothers of the 1960s. She concluded, “1980s feminists needed to stop trying to ‘do it all’ and ‘be it all’” (Tong 1998: 27). *The Second Stage* therefore suggests that both men and women should work toward an androgynist existence, which may be achieved through a mix of mental and behavioural ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits. In her most recent book: *The Fountain of Age* (1993), she repeats the call for androgyny, and seems to have moved away from feminism toward humanism, claiming that “‘human wholeness’ is the ‘promise of feminism’” (Tong 1998: 31).

- IV. Immediate revision of tax laws to permit the deduction of home and child-care expenses for working parents.
- V. That child-care facilities be established by law on the same basis as parks, libraries, and public schools, adequate to the needs of children from the pre-school years through adolescence, as a community resource to be used by all citizens from all income levels.
- VI. That the right of women to be educated to their full potential equally with men be secured by Federal and State legislation, eliminating all discrimination and segregation by sex, written and unwritten, at all levels of education, including colleges, graduate and professional schools, loans and fellowships, and Federal and State training programs such as the Job Corps.
- VII. The right of women in poverty to secure job training, housing, and family allowances on equal terms with men, but without prejudice to a parent's right to remain at home to care for his or her children; revision of welfare legislation and poverty programs which deny women dignity, privacy and self-respect.
- VIII. The right of women to control their own reproductive lives by removing from the penal code laws limiting access to contraceptive information and devices, and by repealing penal laws governing abortion.

From these demands it soon became clear that NOW's 'essential' identity and agenda was liberal, which resulted in much disagreement between the liberal, conservative, and radical members. Radical feminists criticised liberal feminists as "prone to the co-optation by the 'male establishment'", while conservative feminists criticised liberals as being "out of touch with the bulk of U.S. women who hold the institutions of marriage, motherhood and the family in high regard" (Tong 1998: 26). Owing to this internal strife, NOW changed its aim in 1971 to serving "not only the women most likely to survive and thrive in the 'system' but any woman who believes women's rights should be equal to men's" (Tong 1998: 25). After this, NOW - and other women's rights groups - focused increasingly on the 'sameness-difference debate'. This debate was about whether gender equality

2.3.2 THE RADICAL FEMINIST VIEW

In contrast with liberal feminists, radical feminists stressed the depths of women's oppression that led to the view of women as victims. Jaggar and Rothenburg, for example, are of the opinion that the victims of women's oppression suffer most, both qualitatively and quantitatively, and can easily be missed because "sexist prejudices [exists in]... both oppressors and the victims" (Tong 1998: 46-47).

Liberal feminists relied significantly on the belief that women and men were basically the same and pushed society for changes toward acceptance of women in positions previously occupied only by men. Radical feminists, on the other hand, seeing this aim as lacking ambition, turned their focus to boundaries created by gender differences (Nicholson 1997: 3). It was generally accepted that in all societies and cultures men dominated the public world through which they controlled and defined the behaviour of women (Evans 1997: 16). Feminists ascribed their oppression to specific conventions that were based on the intellectual assumptions of the West, most of which were patriarchal. According to Rubin (1997: 33), "[t]he term 'patriarchy' was introduced to distinguish the forces maintaining sexism from other social forces, such as capitalism".

Nicholson (1997: 8) writes, however, that Gayle Rubin, radical-libertarian feminist¹³, preferred the term 'sex/gender system', viewing 'patriarchy' as a limited concept. Tong (1998: 48-49) also describes radical feminists as examining and exploring the oppressive characteristics of the 'sex/gender system', claiming that "patriarchal society uses rigid gender roles to keep women passive ('affectionate, obedient, responsive...') and men active ('tenacious, aggressive, curious...')". The construction of such 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities, based on specific facts about male and female physiology, such as anatomy, chromosomes and hormones, "serve to empower men and disempower women". As a result, (Jaggar in Tong 1998: 127), many women are alienated from their own sexuality and from the process of motherhood and also from their intellectual capacities. Women's 'alienation' and fragmentation is based on the structures of

the late twentieth century capitalist patriarchy, which successfully excludes them both from the public world and from themselves. The domination and control of their sexual and procreative capacities is ‘a gender-mediated experience’, leading to their subjugation (Tong 1998: 125).

Although there was a difference in opinion between the radical-cultural and radical-liberal feminists, they both seem to reject the idea of androgyny as a means to equality between the sexes (Tong 1998: 47). While radical-libertarians argued that women want to be free from limitations caused by the burdens of natural reproduction and biological motherhood and from the restrictions of the so-called sexual double standards that permit men but not women to experiment sexually (Tong 1998: 49), radical-cultural feminists insisted that the very source of women’s power is situated in their unique reproductive roles (Tong 1998: 48). The debate was discouraged both by critic Jean Elshtain, who urged women “to overthrow the categories that entrap women (and men) in rigid roles” and, seemingly, by Tong (1998: 87-88), who criticises both groups for needlessly ‘polarizing’ issues relating to ‘sex, re-production and biological motherhood’.

2.3.3 THE MARXIST FEMINIST VIEW

The main principles of Marxist and socialist feminism are in line with those of other strands of feminism in terms of the boundaries it identifies that restrict women to a subordinate role in society. Marxism provided (and still provides) a “metanarrative of the social whole that simultaneously explained all previous societies, allowed for historical change and diversity among these, and left open the possibility of a future society where its own explanatory power would become irrelevant” (Nicholson 1997: 2).

While Marxist feminists pay their respects directly to Marx (1883), Engels and other nineteenth-century thinkers, socialist feminists appear to be influenced more by twentieth-century thinkers, such as Louis Althusser and Jürgen Habermas.

¹³ Tong (1998: 47) distinguishes radical-libertarian and radical-cultural feminists.

Marxist feminists are inclined to identify the primary cause of women's oppression as classism rather than sexism. Since Marxist social theories prioritise the examination of the 'public' world of paid labour, which inevitably marginalises women, the 'public' role of women is often limited. According to Evans (1997: 21), this social theory has left no space for the discussion of the 'private' world, emotional life or sexuality.

Socialist feminists, on the other hand, insist that women's oppression is a complex interaction between capitalism and patriarchy. Echoing Wollstonecraft, Engels viewed "man's control of woman [as] rooted in the fact that he, not she, controls the property" (Tong 1998: 103). He argued that the termination of the institution of private property would end the oppression of woman (Tong 1998: 103). Limitations such as the purposes of 'child-breeding' determined the original division of labour between man and woman. These distinctions situated husbands as owners, women as wives, and a means of production, and the children as labour (Firestone 1997: 21).

In this discourse, no natural link existed between Marxism and feminism. Women themselves had to establish some relation with their theories. According to Tong (1998: 94), Marxist feminists agree that "women's oppression is not the result of individuals' intentional actions but is the product of the political, social, and economic structures within which individuals live". However, Evans (1997: 59) believes that the issues of the debate in the social sciences, centred on the sexual division of labour. She adds that feminists were questioning the 'natural' responsibility of women to care for children, the aged and the infirm, as well as their exclusion from "anything corresponding to real social or political power". This identification of what women saw as "unpaid, and essentially un-free, labour in the home" dominated feminist thought throughout the West for a time (Evans 1997: 59-60).

2.3.4 THE PSYCHOANALITIC FEMINIST VIEW

Radical-libertarian feminist, Gayle Rubin (1997: 43) writes that the psychoanalytic movement did not initially have a distinctive theory of feminine development. Her radical explanation for psychoanalysis is contained in the following: “Most importantly, psychoanalysis provides a description of the mechanisms by which the sexes are divided and deformed, of how bisexual, androgynous infants are transformed into boys and girls.” According to Rubin (1997: 43), however, it is the unique set of concepts for understanding men, women and sexuality that has provided psychoanalysis with a distinctive theory.

For psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud “[m]asculinity and femininity are ... the product of sexual maturation. If boys develop ‘normally’ (that is, typically), they will end up as men who display expected masculine traits; if women develop ‘normally,’ they will end up as women who display expected feminine traits” (Tong 1998: 131). Not only do these childhood experiences result in the assumption of a masculine or feminine identity, but also in the belief of masculinity as somehow superior to femininity. Thus, the primary explanation for women’s subjugation lies in their own thought as embedded in their psyche. Psychoanalytic feminists recommend a move toward a more androgynous society in which masculinity and femininity would be differently constructed and of equal value, which will enable a ‘full human person’ to blend positive feminine and masculine traits (Tong 1998: 131).

Early feminist psychoanalysts, such as Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Clara Thompson, rejected Freud’s ‘biological determinism’. These psychoanalysts argued that gender identity, gender behaviour and sexual orientation of women as well as men, “are not the result of biological fact. Rather, they are the product of social values” (Tong 1998: 138). The origin of women’s feelings of inferiority, according to Horney (Tong 1998: 139), is not from their recognition or realisation of their social subordination. Rather, Adler, Horney and Thompson argue that the identity of self “develops uniquely and individually in each person, growing out of the interface between nature and culture.” They maintain that there is not “*one* universally healthy, normal, and natural male self for men and *another* universally

healthy, normal, and natural female self for women. Rather, there are as many human selves as there are individual people” (Tong 1998: 140).

Gender feminists¹⁴, on the other hand, believe that the reasons for masculinity and femininity may be biological, psychological and/or cultural. Carol Gilligan, Tong (1998: 154) has shown that “men’s emphasis on separation and autonomy leads them to develop a style of moral reasoning (and thinking) that stresses justice, fairness, and rights. In contrast, women’s emphasis on connections and relationships leads them to develop a style of moral reasoning (and thinking) that stresses the wants, needs, and interest of particular people”. On this basis, gender feminists believe that women should celebrate their femininity, while men should surrender at least the most extreme forms of their masculinity. They argue that women should overcome the boundaries created by the traditional values “(gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassion, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity, and unselfishness)” that were believed to be morally better values than those originally associated with men “(strength of will, ambition, courage, independence, assertiveness, hardiness, rationality, and emotional control)” (Tong 1998: 131).

2.3.5 THE EXISTENTIALIST FEMINIST VIEW

Although published in 1949 and, although the *grande dame* of European feminism was not involved in organised feminism in France during the 1950s and 1960s (Evans 1997: 44), Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* became a key theoretical text of second wave feminism (Tong 1998: 6). Her book made women aware of the ‘new’ power of women who refused to participate in the conventional categorisation of ‘male’ thought and knowledge (Evans 1997: 45) and demonstrated the boundaries created by the ‘social production’ of women as feminine beings. De Beauvoir therefore proposed that women accept masculine values, and act like men (Evans 1997: 46). “Woman, like man, is a subject rather

¹⁴ Tong (1998: 131) mentions that gender feminists are sometimes also referred to as cultural feminists.

than an object; she is no more being-in-itself than man is. She, like man, is being-for-itself, and it is high time for man to recognise this fact” (Tong 1998: 187).

According to Tong (1998: 182), “men discovered they could control women by creating myths about woman” that focused on specific limiting characteristics such as ‘irrationality, complexity, and opaqueness’. This myth developed to include the idealistic search of every man to find *the* woman that could make him complete. It was De Beauvoir was first to point out that the ideal woman had common traits such as “to forget, deny or in some way *negate* herself” (Tong 1998: 182). She also emphasised that all women engage in role-play, taking roles such as “the wife, mother, career woman, prostitute, narcissist, and the mystic” (Tong 1998: 186). However, De Beauvoir refused to concede that women’s anatomy consigns them to second-class citizenship, believing that “[w]omen are the other not because they lack penises but because they lack power”. On this account, she suggested that women look for reasons beyond female biology and physiology to explain why society has selected woman to play the role of the other (Tong 1998: 180).

Simone de Beauvoir (1997: 13) argues that the “category of the ‘*Other*’ is as primordial as consciousness itself”. According to Tong (1998: 182), she observes that as soon as man asserts himself “as [a] subject and [a] free being, the idea of the Other [arises]”. In this way women are defined as different, separate and inferior to man (Tong 1998: 179, 182). As an ‘object’, woman’s meaning is determined for her. In order to become her-‘self’ or a ‘subject’, a woman therefore has to “transcend the definitions, labels, and essences” that limit her experiences (Tong 1998: 6). The primary methods by which the subject controls the object are social roles and conventions (Tong 1998: 183). De Beauvoir views woman’s acceptance of her otherness as tragic, describing it as the ‘feminine mystery’ that is passed to each generation “through the painful socialisation of girls”. She sees otherness as fixed in institutions such as marriage and motherhood (Tong 1998: 183). According to de Beauvoir (Tong 1998: 184), marriage seems to offer women “contentment, tranquillity, and security ... (but) it also robs women of the chance to be great. In return for their freedom, women are given ‘happiness’”.

De Beauvoir's claim that 'woman is made not born' became the essential issue that focused feminist debates during the second wave (Evans 1997: 50). In this regard, *The Second Sex* "provided an ontological-existential explanation for women's oppression ... by virtue of her otherness". This insight helped many women/feminists to understand the full significance of their status (Tong 1998: 6, 173). To escape their status as a 'second sex', they were encouraged to work outside the home, become intellectuals, work toward a socialist transformation of society and "refuse to internalize their otherness" (Tong 1998: 188).

Existentialist feminists therefore believe that man's myths about the idealised, idolised and self-sacrificial woman, betray a fundamental ambivalence about her nature (Tong 1998: 183). Woman's person is perceived to be split between "woman's *inauthentic* self lives as the 'object-self' seen by the male world; on the other hand, woman's *authentic* self lives as a 'withdrawn-invisible self' - invisible at times even to oneself" (Tong 1998: 188). De Beauvoir's (Tong 1998: 188) belief that woman could transcend her limitations if she refused to accept the role of the other or the object, is however criticised by Genevieve Lloyd (Tong 1998: 190) as being a "male ideal by definition". The acceptance of transcendence, as a liberating ideal, places the feminist in a paradox that is rooted in existentialist opposition between the self and the other. It creates specific problems for women, since, in its origins, it results in self-denial (Tong 1998: 190). Hiller (1991: 11) and Bem (Swemmer 1998: 16), for example, share the opinion that the category 'other' is that, which is always different and distant. According to Hiller (1991: 11) it also includes "...beings and monsters ... [of] territories ... real or imagined, allies and enemies, and lands of the dead." Women often equal the monster or the 'other' and it is against this 'difference' that the characters of 'self' and 'society' are informed or classified. Fortunately, as Evans (1997: 135) says, new discourses about sexuality have extended the options open to women.

2.3.6 FEMINISM, COLONIALISM AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Colonial contact has been a recurrent feature of human history. According to Loomba 1999: xiii), modern European colonialism was the most distinctive and the most extensive of all the different kinds. Not only did modern states extract goods and wealth from occupied countries, but they also restructured their economies. This resulted in a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries (Loomba 1999: 3). The essential point in European colonialisms was the “variety of techniques and patterns of domination... [which] produced the economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry” (Loomba 1999: 4).

Both Loomba and Evans (1997: 9) believe that gender difference and sexuality are central to the ‘conceptualisation’, ‘expression’ and ‘enactment’ of colonial relations. National fantasies, whether they are colonial, anti-colonial or postcolonial, “play upon the connections between women, land or nations” (Loomba 1998: 215). The state or its “guiding principles are often imagined literally *as a woman*” (Loomba 1998: 215). Although they can be abstract, allegorical, goddesses or real-life women, they are generally cast as either mothers or wives. Loomba (1998: 221, 222) urges that it is important to “remember that symbolism shapes the real-life roles women are called upon to play”. The repositioning of women is therefore a major concern within nationalist (and colonialist) discourses.

Although records reveal little about the feelings or responses of ‘colonised’ women to their unique situations, and little attempt has been made to locate them as subjects within the colonial struggle until recently, Loomba (1998: 221-222) writes that women are the ‘site’ rather than the subject in particular historical debates. They are marginalised by discourses ‘about’ them. Since the tradition of patriarchy was reinforced within the family and became an apparatus for colonised men to assert their otherwise eroded power, both colonial and ‘indigenous’ patriarchies co-operated to keep women ‘in their place’ (Loomba 1998: 222).

This does not, however, situate patriarchy as more important than class, or race, or colonialism (Loomba 1998: 222). An obvious connection exists between the black feminist movement, and political black liberation movements of 1960s and 1970s, who defined their politics as concerned with an active struggle “against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression”. They held that black feminism was also a “logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions” faced by all women of colour (Nicholson 1997: 63). According to Collins (1997: 243), satisfactory definitions of black feminist thought must therefore include the “complex nexus of relationships among biological classification, the social construction of race and gender as categories of analysis, the material conditions accompanying these changing social constructions, and Black women’s consciousness about these themes” (Collins 1997: 243). Collins (1997: 245) notes that all African-American women come across racism, social and class differences among themselves. This diversity produces experiences which shape their reactions to ethnicity, sexual orientation, urbanisation and stereotypical or ‘controlling images’. While some internalise stereotypical images, others deconstruct the ‘conceptual apparatus’ of the dominant group, exposing their heritage of struggle.

Several postcolonial women’s movements have viewed ‘feminism’ with deep scepticism, associating it with Western values. Evans (1997: 62) cites black feminists, in particular Hazel Carby of Britain and Angela Davis of the United States, who challenged the very parameters of white feminism as a whole, and questioned the different degrees of privilege and exploitation based on social and racial divisions. Social feminist historians, such as Anna Darwin, Linda Gordon and Barbara Taylor, agree with this view (Evans 1997: 60-61). Women have therefore realised that the initial potential of an all-embracing feminism, has become fragmented and characterised by a divided consciousness (Evans 1997: 19-20).

Some movements “have tried to establish [their own indigenous] roots for the women’s movement”, challenging the popular assumption that postcolonial women’s activism is only “inspired by its Western counterparts” (Loomba 1998:

229). To achieve this individuality, postcolonial feminism involves “re-writing indigenous histories, appropriating pre-colonial symbols and mythologies, and amplifying, where possible, the voices of women themselves” (Loomba 1998: 229). According to Evans (1997: 62), black women’s questioning of these values has contributed to the fragmentation and disintegration of a fixed Western feminism.

Loomba (1999: 12) warns that ‘post-colonialism’ is a term that appears to be full of contradictions and qualifications, which should not be applied indiscriminately. Since the term has been used to refer to “specific groups of (oppressed or dissenting) people (or individuals within them) rather than to a location or a social order, which may include such people but is not limited to them”, postcolonial theory is criticised for shifting the focus from “locations and institutions to individuals and subjectivities” (Loomba 1999: 17). This shift in focus allows postcoloniality to become a vague condition of people anywhere and everywhere. She (1999: 228) also warns against ‘homogenising’ either ‘First World’ or ‘Third World’ women, since both first and third world women have been influenced by considerations of class, colour, religion, location, sexuality and politics. If American black women have questioned the politics of white feminism in that country, feminists in India have raised issues that have not been voiced by women’s groups, be they nationalist or left wing. Also, whereas middle-class white women’s movements can be criticised for not addressing questions of class and race sufficiently, nationalist or class-based struggles have historically subjected issues concerning women’s autonomy or sexuality to supposedly ‘larger’ concerns.

Evans (1997: 9) agrees that feminism today is marked by an awareness of its intricacy and its different meanings for different classes and countries. As feminism has become more complex in its traditions, a measure of deconstruction is necessary for making sense of its diversity. She (1997: 12) argues that the process of globalization requires a rethinking of static perceptions of nationality and ethnicity, and the realisation that although there are still ‘national identities’, their meanings have become increasingly negotiable, as the post-1989 world has

demonstrated. Although gender difference remains the central and crucial organising principle, she holds that feminism has reached a point of fragmentation, which allows for *difference* and *diversity* among women and between women and men. These words have become synonymous with feminism in the 1990s (Evans 1997: 62-63).

2.4 POSTMODERN FEMINISM

According to Evans (1997: 12) the point of the 'emergence' of contemporary feminism must be positioned with reference to the changing culture in the West and a shift in the theoretical understanding of the world. She identifies two major changes: the globalisation of the late twentieth-century world and the shift from modernity to postmodernity, adding that most of the 'feminist material' that has been collected in the last twenty years shows a concern with the "marginalization or the suppression of women's interests and female identity" (Evans 1997: 123-124). Contrary to the demands of women of the 1960s, therefore, the differences between men and women are now acknowledged. Their experiences are not shared and they do not have the same needs or interests. Evans (1997: 138) notes that this acknowledgement allows women to demonstrate their ability to participate in the formation of human equality.

As with modernism, Evans (1997: 85) warns that the relationship between feminism and postmodernity is a complex one. Tong (1998: 193) is of the same opinion, writing that individuals "often have difficulty explaining how they can be both postmodern and feminist". Not only are postmodern feminists sceptic of any approach to provide '*the* explanation' for woman's oppression, or structures that can achieve all women's liberation, but they also refuse to develop 'one overarching' solution for women's subjugation. Arguing for 'plurality', 'multiplicity' and 'difference', they invite every woman to disregard set conventions and boundaries and to become the woman she wants to be (Tong 1998: 193).

Postmodern feminists therefore share a philosophical perspective. While prominent writers, such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, responded to existentialist Simone de Beauvoir, deconstructionist Jacques Derrida's attack on the "ordinary notions of authorship, identity and selfhood" (as quoted in Tong 1998: 194), and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's 'symbolic order' have led to a more radical interpretation of the status of women. According to Tong (1998: 196), "the symbolic order regulates society through the regulation of individuals; so long as individuals speak the language of the symbolic order - internalizing its gender roles and class roles - society will reproduce itself in fairly constant form." In response to Lacan, feminists have, for example, "commit[ted] themselves to interpreting traditionally Freudian thought iconoclastically" (Tong 1998: 194). In addition, de Beauvoir's understanding of otherness has been turned on its head (Tong 1998: 6-7). Instead of viewing the status of the other as something to be overcome, its advantages have been acknowledged. De Beauvoir's question of "Why is woman the *second sex*?" has also been rephrased to "Why is the woman the other?" (Tong 1998: 195).

✦ Postmodern feminists continue to confuse and break boundaries. They argue that while otherness may have marginalised woman, it also enables her to stand back as an individual and to criticise conventions. Regardless of the associations of otherness with negative characteristics such as oppression, inferiority, exclusion, shunning, rejection, unwantedness, abandonment and marginalisation it as a "way of being, thinking, and speaking allowing for openness, plurality, diversity, and difference" (Tong 1998: 195). The acknowledgement of 'difference' does not have to mean 'separation'. Instead the enormous appeal of the status of an outsider, "to be uncorrupted by the system, to see and feel what other people do not see and feel, to be free of tight constraints and unnecessary restraints". (Tong 1998: 278). What Tong values most about feminist thought is that it has a beginning but no end. "[B]ecause it has no predetermined end, feminist thought permits each woman to think her own thoughts". Tong believes that "[n]ot the truth but the truths will set women free" (Tong 1998: 280).

According to Tong (1998: 195-196), one of the most radical views of deconstruction, is that the “entire conceptual and therefore linguistic scheme of the West is fundamentally flawed”. Deconstructionists “challenge arbitrary boundaries between concepts such as reason and emotion, mind and body, and self and other”. The pointless boundaries “between art and science, psychology and biology, literature and philosophy” are also subject to their scrutiny. The deconstructionist’s anti-essentialism questions the “most basic assumptions of Western thought”. It is proposed that what society generally “regards as good, true and beautiful”, should be exchanged for “bad, false and ugly”, which suggests that these traits “might actually be better for individuals”. Deconstructionists believe that there is neither a self-identity, that is, “an essential unity of self through time and space”, nor truth, described as the “essential relationship between language and reality”. Neither do “words stand for things, for pieces of reality. Rather, reality eludes language, and language refuses to be pinned down or limited by reality” (Tong 1998: 196).

Tong (1998: 204) views Julia Kristeva, who out-rightly contests “‘feminism’ as it is defined by French theorists and activists”, as the most controversial postmodern feminist. Kristeva’s writings centre on “difference in general rather than sexual difference in particular” (Tong 1998: 205). While she contests both traditional definitions of the two separate sexes, she does admit “that there are male and female *sexual differences*”. Tong (1998: 206) explains that “Kristeva ultimately endorse[s] only those aspects of the feminist movement that break down or render ambiguous identity, especially sexual identity”.

“[P]ostmodern feminists are deliberately opaque, viewing clarity as one of the seven deadly sins of the phallogocentric order” (Tong 1998: 206), and their texts have been criticised by many British and American feminists as “self-indulgent academic treatises addressed not to ordinary women but only to highly educated women with doctoral degrees in philosophy, for example” (Tong 1998: 194). However, “[a]lthough postmodern feminists have distinctly different agendas, they share particular tendencies”, which Tong (1998: 210) identifies as “an appreciation for the possibilities latent in nothingness, absence, the marginal, the

peripheral, the repressed”. Perhaps more important, is their “common desire to think nonbinary, nonoppositional thoughts”. In this sense, postmodernism is understood as “offering women the most fundamental liberation of all: [that is,] freedom from oppressive thought” (Tong 1998: 199).

According to Tong (1998: 210), it is uncertain whether women can overcome this binary opposition by breaking the silence. She does believe, however, that in the attempt to achieve unity “human beings have excluded, ostracized, and alienated so-called abnormal, deviant, and marginal people”, in so doing, impoverishing the human community. The time is therefore ripe for a new conceptual order. It was Derrida who used the term “*différance* to describe the ineliminable, confounding gap between reality and language that confounds us”. Postmodern feminists “appropriated this novel term... They noted that if they agreed on anything, it was that woman, the other, the feminine, had been left unthematized and silent in the void between language and reality, and the time had come for her to emerge from this abyss” (Tong 1998: 198).

Cornell (1998: ix-x) picks up this line of argument when she writes that the ‘imaginary domain’ [is] a domain which “takes us beyond hierarchical definitions of self, whether given by class, caste, race or gender”. She describes this domain as a “moral space in which we, as sexed creatures ... care deeply about matters of the heart ... [in which] we are allowed to evaluate and represent who we are”. More importantly, she states that “[t]o say the imaginary domain is a right is to say that the freedom to be ourselves and the participation in the richness of life is not an arbitrary wish, but an essential right of personality”.

Cornell¹⁵ defines feminism as an ego ideal, which represents women’s freedom to be themselves in their everyday existence. She holds therefore that feminism cannot prescribe to women to ‘be’ or act in a certain way to qualify as a feminist. The “understanding that every woman needs to be respected in her effort to match up her feminism with any actual attempt to change our world through solidarity does, indirectly, serve the moral imagination required by such experiments. Thus,

we are, once again, returned to the need to respect the dignity of all women as the ultimate ethical law in which feminist political action must proceed in its struggles.” Cornell therefore understands that it is difficult for both historical and new voices “to find the means of representation to be seen and heard.” Yet she believes it is necessary to reclaim also the “obscured ... ‘official history’, and that another history can be spun into another story only by respecting another time”.

Cornell’s definition and suggested course for feminism relates to di Stefano’s warning that in postmodernism’s “embrace of the enriching differences of race, class, sexual preference, ethnicity, culture, age, religion...” women may also stand to lose themselves (Tong 1998: 210):

gender is basic in ways that we have yet to fully understand, ...it functions as “a difference that makes a difference,” even as it can no longer claim the legitimating mantle of *the* difference. The figure of the shrinking woman may perhaps be best appreciated and utilized as an aporia within contemporary theory: as a recurring paradox, question, dead end, or blind spot to which we must repeatedly return, because to ignore her altogether is to risk forgetting and thereby losing what is left of her (quoted in Tong 1998: 211).

2.5 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter, a broad outline has been provided of the development of feminist thought, mainly in the West. Chadwick (1997: 422) points out that today’s women are aware of the many unattained goals and debate what their next step might be. Some strands of feminism concentrate on multiculturalism, globalisation, ecology (Tong 1998: 7-8) and the Queer Theory (Chadwick 1997: 14), while others simply carry on with life more confidently. It must, however, also be noted that the feminist movement has not touched the lives of a large proportion of the women.

The purpose of the chapter has been to establish a framework for the analysis of conventions that have restricted women as they have been depicted in the pictorial

¹⁵ Drucilla Cornell, Chapter Two, *Legacy of Dignity* to be published in March 2002.

art of specified artists. Before that can happen, it is necessary to demonstrate how such boundaries can be identified in artworks of the period covered in this study. This is done in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER III

RESTRICTIVE SOCIAL CONVENTIONS AS REVEALED BY WOMEN DEPICTED IN PICTORIAL ART

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Before the conventions that have been resisted by women since the 1990s are discussed in any detail with regard to particular artists, it is appropriate to discuss whether the restrictive conventions that feminists were contesting in their writing during the periods discussed above could be identified in any pictorial depictions of women of the time. Chadwick (1997: 422), writes that contemporary art, specifically that of women “reveals the formulation of complex strategies and practices through which they are confronting the exclusions of art history, expanding theoretical knowledge, and promoting social change.” The intention is, however, not to analyse comprehensively all pictorial art that was produced during this time, but to illustrate how these conventions are revealed in art, albeit unconsciously.

3.2 GENDERED WOMAN

As Mary Wollstonecraft wrote (see 2.1), economic changes and wealth brought disastrous changes to social and cultural spheres. Society began to be characterised in gendered terms (Solkin 1993: 48). In the eighteenth century women in English society were therefore portrayed as confined to the home and pampered, people who had “to soothe...(men) into tenderness and compassion” (Addison¹⁶ c. 1750). They were also seen as frivolous and self-indulgent and were confined to the context of male dominance and the space of private life (Solkin 1993: 186).

¹⁶ Addison was a well-known writer who belonged to the Kit-Cat Club of the early eighteenth-century (Solkin 1993: 28).

French painters such as Jean-Antoine Watteau, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and François Boucher reflect these conventions clearly. In *The Schoolmistress* (c. 1733-1736, fig. 1), Chardin focuses on female activities such as teaching and in *Washerwoman* (1733) and *Girl returning from the market* (1739) on the duties of female servants. In line with the argument of this chapter, his *Saying Grace*, painted in 1740, was praised for its allegorical depiction of the “womanly virtues of order, calm and piety...” at the time (Gregory & Lyon 1987: 63). In *La Modiste* (1745), Chardin’s contemporary, Boucher, depicts scenes from everyday life that reflect the luxurious pampering of women mentioned by Wollstonecraft (see 2.1). The model portrayed in this work has just finished her morning dress and hair, and is presented with the latest fashion accessories by a milliner who is aptly seated on the floor at the lady’s feet.

Although Benjamin West (c. 1745), also referred to as the “American Raphael” (Solkin 1993: 180), portrayed feminine virtue such as pity and compassion, his women were more often the object or focal point of masculine attention. He was therefore hailed as a painter of feminine and feminised beauty. Examples of such portrayals are *Venus and Cupid* (1765, fig. 2), in which his use of colour and light is described as ‘purely sensual’ and closely linked with the effects of love, creating female wantonness. *Venus and the Little Loves* (c. 1751) is another good example of this. In *Vulcan Catching Mars and Venus in his Net* (c. 1751), he sentimentally contrasts feminine beauty and softness with male brutality and dominance (Solkin 1993: 184, 186).

Men, on the other hand, were seen as serious and restrained. Solkin (1993: 105) writes that the well-known British artist, William Hogarth presents the male figures in *The Wollaston Family* (1730), as keeping a watchful eye on the demurely seated women. He interprets their stance as protective, mentioning that women’s tendency to idle gossip was considered typically feminine, even though the men show respect for the ladies’ more ‘delicate sensibilities’ (Solkin 1993: 87).

Until late in the nineteenth century, women continued to be portrayed indoors and occupied with feminine activities, such as embroidery (Mary Severn, *A*

woman of the Petre Dawins family, 1857). (Cherry 1993: plate 17). These activities had not changed much from the time in which Wollstonecraft had written, as Cherry indicates through the aptly named *Preparing Tea* (Jane Bowkett c1860, fig. 3), and Chadwick (1996: 239) illustrates in *A Cup of Tea* (American artist, Mary Cassat 1880), *Tea-Time* (Mari Bracquemond 1880), and *An Afternoon in the Nursery* (Jane Bowkett c1860), Bertha Morisot's *Hanging the washing* (1881), and *Two Women in an Aesthetic Interior* (Maud H. Neale 1880).

The emotional dependence that had been mentioned by Wollstonecraft is also visible in Alice Walker's *Wounded Feelings* (1862), and in *Weary Waiting*, painted by Louise Jopling (1877, fig. 4), for example. In the latter, the lady of the house is portrayed as waiting for her husband's return, or just for something to relieve the tedium. Also in *War* (1883), painted by the American painter Anna Lea Merritt, who had settled in England after marriage, are women's "anxieties, the fears & the long wait ... opposed to the glorification of war" (Chadwick¹⁷ 1996: 204). Although Merritt criticises masculine enterprises in this work, she affirms the "dominant view of acceptable femininity defined in terms of passivity and domesticity" at the same time (Chadwick 1996: 204).

3.3 EMANCIPATING WOMAN

The political and economic inequality, addressed by Wollstonecraft and later also Mill and Taylor (see 2.1 & 2.2), is evident in the choice of subject matter of paintings of the mid-eighteenth until and beyond the early twentieth century. At first the poor were either sentimentalised or ridiculed, as seen in the work of Francis Haymen (c. 1741). Haymen's portrayal of young women as in *The Play of Skittles (The Enraged Vixen of a Wife)* (c. 1741-42, fig. 5), renders them as "accessible to the desires of the polite male viewer", for example (Solkin 1993:

¹⁷ Chadwick (1996: 204) writes that American women faced similar challenges.

142), while many of his other portrayals confirm the distinct separation between the privileged and the 'debased poor' (Solkin 1993: 144).

It was only in the nineteenth century that some awareness began to be created of women who were not confined to their homes any longer, but were beginning to contribute to the economy, albeit in typically female roles. From the 1850s to the 1890s, when feminists were beginning to press for the vote, women began to be portrayed as flower-sellers, for example, and as seamstresses, as in Anna Blunden's *For Only One Short Hour* (1854, fig. 6). They were also depicted as lace-makers, factory girls, and surface workers in the Cornish tin mines. Eliza Fox's *Study of a Factory Child* (RA¹⁸ 1850), and Annie Swynnerton's *The Factory Girls' Tryst* (RA 1881) are examples of this occupation. According to Cherry (1993: 152), domestic service was the main occupation for women at the time. General servants, housemaids, lady's maids, cooks and nursemaids are, for example, portrayed by Joanna Boyce in *Our Housemaid* (RA 1857) and by Bertha Morisot in *The wet nurse and Julie* (1897). In *And Flowers of Every Hue Shall Grace the Festal Day* (RA 1883), Jessica Hayllar also depicts a parlour maid with a tray entering a hall where a male gardener is arranging plants (Cherry 1993: 149). In *Blackberry Tart* (1885) by Hayllar's sister, Edith, a cook is portrayed rolling out pastry in a spotless kitchen. Cherry (1993: 152) also mentions that women worked as artists' models, posing nude or in character roles and costume (Louise Jopling's *A Modern Cinderella*) or as 'ayahs' (Rebecca Solomon's *A Young Teacher*). The latter were usually south Asian women.

The advances mentioned above did not stretch to include women of non-western cultures. The work of Paul Gauguin, such as *Nevermore* (1897, fig. 7), *Annah the Javanese* (1893), *The Birth of Christ, Son of God* (1896), *Tahitian Women with Mango Blossoms* (1899), *Nativity* (1902) and *Barbaric tales* (1902), instead exemplifies the renewed pursuit of the Romantic tradition. In this tradition, women were generally characterised as 'exotic', 'otherworldly' and 'mystical'

¹⁸ Royal Academician (Twentieth Century) (Cherry 1993: 215).

(Arnason 1988: 59). Examples of such portrayals of women are Henri Rousseau's *The Dream* (1910), and Raoul Dufy's *Indian Model in the Studio at L'Impasse Guelma* (1928). As late as in 1907, during the period of new artistic expression, Cubism, women remained faceless. One of the pivotal paintings in art history, Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, depicts women as 'otherworldly'. Here African masks prevented the necessity for examining the identity of the female models.

In this regard, Cherry (1993: 118) notes that from the 1860s onwards, "visual pleasure was redefined to target the visual spectacle of women". As a result, women depicted in this time are characterised by "an excess of unseeing female faces, female bodies swathed in or divested of drapery...doing very little other than *looking* beautiful" (Cherry 1993: 118). Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* (1862, fig. 8) and *The White Slave* (1888) are examples of this. In these paintings the women show little or no emotion and seem to lack identity. Women were portrayed as types rather than individuals and 'occasionally' as more spiritual, instinctual, always closer to nature and subject to its mysterious forces (Elderidge 1993: 175). Griselda Pollock argues that this reduction of woman to an 'explicitly visual sign' was to represent the difference between the sexes and 'signify masculinity' (quoted in Cherry 1993: 118).

However, during the same period, artists began to portray the struggle and suffering of the poor in a more realistic way, raising awareness through public exhibitions. Most of these artists were 'respectable middle-class women'. Nochlin (1989: 40) notes that in Millet's *Gleaners* (1857), for example, the women depicted are working for survival, not for profit. The greatest 'satirical draftsman' of the nineteenth century, Honoré Daumier, who was also concerned with the portrayal of the struggling poor (Arnason 1986: 28), focuses on the stark reality of poverty and hardship in, for example, *The Third Class Carriage* (1860-62, fig. 9). There is no idealisation or romantic indulgence of their daily struggling existence.

One of the best-known artists who raised awareness of poverty and, in particular, its effect on women, however, was Käthe Kollwitz. *The Weavers' Revolt* (1895-

97), *Mother with Dead Child* (1903, fig. 10), *Outbreak* (1903) *Out of Work* (1909), and the *Peasants' War* series speak for themselves. The poor had also never been depicted in such a truthful way in the established art world, except perhaps by Daumier. Other examples of Kollwitz's work that are relevant to this study, is the series consisting of *Poverty, Death, Council, March of the Weavers, Storming the Gate* and *End* (1893). War and its effect on women are also portrayed, for example, in *The volunteers, War* (1922-23), and the series consisting of *The Sacrifice, the Volunteers* (1922-23), as well as in *The Parents, Widow I, Widow II, The Mothers and the People* (1924). For her time, Kollwitz's unclouded interpretation of women's lives was remarkable.

3.4 ADVANCED WOMAN

3.4.1 GENDER

From around the turn of the century until the 1920s and 1930s, women began to be portrayed in the light of new social advances. They were depicted smoking and drinking alcohol (Francis Benjamin Johnson's *Self-Portrait* (c. 1896, fig. 11)), Kees van Dongen's *Bar in Cairo* (1920), Guy Pène du Bois's *Woman with Cigarette* (1929), Piero Marrusig's *Two women in a Café* (1923)), reading books (Albert Morrow's *The New Woman* (1897)), leading healthy and active lives (John Laverley's *The Tennis Party* (1886), William Russell Flint's *The Kite Flyers* (1925), André Lhote's *The Beach* (1922)), and participating in the economy (Alice Barber Stephens' *The Woman in Business* (1897)).

Several depictions of gender-neutral females also exist from this period (Romaine Brooks's *Self Portrait* (1923) and *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924, fig. 12) and Kees van Dongen's *La Fumeuse* (1923), for example. *The Flower Torso*, painted by Peter Blume in 1927 could be male, were it not for the 'pendulous' breasts adorned with 'lush' flowers (*The American Art Book* 1999: 50). Female sexuality, especially lesbianism, also became a subject for portrayal, as in Tamara de Lempicka's *Les Deux Amies* (1923).

During the lull in feminist thought, artists continued to challenge conventional views of femininity and sexuality, as in Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940, fig. 13) (Meskimmon 1996: 81). Eva Schulze-Knabe's photograph, *Self-Portrait Wearing Builder's Helmet* (1950), also does this by depicting her as she assumes a masculine stance (Borzello 1998: 137). In 1953, Richard Lindner, a German-Jewish painter, introduced ideas that were to be popularised only much later. The marionette-like women he depicted had dual roles, such as 'demon and mother' and 'goddess and whore'. *The Meeting* (1953) is a good example. The artist's belief that women were the stronger sex also caused him to depict them as superior to men (Walther 1998: 327).

Also Pop Art, which began in the late nineteen-fifties towards the end of the feminist lull, challenged conventional views. Portraying 'everyday functional objects', that had traditionally been classified as lacking aesthetic value as '*objets d'art*' (Nettleton & Hammond-Tooke 1989: 8). Pop artists celebrated American trivial culture, among other things monumentalising icons of mass culture, including women. Tom Wesselman, for example, made use of advertising clichés, one of which is a "secularized Eve, equipped with the corresponding attributes: invitingly open mouth, dazzlingly white teeth, swelling breasts..." (Walther 1998: 319), of which *Great American Nude # 57* (1964, fig. 14), *Great American nude # 98* (1967), *Bathtub Collage # 3* (1963) and *Seascape # 18* (1967) are good examples. Another cliché, that women pine for lost love and missed dates, is depicted in Roy Liechtenstein's *M-Maybe (A Girl's Picture)* (1965), in which he uses enormous comic book heroines. Other examples of Pop Art portraying women as types are Allen Jones's *Perfect Match* (1966-67), *Chair* (1969) and *Table* (1969), R.B Kitaj's *Casting* (1967), shows female types with titles such as 'secret life' and 'big green fresco mom', Richard Lidner's *Leopard Lily* (1966), Marital Raysse's *Simple and Quiet painting* (1965) that depicts a female nude in a garden, Larrie Rivers's *Girlie* (1970), and Mel Ramos's *Hippopotamus* (1967) and *Miss Corn Flakes* (1964). Pop Art's challenge was voiced in a simple, but effective way. Yet its celebration of trivial culture and its comment on female subordination, whether intentionally or not,

marked the shift of boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, signalling the advent of postmodernism.

Not only did white feminists of the 1960s begin to raise awareness and challenge accepted views of women’s issues such as sexuality (see 2.3) in what is now acknowledged as postmodern art, but women art historians also challenged traditional aesthetic boundaries by focusing on women artists, with regard to both their art and their lives. They examined women’s experience as artists in the context of feminist debates on the relationship between gender, culture, and creativity, for example (Chadwick 1996: 8). They realised that women’s art was inseparable from the ideologies that generally defined their place in Western culture, and “demonstrated how patriarchy is structured through men’s control over the power of seeing women” (Chadwick 1996: 12). They believed that since the real nature of male and female cannot be determined, gender is a matter only of representation (Chadwick 1996: 9, 11).

A painting by Wayne Thibaud, *Women and Cosmetics* (1963-1966), for example, comments on a woman that is “unmasked from her artifice” (*Twentieth Century Art Book* 1996: 458). In *God giving Birth* (1969, fig. 15), the Swedish artist, Sjöö Marcia, makes a powerful comment on accepted gender roles by the portrayal of God as a feminine body of indeterminate race. At the time of its first viewing, this painting was criticised as blasphemous and obscene (Chadwick 1997: 232, *Dictionary of Women Artists, Volume II* 1997. Sv “Sjöö”). In *Caffé Greco*, painted in 1976 by Sicilian artist, Renato Guttuso, no restrictions appear to confine the women depicted. The painting includes, for example, a lesbian couple. New Zealand artist, Fahey Jacqueline’s *My skirt’s in your Fucking room* (1978-1979) goes further. It could be read as a message of protest and subversion, an interpretation that seems to be confirmed by *I paint myself* (1981-82), in which she depicts herself as naked and un-idealised, surrounded by household clutter. In this way she explores the myths of idealised femininity and ordered domesticity (*Dictionary of Women Artists, Volume I* 1997. Sv “Fahey”).

Another response to accepted gender roles is that of photographer Rosy Martin. Her *Dapper Daddy* (fig. 16), which she produced 1986 in collaboration with Jo

Spence, is interpreted by Meskimmon (1996: 81) according to psychoanalytic theory, as a sign of the empowered masculine position that is assumed by boys in their development but denied girls. Catherine Opie also makes a powerful comment on gender in her photographs, of which, *Bo* (1994), is a good example.

The photographs of Cindy Sherman comment specifically on the instability of gender. She portrays her own body according to the conventions of advertising and film, attempting to expose “the fiction of a ‘real’ woman behind the images that Western Culture constructs” (Chadwick 1996: 383). To act out the psychoanalytical notion of femininity as pretence, she draws on images of the 1950s and 1960s (Chadwick 1996: 383). Her images depict stereotypical roles played by the women of her time, which range from bored suburban housewives, through centrefolds, to heroines. Some examples are *Untitled Film Still #3* (1977, fig. 17), the series, *Untitled Film Still* (1979), *Untitled* (1981), *Untitled (#93)* (1981) and *Untitled (#150)* (1983). The lack of descriptive titles emphasises the anonymity of stereotype. Her photographs are carefully worked out to obscure details, which enables the viewer to complete the images according to their memory or role consciousness (Arnason 1986: 649). Like many postmodern artists, she “suggests that the self is not the self-created, but a product of a culture suffused with photographic images” (*The American Art Book* 1999. Sv “Sherman”).

Another photographer, Barbara Kruger, attempts to destabilise woman as an object by using image and text together. Two examples of her work in which this technique is employed, are *Untitled* (containing the phrase *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*) (1981) (Chadwick 1996:382), and “*Untitled*” (containing the phrase *I Shop Therefore I Am*) (1987) (*The American Art Book* 1999. Sv “Kruger”). According to Dunning (not dated), Kruger is particularly “concerned with issues of gender inequality, racial bigotry, and financial greed...” In *We have received orders not to move* (1982, fig. 18) and *Surveillance Is Busy Work* (1984), she also questions cultural attitudes that take individuals for granted (*The American Art Book* 1999. Sv “Kruger”).

As seen in the previous chapter, liberal and psycho-analytical feminists as well as existentialists believe that androgyny is the solution to women's oppression. Debbie Humphry is a freelance photographer who has explored this theme in *Computer Operator with her Male Colleagues* (1996, fig. 19) and *Female Fire Fighter in Sleeping Quarters with Male Colleagues* (1996, fig. 20). Jobling (1997: 13) describes the central female figure in Humphry's *Computer Operator with her Male Colleagues* (1996, fig. 19), as follows:

She wears "a short haircut and a suit and tie, the traditional formal garb of white-collar male employees. At first glance we do not immediately discern that she is a woman; the baggy, ill-fitting suit and crossed arms disguise her breasts and her gaze is as direct as those of either of the men who flank her. Nor should we necessarily assume that her choice of masculine attire signifies the fact that she is either a lesbian or a female transvestite. Rather, the photograph represents an androgynous masquerade that subverts both the normative dress codes and the power structure of the workplace..."

Since the central woman in this photograph seems to be overshadowed by her (standing) male colleagues, Jobling (1997: 13) interprets Humphry as suggesting that it is going to take more than this kind of masquerade to effect equality in the workplace.

The female figure is even more indiscernible in Humphry's *Female Fire Fighter in Sleeping Quarters with Male Colleagues* (1996, fig. 20). Jobling (1997: 13) writes that with this photograph the artist portrays the "sexual ambiguities concerning what constitutes appropriate jobs for men and women..." It is impossible to discern the sex of the figures portrayed. Jobling (1997: 14) interprets this as Humphry's comment on the exclusivity of so-called masculine or feminine, straight or gay, occupation. He writes that Humphry deals with "more fluid boundaries, which resist the idea of a pre-determined or core gender and sexual identity" (Jobling 1997: 14).

Paula Rego's work contrasts with the work of the photographers mentioned above in several respects. She is a painter who "returned to the figurative tradition of history painting". According to Chadwick (1996: 397), the "heroic

scale, harsh lighting, and theatrical compositions” in which she depicts traditionally oppressed female figures “propose a new iconography for the female heroine”. *Girl Lifting Up Her Skirt to a Dog* (1986), for example, portrays the frustration and anger that is often present in relationships that are based on some sort of dependency on another (McEwen 1997: 223). *The Family* (1988) and *Snare* (1987) depict women whose nurturing or domesticity can be read as sinister. In *Sit* (1994, fig. 21), Rego depicts a pregnant or ‘confined’ woman in an armchair with her arms bound. In *Bride* (1994) a victimised and exhausted girl accepts her situation with resignation (McEwen 1997: 223). In these works Rego seems to reveal more explicit anger at the position of women than the photographers described above.

In *The Yellow Painting* (1992) by Sue Williams, this explicitness is depicted in words. Phrases such as “One thing I’ve gotten with age, is free to choose” and “This [art] is not social commentary” (Archer 1997: 211) occur directly in her work. Despite the disclaimer that her art is not social commentary, she makes a powerful comment on gendered roles in society, for example in *La Sistine* (1992, fig. 22). According to Fineberg (1988: 466), she uses “raw, withering, direct frankness about the body” (“Let me begin by apologising for my breasts”, “the project of awareness comes to a halt”, ‘bikini lines blossom’, ‘lets join the guys’) to express her view.

This questioning of accepted perceptions of the body and of beauty also occurs in the work of Joan Semmel and of Rachel Lewis. *Me without mirrors* (1974, fig. 23) shows Semmel’s body as she sees it, lying on her back and looking down, without interference, influence or distortion from mirrors (Borzello 1998: 161). *Am I still a Woman* (1990) depicts Lewis as an anorexic against a background collage of the tabloid headlines and pin-up pictures that influence women’s perceptions of their bodies (Borzello 1998: 173). Further comments on the body and especially beauty, are made by Jenny Saville. In *Branded* (1992) mammoth female nudes are depicted with brand marks reading ‘decorative’, ‘support’ or ‘delicate’. In this way, a viewer is confronted with his or her own “conventional response to imperfect bodies” (Borzello 1998: 179).

Not only do women artists question accepted perceptions of beauty, but the fact that men have been in sole charge of the representation of the female body has specifically been contested (Evans 1997: 82). Challenging the “construction [of the female body] as a passive object of male desire”, women artists are beginning to explore “women’s desire and sexual pleasure” (Chadwick 1996: 14). In this regard, artist Nancy Spero’s mature work, *The Black and the Red III* (1994), reflects her radical turn to fundamental feminism, in her portrayal of active, self-confident, independent and sexually self-determined women (Walther 1998: 384).

From the above, it is clear that women pictorial artists generally tended to use traditional mediums and methods to express their discontent about their own social reality until this time. However, their questioning of traditional assumptions of art making and art history in the 1970s, led them to the celebration of their cultural traditions, such as sewing, working with alternative materials and, in particular, photography and installations. The status of both medium and method would drastically change after this.

Remarkable in this context, is that male artists working during the 1980s and 1990s exclude “virtually all women” (Chadwick 1996: 378-79). Examples of such painters are the Neo-expressionists, Julian Schnabel, David Salle and Francesco Clemente. When women are represented, they are subjected to a traditional male opinion. In Al Hansen’s *Calliope Venus* (1986, fig. 24), for example, a robust female form is constructed of Hershey’s chocolate bar wrappers that contains words such as ‘Hers’, ‘wow’ ‘first in’ ‘cake in’, ‘ant size’, ‘ate’, ‘late’ and ‘he ate her’. The figure’s brown thigh-high stockings are delineated by the following phrases “ooh like me like me” and “oh lick me lick me cool”. One does not need to be a feminist to find it alarming that the *The American Art Book* (1999. Sv “Hansen”) describes this work as a “humorous collage, reminiscent of Dada with its harmless exaggeration of stereotypical sexy terms, reminiscent of Fluxus...” Another example is Eric Fischl’s *Bad Boy* (1981), described in *The Twentieth Century Art Book* (1996. Sv “Fischl”) as “a picture full of complexity, ambiguity and erotic symbolism inflicted by secrets

and taboos”, which refers to the boy’s pubescent sexuality, while disregarding the nude’s more explicit pose.

In contrast with male artists who avoid the depiction of women, British male artist, R.B. Kitaj, is fascinated by sexual debates. The technical play between drawing and painting seems to enhance the sexual drama in his *Sighs from Hell* (1979), while the depiction of a female prototype in *The Mother* (1977, fig. 25), *The Rise of Fascism* (1979-80), and *The yellow hat* (1980) celebrates female sexuality. Quoting Kitaj, Livingstone (1999: 197) mentions that *Women & Men* (1991-93), reflects his view that the two sexes are too rarely seen together in paintings and seldom in heterosexual relationships:

“Women and men, as a subject in painting, can help bring beauty and good cheer and erotic pleasure back from wherever those things have gone. Amen to women.”

3.4.2 DISADVANTAGEMENT

Although race and class are issues that have spanned the centuries examined in this study, renewed challenges against established structures began to be offered by black and other artists on the issue of race after the 1960s. As in the case of women, however, the support of society was needed for significant change to take place.

As seen in Chapter Two (see 2.3.6), black women’s outspokenness on social and feminist matters was first noted in 1851. Before and during this time several mainly white male artists depicted the slave trade and the struggle for abolition, as can be seen in *The Slave Ship* (1840) by J M W. Turner, *The Slave Trade* by Francois Biard (1840), *Last Sale of the Slaves* (1875) by Thomas Satterwhite, *Slaves waiting for sale - Richmond, Virginia* by Eyre Crowe (1861), and William Tolman Carlton’s *Watch Meeting Dec 31st 1862*, *Waiting for the Hour* (1863). These portrayals do not specifically distinguish between male and female domains.

Blacks living and working together were depicted by Eastman Johnson's *Negro life at the South* (1859), Frank Buchser's *The Song of Mary Blane* (1870) and Thomas Waterman Wood's *A Southern Cornfield, Nashville, Ten.* (1861, fig. 26). Just as in the case of (white) women, these slaves were depicted as objects. They were perhaps not as faceless as the women, but they were objects in a more literal way than the women.

As society's conscience was raised regarding abolitionists issues, several paintings portrayed the fight for or flight to liberty, such as Benjamin Robert Haydan's *The Anti-Slavery Society Convention 1840* (1841), Frenchman Francois Biard's *Proclamation de la Liberté des Noirs aux Colonies* (not dated), John Adam Houston's *The Fugitive Slave* (1851), Richard Ansdell's *Hunted Slaves* (1861), Thomas Moran's *The Slave Hunt* (1862), Eastman Johnson's *A ride for Liberty* (c. 1862) and Theodor Kaufman's *On to Liberty* (1867). Hélène Rudder-du Ménil's *Liberty* (1897, fig. 27) is an embroidered panel that depicts an African woman embracing a white allegorical female figure of liberty. The significance of this work in the context of this study is not only the fact that Rudder du Ménil was a woman working in a traditional woman's medium, but that she seems to have understood the connection between the oppression of blacks and that of women.

Despite the advances gained in the nineteenth century, the images of blacks reflected their cultural isolation and social restrictions as late as in the 1950s. *Melancholy Negro* (1936), painted by Glyn Philpot, is a good example. Philip Evergood's *The Future belongs to them* (1938-53) is an idealistic allegory that depicts racial integration (black and white infants embrace), which also reflects this isolation. Images of African-American life, such as those in the work of Marion Greenwood *Mississippi Girl* (1945) and *Rehearsal for African Ballet* (1945), *The Window* (c. 1950), portraying a black girl daydreaming in a window, and *The Window* (c. 1953), portraying a band of black musicians, add to this picture. This artist was considered so important, that she was commissioned by the Mexican government to execute a mural at the San Nicolas Hidalgo University in Morelia on the subject of Trascan Indian life (c. 1932). Her 1965

mural; *Tribute to Women* (fig. 28), which depicted women of different race, from Chinese through Haitian, African and Portuguese to Mexican, was later vandalised.

As remarked above, there is an obvious connection between black women's consciousness and that of the political liberation movements of 1960s and 1970s (see 3.6). Audrey Flack portrays several turning points in American social history, such as civil rights protests and riots in Harlem. *Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Marching for Freedom* (1956, fig. 29), in which she depicts white nuns marching with black men, is a case in point. In *War protest March* (1968, fig. 30), she depicts the protest against the Vietnam War, once again using both black and white figures (Gouma-Peterson 1992: 54). She also explores the role of women in society, painting several portraits of black females that reveal their social position. *Old Mexican Orange Seller* (1967) and *Two women grieving over Kennedy outside a Dallas Hospital* (1964) are significant examples.

3.5 RECLAIMING WOMANHOOD

As the social boundaries between established values and the oppressed were slowly challenged, boundaries between conventional ideas and art practice were also affected. In some cases the art world transgressed these boundaries. Chadwick (1996: 9) writes that because the relationship between 'fine art' traditions and 'craft' concerned early feminists, they focused their attention not only on the work of neglected women artists, but also on the "unequaled traditions of domestic and utilitarian production by women". Their questioning of fixed categories revealed that the work of women had long been "presented in a negative relation to creativity and high culture". Their analysis therefore exposed the fact that traditional binary Western thought had been "replicated within art history and used to reinforce sexual difference as a basis for aesthetic valuations" (Chadwick 1996: 9), which resulted in a different approach to making art between the two sexes. Other binary categories that have been

challenged more recently by postmodern artists are, for example, art and craft, black and white, nature and culture, and analysis and intuition.

Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke (1989: 8) confirm that the distinction between ‘art’ and ‘craft’ results from binary thinking. She writes that the word ‘art’ was used for the first time in 1668 in England, to describe specifically painting and sculpture. Thus the term described ‘non-functional hand-made objects’ of beauty, rather than commodities. Only in 1876, was the word ‘craftsman’ used to refer to “one who practised ‘handicraft’” (Nettleton & Hammond-Tooke 1989: 8). In these *hand-made* objects, *functionality* was emphasised, rather than aesthetic qualities. However, in the postmodern paradigm, the distinctions between these two fields have been seriously challenged. In 1993, for example, a visual arts group of the Culture and Development Conference (1993) proposed “that the plastic and visual arts be broadly defined so as to erase the distinction between ‘fine art’ and ‘crafts’” (Culture and Development Conference 1995: 61). In this way the ‘stuff of women’ was reclaimed, acknowledged and promoted as legitimate human activities.

Black women have made a particular contribution to the challenge against binary thinking. The challenge to the distinction between art and craft, for example, was issued by American artists, Faith Ringgold and Betye Saar. Not only did they articulate the realities of black women’s lives, but they also exchanged traditional grounds (canvas) and mediums (paint) for soft sculpture, challenging technical assumptions of western art traditions. As seen in the soft sculptures *Mrs. Jones and Family* (1973, fig. 31) (Nelson-Landry 2001: 2), and *Aunt Bessie and Aunt Edith*, from the “Family of Women Mask” series (1974), Ringgold’s art transgressed social and aesthetic boundaries. She is also described as a “pioneer in using quilts as a high art form” (Nelson-Landry 2001: 1), she celebrated narrative as family tradition and as an art medium, for example *The Wedding: Lover’s Quilt No 1* (1986) (Chadwick 1996: 362, 417), and *#3 The Picnic at Giverny* (1991). Betye Saar, on the other hand, went beyond conventional methods by incorporating stereotypical images of blacks in collages and three-dimensional constructions. *Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972, fig. 32)

and *Is Jim Crow really dead* (1972) are relevant examples. In describing the *Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), Rosenberg (not dated: 2) comments that “Saar has, in effect, seized control of the power of images to define identity ... we cannot see it without confronting our own values and morality, whether one is a Black female or a White male of European descent.” Examples of the collective idea of the female artists, such as Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett and Raymond Saunders, “focus attention between the black community and the American mainstream.” The occasional images which included blacks, “tended to confirm white conventions and stereotypes.” (Chadwick 1996: 341). In *Die* (1967), a work by Ringgold, the correlation with the stereotypical images is significant because of her contradictory use of black and white men and women and children together in a violent environment. In this work, everyone, regardless of skin colour or gender, is subjected to violence. The work, *The Flag Is Bleeding* (1967), is another example.

The more seductive approach to blackness and gender in the work of Black artist, Kara Walker, who has identified herself as “a Free Negress of noteworthy talent”, forces viewers to reexamine their prejudices. Described by Janovy (1998) as producing “works that deal in startling ways with race relations, past and present”, Walker also touches on gender issues. In her series, *The Means to an End ... A Shadow Drama in Five Acts* (1995), she arranges “exquisitely detailed black-paper cutouts of stereotypical characters- pickaninnies, sambos, slave mistresses and masters - directly onto the gallery wall, (and) constructs tableaux, parodying raunchy, racial clichés [sic] like the myth of hypersexuality...” (Hyat 1997). In her own words, “it operates just as derogatory stereotypes do, making a reduction out of the real person”. However, what is not mentioned is that the medium was used in Victorian times to depict the loved ones and ancestors of white middle-class families. Perhaps Walker was making a statement regarding the continued subjugation of blacks in society.

In addition to the challenge to the content of accepted art and the medium of art making, postmodern artists, male and female, black and white, also began to use alternative methods. The freedom created in this way was used to make powerful

social comments. In 1985, for example, the activists, Guerilla Girls, displayed a poster (print medium) around SoHo, New York, that read as follows: “When racism & sexism are no longer fashionable, what will your art collection be worth?” (*Guerilla Girls* 1987, fig. 33) (Chadwick 1996: 420-421). According to Chadwick, the group intended to expose racism as well as sexism, as present in gallery and museum shows, for example “How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?” (*Guerilla Girls*, not dated), as well as in art publications.

Another example of an artist who uses an alternative medium to contest popular or fixed societal boundaries and established art conventions is Silvia Kolbowski in, for instance, *Inadequate History of Conceptual Art* (c. 1972-1881), which Moore (1999: 2) describes as “‘idea art’ in what has to be its purist form”. Betye and Allison Saar, the mother and daughter pair, described as “assemblage artists”, “create new worlds from ‘found objects’ ... recycling ... ideas, materials, and experiences, forming a strong narrative element” (Anonymous, not dated: 1). Their collaborative video, *Betye and Allison Saar: Women Of The Arts* (not dated) is a case in point. So also is Barbara Kruger’s work, which addresses the viewer directly. As one of the ‘leading visual polemicists’ of contemporary art, her “unique form of cultural critique” through the use of signatory text on billboards, “cuts through the grease to expose the uses and abuses of power that construct our everyday lives” (Dunning, not dated: 1).

Powerful comments are also made on the constraints of contemporary life through traditional mediums, such as oil painting in the case of artist Ida Applebroog¹⁹. Her multi-panelled paintings address the “social and psychological deviations of daily life” in, for example, *Mother, mother I am Ill* (c. 1987-1997) (Anonymous 1998: 1), *Rainbow Caverns* (1987, fig. 34) and *ooze/whose* (1991). Likewise, Dorothy Cross uses traditional bronze sculpture

¹⁹ Ida Applebroog has also made use of video to raise public awareness on child victimization, for example in *Belladonna* (1990).

for her installation, *Irish and English* (not dated) to reveal the “chauvinist and colonizing impetus of mapping” (Isaak, not dated: 1). Another example of the alternative use of medium for protest or comment, is Helen Chadwick’s *Glossolalia* (1993), described by the artist herself, perhaps a little garrulously, as “a work that would play off how you read gender and yet be impossible to define, so that a phallic structure is not simplistically penile and something more supposedly feminine also doesn’t quite live up to that stereotyping” (Chadwick 1996: 414). She adds that the work’s “eroticism is difficult to locate or fix...” In the work, she combines bronze to cast lambs’ tongues and found objects such as discarded Russian fox furs to communicate her views.

There can be no doubt that women artists have come into their own. No topic is out of bounds for them. Neither is any medium of art-making. They are also free to choose the context for their work. However, they still express their outrage at societal boundaries that restrict their daily existence. According to women artists therefore, many hurdles remain for women to be crossed.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter intended to examine the conventions revealed in art that have restricted women, spanning the time periods defined in Chapter Two. Although it was probably not the intention of earlier artists to portray such conventions, this study has shown that many boundaries that have restricted women in the past, are clearly detectable in works of art made in those periods. During the second wave of feminist thought, however, women’s oppression has been deliberately expressed, especially by women artists, not only through controversial content, but through alternative mediums and methods. Although women artists can now make art freely, the focus has changed from individual women as a symbol of oppression to the context within which women exist as a collective.

In the next two chapters, the work of two particular artists is analysed against feminist trends of their time. The purpose of Chapter Four is to examine what

Tretchikoff's work reveals regarding the boundaries that confined the women during his lifetime, while Chapter Five analyses Sterns work for signs of the boundaries confining the women of her time.

CHAPTER IV

VLADIMIR TRETCHIKOFF: ROMANTICISING TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

It is possible that the established form of pictorial depiction in South Africa in the mid-twentieth century aided the acceptance, accessibility and popularity of Tretchikoff's art. In general, his works do not reflect an awareness of the development of feminist thought and have not proved to contest cultural or gender boundaries. In fact, his depiction of exquisite women seems to have romanticised their traditional and social constraints. In an attempt to establish whether these assumptions are correct, this chapter analyses his portrayal of women, following the methodology proposed by Dietrich and described in Chapter One (see 1.6.3.2).

4.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Vladimir Grigorovich Tretchikoff was born in 1913 in Siberia. Tretchikoff's family immigrated to Habrin, China, when he was four. Having escaped the Russian revolution, Tretchikoff was orphaned at age eleven, after which he and his siblings had to support themselves (Olivier 1967: 72, Truter 1992: 30). At the age of 14, Tretchikoff and his brother Kostya shared a room in Habrin and lived from hand to mouth. To pay for school and their living expenses, Tretchikoff had several part time jobs, one of which was to take commissions for portraits, which he drew in sanguine crayon. Encouraged by his brother, he entered a competition for public portraits of Lenin and Sun-Yat Sen, omitting to mention his age. Having won the commission he and Kostya set off to Shanghai, from where Tretchikoff planned to go to Paris to further his studies. However, Tretchikoff's other brother, Fixer, heard of their good fortune and persuaded them to start a boarding house in Shanghai instead. Although they ran a profitable business, they had to take out a loan, which Tretchikoff paid off by working as a cartoonist at the American newspaper, the

Evening-Post. When Fixer and Kostya cheated him out of his share of the money and the business (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 88-89), the Russian community supported him. It was at a Russian club that he met his wife Natalie at nineteen. They were married in 1935, after which they settled in Singapore (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 89, 100).

Despite his lack of formal training, Tretchikoff worked as a cartoonist for the newspaper the *Straits Times Annual* in Singapore. Other sources of income were propaganda work for the British Ministry of Information in the Far East, a commercial artist for an advertising company and writing 'Tretchikoff Fashions', a weekly feature on the evening gowns he designed for Natalie, for the *Straits Times*. Tretchikoff also taught art twice a week and, in 1934, held his first solo show in Shanghai at twenty²⁰ (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 11, 102, Loots 1997: 50).

Before Singapore fell to the Japanese in World War II, Natalie and their daughter Mimi left for an unknown destination. Tretchikoff and others were taken prisoner and jailed in Java. After a year in prison, he was released because he was Russian and an artist. He remained on parole in Jakarta until the end of the war (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 110). After his release from Java in 1946, when Tretchikoff established the whereabouts of Natalie and Mimi, he immigrated to Cape Town, South Africa (Truter 1996: 45).

Nearly a year passed before he felt it was time to hold an exhibition of his work painted during his captivity. Tretchikoff joined the Association of Arts of Cape Town and booked the gallery in Church Street, which he considered a modest but highly thought of gallery. Here he met many of the better-known South African artists, such as Irma Stern, musicians, writers and others interested in the world of the arts. They were intrigued to hear of his adventures and plans to hold a one-man show. They were also, however, doubtful whether he would succeed in South Africa, as he was unknown (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 176).

Since Irma Stern, a renowned South African painter, was interested in

²⁰ His painting *Penny Divers*, of this exhibition, was chosen to represent British Malay at the New York World's Fair in 1939 (Loots 1997: 50).

Tretchikoff's story, he invited her to view his paintings. Shortly after her visit, Tretchikoff received a letter from the Association of Arts requesting him to submit some of his work to determine whether it was suitable for exhibition. When his work was turned down, Tretchikoff remarked that the method of selection had been based on a criterion not applied before, and that the decision appeared to have been influenced by Stern (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 177-178). Shortly afterwards, a newspaper reported that "... the Association of Arts had been 'fortunate enough' to arrange a special exhibition at short notice of the latest works of Irma Stern" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 178), which seemed to confirm his suspicion. However, he never ascertained what had really transpired between Stern and the Association of Arts (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 178).

If the Association of Arts considered Tretchikoff's work inferior, the feeling was mutual. In his biography (1973: 177), he writes "I had been warned there might be prejudice in South Africa against a newcomer, but I felt the decision was ridiculous. I had attended several exhibitions in the association's gallery already, the work of its members, and had found it mediocre." Interestingly, many of the numerous exhibitions held by the New Group after its establishment in 1938 to introduce modern works of art to the South African public, were met with incomprehension and disapproval (Berman 1983: 308). Tretchikoff must therefore have reflected the views of the general public.

Whatever the reason for the difference between Stern and Tretchikoff, he approached the Maskew Miller Gallery after the refusal of the Association of Arts to exhibit his work, and was accepted. Publicity for the exhibition was modest, but, although attendance was slow at first, queues had formed at the lift carrying visitors to the gallery by the third day (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973:182). A 1948 *Cape Times* review of this exhibition reflected what may perhaps be seen as the public's relief at being presented with understandable art: "[Tretchikoff's paintings] show much thoughtful interpretation and are blended with a sincerity that indicates a return to sound craftsmanship and the end of the crazy obscurantism which so often, in recent years, has passed into the realms of a transient glory of so-called highbrowism through lack of essential technical

groundwork...” (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 183).

Eighteen months later, Tretchikoff held a second exhibition at the Maskew Miller Gallery. Despite the opinion of sceptic critics that he would not achieve his first ‘fluke’ of success, the exhibition proved to be extremely popular, and another financial success (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 190). Despite the fact that it once again received heavy criticism from critics and established artists, therefore Tretchikoff extended the show to Johannesburg, exhibiting in the Carlton Hotel²¹.

The turning point of Tretchikoff’s focus on art occurred when he exhibited the same works in Durban. Ironically, Durban was known as “the graveyard of the arts” at the time. Irma Stern had received the “poorest reception of all her shows in South Africa...” in the city, and had responded by promising never to return (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973:197). For this occasion, Tretchikoff had decided to print reproductions of the *Dying Swan* (1949-1952) pasted on catalogues that was for sale. Although catalogues did not usually sell well, Tretchikoff, had sold 10 000 autographed catalogues by the end of the first week. This made him realise the potential of selling reproductions as support while the originals were on exhibition (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 198), but it also brought him tremendous criticism from the art world. Critics accused him of breaking up his paintings in a thousand pieces by reproducing them (Olivier 1967: 73). Tretchikoff’s response that he would much rather shares his art with millions (of people) than with individuals was not received well by the art world (Olivier 1967: 73). True to his views, Tretchikoff jumped at the idea to have a book published of his work as suggested by the Central News Agency. However, he boldly turned down their offer for an inexpensive portfolio, wanting only a publication of quality. Reluctant at first, publisher Howard Timmins of Cape Town agreed to risk the undertaking, which turned out to be a huge success (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 195-196).

During the 1950s, to the dismay of ardent critics and the New Group, Tretchikoff received an invitation from the Order of the Rosicrucian to exhibit in America. The New Group sent letters to authoritative bodies in both South Africa and America

²¹ Tretchikoff exhibited in hotels and stores such as Garlicks and John Orrs because these venues could house his many visitors comfortably (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973:186).

condemning his art and claiming that he was not in any way representative of South Africa. At this, Tretchikoff challenged them to participate in a competitive exhibition, but they never responded. It appears that the antipathetic feelings were so strong, that Tretchikoff's studio was twice vandalised before he left for America²² and he consequently had to repaint the damaged works on his arrival in America (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 199, 201, 207-209).

Tretchikoff's American travelling exhibitions lasted for three years, starting at the Rosicrucian's headquarters in San José in 1952. Shows ran in cities such as San Francisco, Dallas, Chicago and cities in Canada. During this time, the prints of his work, together with the originals brought him an income of 50 thousand dollars a year²³ (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 226). At first Tretchikoff and his family wanted to settle in New York, but he found the atmosphere stifling and was not able to paint. After four years, they decided to return to Cape Town (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 233).

On his return in 1956, Tretchikoff began to reproduce his paintings in earnest. Prints, such as *The Lost Orchid* (c. 1940, Java)²⁴, *Dying Swan* (1949-1952), and *Chinese Girl* (c. 1952, America, fig. 35) became best sellers in London. Other international exhibitions included a second show at Harrods in London in 1961 and a Canadian tour in 1965. He prepared for his 1968 exhibitions at Garlicks in Cape Town and John Orr's in Johannesburg for three years. Although he was apprehensive of facing the most critical audience of his career, attendance records were broken again. This made Tretchikoff feel that even after the seven years the critics had nothing new (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 243).

Although success was never a shy companion in Tretchikoff's career, he claims to be as surprised at it as the critics were, and does not deny that he loved and enjoyed every minute of it. In later years, Tretchikoff did not produce much. In an

²² A stage designer who rented a studio above Tretchikoff's studio was arrested for the attacks but the case was dismissed (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 208).

²³ The Rosicrucian Supply Bureau offered prints on special price for \$6,50 a print (Advert in the Rosicrucian Digest 1953: 299).

²⁴ Tretchikoff did not always date his works, but mostly indicated where they were painted. Therefore a name of a place is given where applicable instead of dates.

interview with Penny Smythe in 1989, he said that he focused on handling his worldwide business, publishing all his collections.

4.3 ANALYSIS

According to Tretchikoff, he had always been interested in drawing and painting although there was no influence by or apparent capability in his family. He had not received any formal art schooling and was self-taught, which, in his opinion, was the most valuable training an artist could have (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 57, Truter 1992: 31). Timmins (1969: Introduction) notes that Tretchikoff did not wish to be influenced by other people's ideas, neither did he ascribe to a specific school of art.

4.3.1 Stylistic Background

Tretchikoff may, however, have benefited from a South African tradition of 'romantic naturalism', a term proposed by Esmé Berman (1983: 3). According to Berman (1983: 1, 3), early topographers and explorers set art on a course of 'tradition of allegorical scenes', which emphasised the scenic splendour of the country, while technical concerns such as finish and proportion, were of secondary concern. Drawing and painting were usually a "useful, incidental accomplishment rather than a creative medium of expression" (Berman 1983: 1). Although these works are regarded as informative, and a mere documentation of the landscape, they are also representative of the artists' admiration and embellishment of the detail of exotic landscapes. In Berman's opinion, these works are invaluable as Africana, but 'less significant' as art (Berman 1983: 1).

Berman ascribes the inclination to paint in the tradition of 'romantic naturalism' to the inability of most of the artists who were painting in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century to come to terms with an environment that, in its structure, colour, light and atmosphere, bore very little resemblance to that of

Europe (Berman 1983: 2-3)²⁵. Most of these artists were of English extraction and had received their artistic training at British institutions, the influential painter, Edward Roworth²⁶, being one example. The works of these artists perpetuated the ‘tried and true conventions’ of Europe, or variants of British naturalism. This style was common practice at the time, and was regularly seen at exhibitions. It was also the type of art likely to be accepted by a public, which is rather patronisingly described by Berman (1983: 7) as: “grossly ill-informed...[with] a few knowledgeable and discriminating patrons...[that] cannot sustain a country’s total artistic effort”. She adds that the majority of urban citizens were not particularly interested in art and had never been to an art gallery, nor were they experienced enough to recognise the quality of painting and their general taste was “cautious and conservative in the extreme” (Berman 1983: 7).

In addition, there was a general concern in South Africa at the time (c. 1948) to create a distinctive national culture and, simultaneously, a ‘national art’ (Berman 1983: 12). This resulted in an “assiduous concentration on local subject-matter” and a type of ‘tourist-poster’ art “descriptive of the domestic or tribal life, or customs of South African natives” (Berman 1983: 12). Martienssen (1966: x) lists *Zulu kraals*, Karoo landscapes, mountains, farmsteads of the Cape and ‘colonial fragments of Cape Town itself’ as examples of this genre, and cites as examples of realist representation the work of Frans Oerder and Pieter Wenning²⁷, which was popular among many people throughout the country. She also notes that despite the introduction of modernism, artists continued to describe the South African environment as something exotic and remarkable as seen from the European

²⁵ The lack of artistic and thematic innovation can be ascribed to the fact that most artists who settled in South Africa at the end of the 19th century (1889), were either self-taught or guided by teachers schooled in the Academies of England. A small community of professional and semi-professional artists was active in the Cape at this time (Berman 1983: 2).

²⁶ Edward Roworth had settled in Cape Town in 1902 and his career included service as the President of the South African Society of Artists, Professor of Fine art at the University of Cape Town’s Michaelis School and Director of the South African National Gallery (Berman 1975: 4).

²⁷ According to Berman (1975: 29), Oerder’s concern with the objective truth resulted in his emphasising the literal content of his paintings, such as in *Still-life Reflections* (not dated), and *Still-life with pumpkins* (1867-1944). Wenning on the other hand, emphasised pictorial form, considering the physical appearance and decorative qualities

point of view.

While Berman (1983: 7) criticises the South African public for being ill-informed, and believes that the attitudes described here did not contribute to the ‘indigenous aesthetic’ quality of South African expression²⁸, Gracyk (1990: 120) writes that “an understanding of art is not itself preferable to the enjoyment of art and that, given a choice between mere understanding and untutored enjoyment, people choose the latter”. Since Berman (1983: 3) acknowledges that the style exhibited a fair degree of professionalism as late as the end of the 19th century (Berman 1983: 3), it is perhaps not so strange that its formal familiarity was emotionally and mentally accessible to the majority of the public.

Tretchikoff’s work is generally classified as what Bell (1977: 41) calls ‘descriptive paintings’. This type of painting merely constitutes a narrative, suggests emotion and conveys information. It therefore does not stimulate the intellect or the aesthetic emotions of the viewer, but elicits only instant emotional response in the most common language understandable to all. According to Bell, this lack of informed aesthetics and involvement of the intellect of the viewer instantly denies objects the status of art. Ward (1952: 35) notes that Tretchikoff’s main objective was to “convey a message that is usually understood by the average person”. Tretchikoff himself believed that the strength of his depiction lay in its simplicity. In line with this, his fans seldom used the words: ‘balance’ or ‘form’. Although they were not highly critical, however, they knew what they liked (Druce 1962: 5). The international enjoyment his paintings aroused is perhaps the best-known feature of Tretchikoff’s work. It is also, what he has been criticised for most fervently.

In the course of his career Tretchikoff has, repeatedly been called the ‘King of Kitsch’ (Truter, 1996: 44). His work seems to depend on the public’s perceived artistic illiteracy rather than contribute to their aesthetic experience. His concern for clear understanding is reflected in his simple content, which ensures only

in the shape and colour of his work as seen in *Dusty Shelf* (not dated).

²⁸ “Insofar as such an aim implied allegiance to a distinctive national tradition it was self-limiting: so-called ‘traditional’ South African art was decidedly eclectic in style and

instant emotional recognition. This easy enjoyment is one reason why his work has been described as kitsch. According to Kulka (1988: 21-23), the subject matter of kitsch work elicits a sympathetic, patronising response that makes the viewer feel secure and comfortable. It reassures the viewer's "basic sentiments and beliefs" rather than to "disturb or question" the viewer by confronting him/her with unpleasant features of reality (Kulka 1988: 21-23). Kitsch shows a disregard for detail and consequently also oversimplifies and exaggerates certain features (Kulka 1988: 22). As such, kitsch portrays universal stereotypes. It therefore derives its visual strength from the depicted subject that is universally recognised and generally considered pretty or emotionally charged (Kulka 1988: 23). Kulka (1988: 22) maintains that kitsch elicits an instant emotional response, in the most common language understandable to all, and also shows a disregard for detail (Kulka 1988: 22-23).

In line with this view, Nederveen Pieterse (1992: 225) suggests that the representation of 'otherness' is part of the general question of representation and stereotyping. Stereotype is an oversimplified mental image and categorises, typifies and establishes an image according to a ruling group's judgement. Schutz (Nederveen Pieterse 1992: 225) writes that the process of typification involves ignoring unique traits of a particular object and also placing that object in a category with others that share a similar trait or quality. These "[t]ypes are always formed in relation to some purpose at hand ... that determines which traits will be equalized and what 'individuality' will be ignored" (Nederveen Pieterse 1992: 225).

According to Kulka (1988: 18), the term 'kitsch' has been used as a synonym for 'worthless art', 'artistic rubbish' or simply 'bad art'. A more important feature is, however, that kitsch complies with the accepted painting conventions and certain artistic styles of the time (Kulka 1988: 22-23). Some styles that are better suited to kitsch than others are socialist realism and nineteenth century romanticism. Kulka (1988: 22) adds that the instant and effortless identification of kitsch keeps it from innovative styles that have not yet become familiar to a public. Art, in contrast,

depressingly barren in content" (Berman 1983: 12).

renews itself and challenges viewers constantly.

4.3.2 Portraits

Tretchikoff usually portrayed women as emotional, passive, beautiful, and/or exotic. The fact that he romanticised their traditional subjugation, however, ironically revealed their everyday mundane existence and emphasised their lack of choice and freedom of expression. While he referred to the submissiveness of women in writing at times, his works do not seem to reflect any awareness of female confinement.

Rainy day (South Africa, fig. 36) is an example of his 'descriptive paintings', which instantly elicit nostalgia. The inspiration for this painting came when he saw a child looking through 'raindrop-marked panes of a roadside window' (Timmins 1969: Introduction). It is not difficult to see that the picture was intended to link a rainy day to the 'rainy day' in the life of his subject. Timmins (1969: Introduction) quotes Tretchikoff as saying that "the picture should not only show a rainy day, but also that it was a 'rainy day' in her life. When I saw Francoise Hardy in Cape Town, I realised that she was the perfect model for what I had in mind - it was that faraway look in her eyes that my painting needed" (Timmins 1969: Introduction).

Not only is this painting, an example of Tretchikoff's ability to portray instant emotional recognition, but it also reveals of his ability to identify the 'kind of face' that would communicate a specific emotion (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 120). From the quote, it would seem that her facial features seemed to coincide with the general idea of beautiful features of the time, such as big blue eyes, full pink lips, flawless skin and tresses of blond hair. The painting can therefore be seen as pandering to public taste.

Although painted from a model, the painting shows a certain degree of disregard for Hardy's identity. Certain features (such as the blue eyes) were oversimplified and exaggerated, which provides a degree of 'unrealism' (Kulka 1988: 22), often found in kitsch. Other examples of such exaggeration are *The Tear* (South Africa), *The Bride* (South Africa), *The Dying Swan* (1949 - 1952), and *Weeping Rose*

(South Africa).

While the charge of oversimplification of features for maximum impact may seem harsh, Tretchikoff's belief that the success of a painting lay in the amount of emotion for and knowledge of a specific subject that the painter had, is questionable. Although he therefore believes that he managed to capture the essence of Chinese womanhood in *Chinese Girl*²⁹ (c. 1952, America, fig. 35), this portrayal "conform[s] to a limited repertoire of types, particularized by details of ethnic costume and hair treatment..." (Brilliant 1991: 107). Confirming his ignorance of this criticism, he relates: "I had seen other Chinese in the Western world, but somehow their Oriental mystery was lost...This girl, though, was something quite different: refined and demure, and with all the charm and infinite promise of the East" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 215).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Tretchikoff ignores the girl's individual identity, and further obscures it by generalising her race. He focuses instead, on a stereotypical rendition of an exotic type. The portrait could represent a number of Oriental races. Only the title indicates the origin of the model. Although some clues are provided in her costume, Tretchikoff's decision to portray the girl with fashionable 1950s curls also contrasts with the traditionally sleek straight hair of the Chinese. The Chinese girl's hair and costume, provide only decorative elements, a suggestion of her generalised exotic origin or culture, rather than an indication of her identity.

Tretchikoff's portraits of exotic women therefore confirm Brilliant's (1991: 107) notion that "exoticism is manifested through careful attention to details of costume, personal appearance, and 'race'... both anthropologically defined and culturally biased." None of these paintings provides enough content to suggest the nationality, individuality or identity of the women, thus exiling them to types, notably *Study in Umber* (South Africa, fig. 37), *Swazi Girl* (South Africa) and *Zulu*

²⁹

This girl reminded him of the model of whom he had painted two studies in Cape Town but had been destroyed in the vandalism before his departure for America. Tretchikoff was eager to take up the subject again. It was arranged that the girl pose for him (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 215). *Time Magazine* recently featured Margaret Thatcher attached to the Chinese girl's body. She also appeared in a Renault add together with the Mona Lisa

Girl (South Africa), *Basutu Girl* (South Africa), *Zulu Girl* (1952, South Africa). Tretchikoff seems to have ignored these women's distinguishing tribal wear, accessories and customs, choosing to portray them with similar turban-like headpieces. His use of blue or green in his portrayal of oriental or black women, as can be seen in *Chinese Girl* (c. 1952, America, fig. 35), *Swazi Girl* (South Africa), and *Kwela Boy* (c. 1950), confirms his inclination for generalisation. Once again the only clue to their identity is provided by the title of the work.

Although Tretchikoff showed the same a lack of awareness of colonial oppression as his contemporaries, he did seem to be aware of the public sensitivity to racial issues, deliberately courting controversy with his painting, *Black and White* (South Africa, fig. 38). This work portrays one side of a girl's face as white and the other as black. While the demure white girl's collar is of lace, the elegant black girl's is a neckpiece. She also wears a head wrap and an earring. However, in this work, Tretchikoff denies the women their right to individuality in favour of sensational controversy. The work therefore, once again, earned him a label. According to Kulka (1988: 25), kitsch "works in stereotypes ... [and] typically presents its subject matter in the most standard and schematic manner" that "completely lacks any individual features" such as an "idealised stereotype of a child" or, as in this case, women (Kulka 1988: 25).

Not only did Tretchikoff engage in visual stereotyping, but he also seemed to rely heavily on colour to emphasise the sensuality and exoticness of his models. In line with this, Buchner (1950: no 27) describes *Lady of the Tropics* (Java, fig. 39) as "colourful flowers and seductive charms of life in a 'lotus land' of brilliant sun and extravagant vegetation". While Timmins (1969: Introduction) notes his appreciation for Tretchikoff's use of "brilliant colour in a drab world", the artist himself wrote that he "was concerned with colour, the whole spectrum of the palette, streaming and whirling through his mind before ever he puts brush to canvas" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 135). Despite these flowery words, he was described in the Cape Times (c. 1952) as "[having] little sense of colour..." (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 200). Even this stylistic feature of his work was

(Spaarwater 1988: 9).

therefore controversial.

Of all the criticisms of Tretchikoff's work, the most severe concerns his intentions. While Richard Buchner (1950) suggests that the artist was conscious of female subjugation, and his subscripts in *Tretchikoff*, a book of reproductions of selected works, imply that Tretchikoff was aware that women are able to 'think', 'perceive', 'feel' and 'intend', the paintings themselves fail to support this notion. In *Lenka* or *Red Jacket* (c. 1946, Java, fig. 40), for example, the most famous painting for which the "half-caste" posed, the 'symbolic fusion' between Eastern and Western cultures suggested by Buchner (1950: no 5)³⁰, fails to move the viewer, because Lenka's physical appearance overrides the intended theme. The prominent nude figure that is only slightly covered by a red jacket, was told on occasion of the posing that "I'm not going to paint your figure as it really looks...It's too good to be true. Your breasts are too aggressive, too pointy. I've got to modify them" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 130). It is possible that the frame of mind reflected in this remark contributed to his failure to communicate his theme to a female audience.

Leonora Moltema, or Lenka as Tretchikoff preferred to call her, happened to be an intelligent and cultured woman, who spoke five languages, and was an artist as well as a qualified accountant (Buchner 1950: no 9, Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 131). On the promise that he would teach her Russian, she became Tretchikoff's model and inspiration for many paintings, among which *Eastern Fantasy* (c. 1946, Java), *Javanese half-caste* (Java), and *Lady of the Tropics* (Java, fig. 39). At one time Tretchikoff, who had met her in Java, remarked that he had "[r]arely ... met a woman more curious or more eager to learn" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 131).

None of these attributes is, however, communicated in the paintings. Only Lenka's exotic, sensual body reaches the viewer, in a provocative pose. In this regard, an American critic remarked that "Tretchikoff lures stunning female models to his canvas..." (Timmins 1969: Introduction). However, the being of the portrayed

³⁰ To illustrate the 'symbolic fusion' between Eastern and Western cultures, Tretchikoff used the *kriss*, a Malay dagger, as a symbol of Eastern traditions and culture, juxtaposed against a red tailored tunic (Buchner 1950: no 5).

women is restricted precisely by this ‘stunning’ effect, their societal issues an obvious secondary concern to both artist and viewer. This criticism seems to coincide with Brilliant’s (1991: 107) observation that in “the portrayal of exotic non-Westerners by Western artists for Western audiences ... the exoticism of the person portrayed is intentionally represented as the principal subject...”

In *Daughter of Java* (c. 1945, Java), *Civilised Bali* (Java, fig. 41), and *Madonna of the East* (Java), the subscripts refer specifically to the female subjugation of these cultures. According to (Buchner 1950: no 3), *Daughter of Java* (c. 1945, Java) is a portrayal of the “...submissive woman of Java who must content herself with being the background of man’s existence”. In this work, he writes that the “...hands are significant, for they are in the traditional pose of supplication and prayer”. In *Civilised Bali* (Java, fig. 41) Tretchikoff supposedly comments on Java as an ‘island of the lost’. The female figure is the central focus of the work, draped in a low cut slippery dress, further emphasised by her full frontal positioning and her dress band slipping from her left shoulder. He (Buchner 1950, no 10) interprets the woman as embodying Java’s ‘natural beauty’, ‘innocence’, and ‘traditional culture’, attributes that are traded for the “easy delights of Western ‘civilisation’”. He also writes that the “[w]omen (sic) have become self-conscious in their newly-acquired dress, and a new morality dictates to age-old custom”. In the subscript on *Madonna of the East* (Java), he describes the work as a portrayal of the masked feelings of the dominated life of Javanese women in their patriarchal society.

However, again the women’s self-consciousness, resignation or submission are secondary. Rather, these images serve as an example of Tretchikoff’s repeated use of the female body to convey his blasé opinion on issues such as the subordination and confinement of women of the East. Instead of raising public consciousness on these issues, his works, in the words of Morreall & Loy (1989: 69), acquire no cognitive, social or ethical challenges. Instead, they have “obvious meaning and [are] immediately recognizable [and have] ... just a hint of the exotic ... [that is not too] ... strange and difficult to understand” (Morreall & Loy 1989: 69). Against this framework, the pose and attitude of the models in *Daughter of Java* (c. 1945,

Java), *Civilized Bali* (Java, fig. 41) and *Madonna of the East* (Java) directly contradict Buchner's interpretation. The 'easy delight' of *Civilized Bali* (Java, fig. 41) can, in fact, not be missed.

Support for this view appears in an incidental comment to an American woman. Although possibly under the influence of alcohol, the remark that women "...should be the shadows of their men ... [should] bring [her husband's] slippers, pour his drinks, scratch his back", reveals an egocentric chauvinist attitude. Consequent to this incident, he seems to have lapped up the attention his remark created in the newspapers, writing that "[w]omen flocked in thousands to see the paintings - and the man who had said such drastic things about the women of the world" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 229).

Although the sparse content of Tretchikoff's portraits makes it difficult to analyse his works, it is clear that none of the images discussed above contain disturbing or even adequate features of reality. Instead, these women, some resembling 1950s American pin-ups, are generalised, provocatively posed, sultry, brooding and idealised. There is no sign of Tretchikoff's so-called intention to address conventions that confine and subjugate women. Women are portrayed only as passive, emotional and subordinate objects with 'gentleness', 'humility', 'tenderness', 'nurturance' and 'intuitiveness', rather than 'ambition', 'courage', 'independence', 'assertiveness', 'rationality' and 'emotional control' (see 2.3.4). In a postmodern context, ironically, this type of depiction only highlights their plight. The way in which Tretchikoff treated women, therefore, is precisely what gender feminists would oppose years later.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Tretchikoff, has been called a 'cheap sensation for the masses' (Schoonraad 1988: 46). Controversy has raged throughout Tretchikoff's art career. His work was, and still is, criticised as planned, kitsch, nostalgic, exotic, and sentimental. However, they do possess a curious kind of beauty. It would be a mistake to assume that he was not aware of the developments in the art world, locally and

internationally. Since he was far too intelligent to ignore these trends, his pandering to public taste must have been a conscious decision. Despite his disclaimers, he is reported by Sonja Loots (1997: 50) to have said: “*Maar sodra ek die kwas neersit, is ek nie meer 'n kunstenaar nie. Dan is ek 'n sakeman.*”

His patronising attitude toward women and his indifference to their subjugation in society could be attributed to his maleness, and the fact that he painted during the feminist lull. Be that as it may, it reflects a blatant disregard of the identities, individualities, or social realities of his models, and romanticises their constraints instead. It testifies to detached observation, which confines women to the picture plane, the realm of object. In the words of Arnold (1996: 2), “the sustained looking of the gaze” sanctions the process of objectification.

Within the parameters of this study, therefore, Tretchikoff did not contest the boundaries that subjugated women to a subordinate position in society, but in fact reinforced them. From a postmodern perspective, his attitude is both patriarchal and patronising, and his art disempowering.

CHAPTER V

IRMA STERN: STRETCHING VISUAL BOUNDARIES

*“Irma Stern is not just a ranking artist in this country –
she is practically a national institution”*

Berman 1983: 440

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Irma Stern is one of the ‘first modernists’ who stretched the visual and technical boundaries of the established art of her time. According to Arnold (1996: 77), she is often cited by writers who wish to argue a case of “cultural discrimination against women”, as an example of a success story, especially regarding her career. Because Stern painted both as a woman and in search of herself, as Arnold points out, it could be construed that her work would reveal the societal constraints faced by women during her lifetime. In this Chapter, her works are therefore analysed to examine whether they reflect the boundaries that restricted women to a subordinate position in society during her career.

As in Chapter Four, the methodology proposed by Dietrich (see 1.6.3.2), is used to examine possible links between her work and developments in feminist thought.

5.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Irma Stern was born in Schwiezer-Reneke, in 1894 (Arnold 1996: 78) to what her teenager diaries reflect as a comfortable and prosperous life in South Africa (Schoeman 1994: 13). Despite the fact that the small village was largely German, Stern’s African background is depicted as “strange” in the Osborn text published in 1927. This idea seems to have been created for the “benefit of its North European readers, and the effect is involuntarily heightened by the poor

translation in the English version...” (Schoeman 1994: 16). Whatever the effect, however, Stern’s work has shown that she was privileged to have the mysterious, even exotic, force of the African continent as a childhood companion.

Political developments in South Africa influenced Stern’s life tremendously. The Boer War resulted in Stern’s father and her uncle Leopold being arrested in September 1900 and sent to Vryburg as prisoners of the British (Arnold 1995: 14, Schoeman 1994: 17). The remaining Stern family soon moved to Cape Town and, due to the outbreak of the plague, further away to Germany, where her father joined them in 1901. Although Irma’s education received more attention here, she found the German schools painful and difficult. Schoeman (1994: 18) believes the “monotony, discipline and formality of school routine, city life and Wilhelmine Germany must have caused many difficulties to a girl of seven brought up in a Transvaal village”. The Sterns were nevertheless assimilated into the German cultural world, like most German Jews of their time (Schoeman 1994: 18).

Stern experienced several severe changes during her lifetime, for in 1903 her family moved back to the ruins of ‘post-war’ Sweizer-Reinecke (Schoeman 1994: 21), only to return to Berlin in 1904. About settling in Germany again after this period, Stern herself remarked: “We gypsies actually had a home of our own” (Schoeman 1994: 21). It was in Berlin that the 25-year old Dr Johannes Prinz, who would years later become her husband, was appointed Irma’s tutor.

However, in 1909 the Sterns and Dr Prinz returned to South Africa once again, settling in Wolmaransstad, where Stern began to keep a diary (Arnold 1995: 14, Schoeman 1994: 23), a habit she would maintain throughout her life and that would enhance analysis of her work. According to Schoeman (1994: 26, 27), it was here that Stern became aware of Doctor Prinz, and paid more attention to him. It is also in Wolmaransstad that she began practising art. Schoeman (1994: 30) notes a “developing sense of awareness of her surroundings and more particularly of the distinctive nature of Africa”. Stern herself wrote about this period: “...my heart [was] swelling with desire. And then I started drawing and painting ... And once I started, I never stopped again, although at that time this

occupation was not allowed to be the centre of my life” (Schoeman 1994: 28-29).

But the young Stern was already considering a career as an artist. After the Sterns had left South Africa once again for Germany, accompanied by Dr Prinz (Schoeman 1994: 32), therefore, Stern attended several institutions, among them Berlin University in 1912. Her formal art training began in the same year, when she was accepted into a private studio. It would seem that she visited many studios to find a suitable teacher before she discovered the Weimar Academy’s “special art class for women” in 1913. Here she was accepted into the drawing class for advanced students (Arnold 1995: 16, Schoeman 1994: 44). Stern also worked among the Bauhaus painters in Weimar during this time (Berman 1983: 438, Dubow: 1991: 8).

Arnold (1995: 47-48) mentions that Stern’s interest in modernism developed at a moderate pace, and that she could possibly have been influenced by modernist documents such as Wassily Kandinsky’s *On the Spiritual in Art* (1912). Another possible influence was Carl Einstein’s *Negerplastik* (1915), a study in African sculpture (Arnold: 1995: 47, Schoeman 1994: 50). What is certain, is that Max Pechstein, to whom she was introduced in 1916, became pivotal in the development of her modernist artistic identity (Arnold 1995: 49, Dubow 1991: 9). Schoeman (1994: 47) writes that Pechstein was a ‘kindred spirit’ with whose romantic and adventurous notions Stern identified. Under his influential guidance, Stern developed her Expressionistic techniques. Schoeman (1994: 50) remarks, for example, that her work from this period is “notably spiky in appearance and tentative in style, as if the artist were still feeling her way”.

Another possible influence on Stern’s work mentioned by Arnold (1995: 47, 1996: 79) comes from modern women artists, such as Paula Modersohn-Becker, Gabrielle Münter and Käthe Kollwitz³¹, (Arnold 1995: 47). Schoeman (1994:33) writes that although Wilhelmine Germany was very much a man’s world, “the

³¹ Other artists of influence could have been the Russian Marianne Werefkin, Dutch born Jacoba van Heemskerck and the Sweed, Sigrid Hjertén who exhibited during the years

role of women in cultural, social and political affairs was steadily increasing.” Women were allowed to attend University, had roles in political activities in 1908 and gained the vote in 1918. The feminist Jüdischer Frauenbund, the League of Jewish Women, was quite prominent, allowing Jewish women active participation in the socialist movement. Germany seemed to enjoy considerable cultural freedom, which was enhanced during the World War, when women had to take over the work of men (Schoeman 1994: 33-34, 59). However, professional women artists of this time were still struggling against discrimination and seldom received adequate tuition (Arnold 1995: 47). According to Arnold (1996: 79), women who adopted the modernist language declared “their rejection of official art, [as well as of] bourgeois social values and prescribed gender roles”. These women, among whom Stern featured, all worked in the Expressionistic style, adopting affirmative modernist characteristics such as transgression, the ‘courage and resilience’ to pursue independent and subjective paths and rebellion against social conventions (Arnold 1995: 47-48, 1996: 79, Berman 1983: 441). Stangos (1991: 7) confirms that “...enormous richness, complexity, multiplicity and simultaneity of ideas”, all modernist characteristics, abound in Stern’s work.

Stern participated in several Freie Secession exhibitions. However, it was Pechstein who introduced her to Wolfgang Gurlitt and the Fritz Gurlitt gallery in the Potsdamerstrasse, where she had her first public show in 1919, receiving encouraging criticism (Arnold 1995: 17, Dubow 1991: 9, Schoeman 1994: 63). Among her many achievements, is the fact that she was a founding member of the influential November Group, which existed during 1919-1932 in Germany (Berman 1983: 438, Schoeman 1994: 62).

According to Arnold (1996: 83), it is the prototype of German Expressionism that first motivated Stern’s modernist fascination with primitivism and the culture of ‘the other’. This fascination was strengthened by Max Pechstein, who believed that primitivism enabled an artist of the sophisticated art world to

of war at the Herwarth Walden’s *Der Sturm*, in Berlin (Arnold 1995: 47, 1996: 79).

appropriate 'other' elements of 'supposedly less-developed cultures' into that world (Arnold 1995: 69). Perhaps as a result of this, Stern developed "a certain nostalgia for Africa and a heightened interest and awareness of her own African heritage" during the last years of the World War (Schoeman 1994: 50). She would later remark that her unsettled upbringing had left her "... with the feeling of belonging to nowhere" (Schoeman 1994: 33).

Stern settled in South Africa permanently in 1920 at the age of 26 (Arnold 1996: 78), by which time she had spent less than ten years in the country of her birth. In South Africa Stern began a "process of exploring the values and visual conventions of [the] two continents". Although Cape Town was the total opposite to Berlin in every imaginable way, Arnold (1995: 70) thinks that it "served Stern's artistic needs; the *reality* of 'the primitive' was accessible". Be that as it may, Stern soon became frustrated with the narrow-mindedness of the locals, however, referring to them as "petty-minded people ..[who].. simply laughed at, scorned, and afterwards imitated" anything that was new (Schoeman 1994: 74). The role of women, who had been subject to male authority within black and white patriarchy throughout the history of South Africa, was also very different from that of German women. It is not surprising, therefore, that, having grown up in Berlin, Stern found the "restrictions imposed by the very provincial standards of Colonial society ... additionally irritating" (Schoeman 1994: 74).

Stern's first controversial exhibition was advertised in 1922 as an 'Exhibition of Modern Art by Miss Irma Stern at Ashbey's Gallery' in Cape Town (Arnold 1995: 18, Schoeman 1994: 70). Contrary to convention, the work in the exhibition made a statement of her personal values, that is, her belief in herself and her freedom as a young woman. According to Arnold (1996: 81), women were generally expected to restrain from such self-promotion, but Stern seemed to deliberately 'court public notoriety'. According to Arnold (1996: 80), she was intent on launching an extremely confrontational career that would outrage "placid Capetonians" who were accustomed to tasteful mountain scenes and modest flower studies. With modernism still perceived as a threat to the development of a specific South African character (Alexander 1962: vii), artists

working in this movement were accused of deliberately attempting to “alienate [their] public” (Harmsen 1992: 51). The public therefore showered Stern with outright condemnation. Her exhibition was duly dismissed as “nasty”, “offensive”, and “an attempt to startle the susceptibility of Cape Town’s art lovers” and was even investigated by police on charges of so-called immorality (Berman 1983: 438, Schoeman 1994: 72). Despite the stress that must have accompanied such an outcry, Arnold (1996: 81) believes Stern acquired the desired attention. To slightly misappropriate the words of Berman, her “defiant individualism...[had been] nourished by encounter with resistance”.

Her daring, aggressively modern portrayals were indeed sensational, even generating a certain Reverend Faustman’s “disgust at the general nastiness of the work” (Schoeman 1994: 72). However, by the time Maggie Loubser returned from Europe in 1924, and “white South Africa [had begun] to catch up with Expressionism and grasp its idiom”, Stern’s work was being met with increasing understanding and support by both the public and the art establishment (Schoeman 1994: 105). In retrospect Arnold (1996: 78, 95) writes that “[m]odernism provided Stern with the vocabulary to impose her artistic identity on the South African art scene...”, while German expressionism, allowed her to create stylised images and form. That it not only challenged existing pictorial conventions, but also the very fibre of society, should have been expected, since innovative presentation is not “readily acknowledged by [a] conservative public as a ‘correct’ or ‘realistic’ representation”, as Kulka (1988: 22) notes.

“In addition to [Stern’s] professional struggle in her own country,” Berman (1983: 438) notes, “her private life had not been smooth...” One devastating experience occurred during a sea voyage to Europe in 1923, when she met Hippolyto Raposo, the “‘eternal friend’ for whom she had been searching since childhood”. In her diary she wrote: “...sadness and love wounded my soul” (Schoeman 1994: 80-82). Two years later, she fell in love with an “unmarried man, and at the same time became attracted to another man...” (Schoeman 1994: 86). Yet in 1926, when Stern was 31 and Doctor Prinz 40, the two were married by special licence in Cape Town (Schoeman 1994: 87). Little is known about

their relationship. It would seem, however, that Stern had “entered into the marriage reluctantly and that her references to her husband [were] notably unenthusiastic” (Schoeman 1994: 109). Schoeman (1994: 88) writes that the marriage did not change her “loneliness, the longing, the vague, unsatisfied yearning ... [which] ... remained much the same, an ingrained part of her personality”. A visit to Madeira, which led to severe introspection, highlighted this unhappiness (Arnold 1996: 86-87, Schoeman 1994: 89). It is not surprising therefore that Stern wrote to Dr Prinz on 25 October 1933: “I have come to the conclusion that our marriage is a failure and I have decided to leave you” (Schoeman 1994: 109). The divorce was granted in March 1934.

According to Arnold (1996: 87), “[a]rt became the only means by which [Stern] could release her emotions and resolve internal conflicts about her feminine identity”. Her paintings of this time was: “anguished ... [and] ... some of the most tormented and personal images she ever made [dealing] directly and indirectly with the pain of physical longing, loneliness and rejection” (Arnold 1996: 87). After her divorce, she seemed to become more stable in her personal life. She had several lovers before Dudley Welsh became her “companion and ... manager of her business affairs” (Arnold 1995: 21, 1996: 87).

“[Stern] was a woman ... who responded passionately to the world and used her painting as a means of self-discovery and personal revelation” (Arnold 1996: 78). Despite the many demands of her family and social life, therefore, she seemed to have searched instinctively for a “private vision of Africa...” (Schoeman 1994: 74-75). After the strong negative response to her first modernist exhibition in South Africa, the beautiful Cape surroundings left Stern unsatisfied and she embarked on several journeys to find the “...land of strong colours”, the country of her childhood memories (Arnold 1995: 17, Dubow 1991: 70, Schoeman 1994: 74). Among other places, she visited the “‘unspoiled’ areas of Natal, Swaziland and Pondoland” (Schoeman 1994: 75) as well as Zanzibar (Arnold 1995: 21), and later, several times, Turkey, Spain and Madeira (Berman 1983: 439).

Since cultural difference is confirmed by life style, art and colour, Arnold (1996: 96) believes that Stern’s imagination was enriched by her contact with rural folk

and the places she observed on her extensive adventurous travels throughout Africa. The landscape and ethnicity of the black people, fuelled her ‘philosophical concept of primitivism’ (Arnold 1995: 18). Yet she did not, in Berman’s (1983: 441) terms, “‘go native’ like Gauguin”. Instead, she remained European, accepting primitivism according to Bell’s (1999: 20) definition as allowing the ‘civilised’ to “inspect or ... indulge ... through an imaginary opposite”. Since Stern “focus[ed] her inherently romantic temperament and naive Utopianism on ‘the other’ ...”, [however] it was to become a dominant theme in her body of work (Arnold 1995: 70).

While the viewing public often saw Stern’s idealised ‘pictorial interpretations of her models’ as statements of fact, Arnold (1995: 102) thinks that “Stern’s psychological insights into others were limited by her own cultural mindset and egoism...”³². She therefore agrees that Stern’s work can be described as idealised, regardless of the fact that it was motivated by her contact with real people (Arnold 1995: 71-73). The models had to fulfil her romantic belief of their unspoilt naturalness, and were therefore subjected to idealisation. Stern did not only show a total lack of understanding of the ‘forces of colonialism’ therefore, but was also “selfishly distressed when reality impinged on her artistic needs and, when the disjunction between imagination and reality proved irreconcilable in South Africa...”, after which she turned to distant places, untouched by ‘civilisation’ (Arnold 1995: 73). Her philosophy, which remained constant throughout her life, “ignored the material conditions of life and posited an ideal world of harmony and timeless unity between humankind and nature”, especially in the last years of her creativity (Arnold 1995: 21).

However, Arnold (1995: 102) disagrees with Uys Krige’s criticism in *The Cape Times* of 8 March 1938, that “[Stern] knows less about natives ... than I do about

³² After a disappointing trip to Swaziland in 1933, Stern was quoted by *The Cape Argus* of 7 July 1933 as follows: “It was a shock to me to see how the natural picturesqueness of the native in his kraal had almost disappeared ... Six years ago I saw him as a joyous, untrammelled creature, the spirit of Africa at its happiest and most colourful. Today he has submitted to civilization ... and its unnaturalness seems to have cramped his spirit ... [h]e seems unhappy in the burden of civilized living” (Arnold 1995: 73).

that amiable old buffer on the top of the moon. She uses them ... only for their surface value, their decorative qualities. So she not only sentimentalizes them but exploits them, artistically speaking". Although Arnold (1995: 21) acknowledges that this philosophy emphasises Stern's lack of social awareness and is simplistic, she views it as positive on the whole. While she (1995: 102) therefore admits that Stern viewed her models in terms of their decorative qualities, concentrating mostly on their visual impact, she does not agree that the artist's models are sentimentalised.

Instead, she (1996: 81, 83) argues that Stern's 'psychological make up' and 'concept of self' was dominated and controlled by her perception of her body as large and unattractive. She was therefore vulnerable, extremely self-conscious and sensitive to other people's perceptions of her, especially during the 1920s. She was short and strongly featured, and not stereotypically feminine. Her hair was "fizzy" and, as she became older, she became more overweight, as also appears from a rather sharp description by Tretchikoff of Stern as "...an impressive figure... a rather large lady with a presence to match" (Tretchikoff & Hocking 1973: 176). Perhaps it is this 'presence' that caused people to refer to her as 'a character'. Be that as it may, they seemed more conscious of her size and her masculinity than of her as an individual (Arnold 1996: 81).

This is what Arnold (1995: 71, 88) sees as giving rise to Stern's 'ideal of beauty' and the projection of her "internal self-image onto her models". Even though Stern was preoccupied with herself and her body image, she was perhaps not able to "deal with the objectification of the self", which could also have been the reason why she never painted a self-portrait. Arnold (1996: 87) surmises that since she had to find a suitable vehicle for a self-portrait, she may have painted "fantasised self-portraits when painting others" (Arnold 1996: 88-87, 96). In summary, Dubow (1991: 100) writes that Stern's pursuit of the 'other' was in reality a "pursuit of an idyll, which would gain for her personal liberty: the freedom to be herself."

The fact that Stern chose to portray her female sexuality in the 'guise of the other', testifies to her consciousness of her own femininity (Arnold 1995: 71). Despite her

unrestrained involvement with the other, therefore, she never lost track with her own identity as an artist. In fact, her identity sometimes threatened to overwhelm the model's identity (Arnold 1995: 103). She was a 'very contradictory woman', who needed constant affirmation despite projecting an air of assurance. Her reaction to people as well as places, was a direct result of her so-called "failure to establish fulfilling emotional and sexual relationships..." (Arnold 1996: 77, 81). However, Arnold (1996: 77) clearly distinguishes between her overly emotional, temperamental, introspective and insecure personal relationships and her confidence regarding her professional life and the value of her art (Arnold 1996: 77).

Stern's artistic career spanned more than fifty years and nearly a hundred one-person shows in Europe, USA and South Africa (Arnold 1995: 13, Berman 1983: 439). Highlights in her career include winning the Prix d'Honneur at Bordeaux International Exhibition in 1927 and the monograph by Max Osborn on her, published the same year. Under great protest, Stern was also selected to exhibit at the Imperial Gallery of Art in London in 1929, where Sir Ernest Oppenheimer bought one of her works for the South African National Gallery (Berman 1983: 438, Schoeman 1994: 105). At her exhibition in Pretoria in 1933, two of her works were acquired for the new City Hall. In 1942, Stern was again subject of a monograph, this time by Joseph Sachs and entitled *Irma Stern and the Spirit of Africa*. The South Africa Department of Information made two films on Stern's work (Berman 1983: 439).

According to Schoeman (1994: 105), David L. Kahn referred to Stern as "the greatest creative artist in South Africa" of that time. Stern received similar acclaim in the *Lady's Pictorial*, which Schoeman (1994:105-106) calls the "bastion of upper-middle-class white South Africa with all its (sic) prejudices and snobberies..." From this, Schoeman (1994: 106) concludes that Stern's "once controversial work had clearly won general acceptance". Stern was granted several prestigious awards (Berman 1983: 439), such as the "Cape Tercentenary Grant for outstanding work" (1952), the Regional Award of the Peggy Guggenheim International Art Prize (1960), Oppenheimer Award (1963) and the

Medal of Honour for Painting by the South African Academy (1965). In 1967, the Grosvenor Gallery in London posthumously hosted a major retrospective show of Stern's work.

According to Arnold (1995: 22), Stern is the *grande dame* of South African Art, who exhibited on such a regular basis that the critics rarely had anything new to say about her art. Berman (1983:440) further enthuses that "...none has equalled Irma STERN in the impact of her presence, the energy and gusto with which she lived her life and the violence of the storms and controversy which surrounded her throughout it." As she grew older and more obese, however, her health failed, and she had to force herself to work. While Arnold (1995: 22) is of the opinion that it was her painting that gave her the strength to cope with the painful existence that resulted from these circumstances, Berman (1983: 440) notes that the main theme of Stern's 'prodigious oeuvre', its most consistent characteristic, is fruitfulness and vitality. "[U]rgency had indeed been a leitmotif of her activity throughout her entire career." Even her last works reveal a "regenerative zest", as if she were stealing "a short new lease on life in order to project the things which still remained unsaid..."

Irma Stern died from heart failure on 23 August 1966.

5.3 ANALYSIS

5.3.1 Stylistic Background

Although Stern's style underwent many adjustments and she experimented a great deal, she fundamentally remained an expressionist (Arnold 1996: 81). Her earlier portrayals speak of a careful investigation of impressionist methods, of which *Nude Study* (1916) is a good example. In this work, she paid careful attention to modelling and colour in order to enhance form. These methods did not seem to satisfy her for long, however. Soon afterwards she painted *Das Ewige Kind* or *Eternal Child* (1916, fig. 42), which came to be seen as a pivotal painting in her career, since it marks her move from careful observation to expression (Arnold 1995: 48, Schoeman 1994: 52). In this work Stern was intent

on portraying her emotion on seeing the child rather than portraying the specific child accurately. Thus the child became a symbol that represented everyone that had suffered as a result of the First World War.

Stern's contact with primitivism and artists such as Pechstein, lead to several paintings in which she experimented with this method. *Great Women's Dance* (1922, fig. 43), *Composition* (1923), *Reclining Nude* (1923) and *The Hunt* (1925) are good examples. *Reclining Nude* (1923) is a beautiful line drawing of a female nude in which the face shows a remarkable resemblance to an African mask. The primitive influence can be seen in the spiky rendition of plants and facial features that, once again, remind the viewer of African masks.

Irma Stern's use of colour was a stylistic landmark. Eventually "[c]olour was to be the primary vehicle of her expressive inclinations and the richness and variety of her palette became the most distinctive feature of her style", says Berman (1983: 440-441), noting that "...subjectivity of colour-treatment and the unaccustomed technique ... were ... startling as visual experiences". Hilda Purwitsky agrees, describing Stern's use of colour as "...strong and virile, but so unrestrained and chaotic as to be almost indecent..." (Schoeman 1994: 92). *Eternal Child* (1916, fig. 42) is an early testimonial of this preoccupation with colour, while *Women Sunbathing* (1920, fig. 44), in which Stern uses flamboyant colour in expressionistic brush strokes to portray a young woman in a provocative pose, is a good example (Arnold 1995: 48). Other examples of Stern's vibrant use of colour are *Congo Landscape* (1945), *Fishing Harbour Madeira* (1950), *Cape Town Docks* (1953), *Day of Liberation* (1955), and *Reclining Nude* (1944).

In *Bed Carriers* (1941, fig. 45), the warm colours, textures and shapes become more important than the individuals in the painting. This could be a reflection of Stern's view of painting as an object with an inherent visual language, which existed in its own right (Arnold 1995: 49). Certainly painting models became an excuse for "transforming a white canvas into a painting". The fact that her career is characterised by change, testifies to this "fascination with painted surfaces", which also subjected resemblance to the visual language of form in her portraits (Arnold 1995: 102-103). Other examples of Stern's overriding interest in the act of

painting, and her fascination with colour, are: *Calabash* (1927), *Swazi Girls* (1931), *Pieta* (1944), *Reclining figure, Zanzibar* (1945), *Congolese Woman* (1946), *Still Life with Dalias* (1947), *Still Life with Lilies* (1947), *Wood Carriers* (1951), and *Vineyard Sketch* (1966).

Berman (1983: 439) surmises that Stern's career climaxed in 1945, catalysed by a return-visit to Zanzibar. Here, "...all [the] elements of her style fused into a mature reposeful whole". Years later, after the Second World War, when Stern was influenced by diverse artists such as Tinteretto, van Gogh and Picasso, her work was marked by profuse experimentation and 'stylistic inconsistency', which caused it to "[veer] between an interest in controlled, contrived design, rhythmic, lightly painted oils and statements dominated by the thick paint and brutally expressionistic textures" (Arnold 1995: 21). *African Woman with Children* (1955, fig. 46) is a good example of Stern's use of 'controlled, contrived design'. *The Grape Pickers* (1940), *Winter on the Riviera* (1942), *Annunciation* (1947), *St Marco Square, Venice* (1948), *Venice Lagoon* (1948) *Wood Carriers* (1951), and *Grape Harvest* (1962), are examples of her use of expressionistic technique and thick texture. Later works, such as *Le Jour du Sacré Coeur* (1950), *Pondo Woman* (1952), *Meditation* (1958), *Siesta* (1961), *Pimento Pickers* (1962), *Peasant Woman with Chickens* (1962, fig. 47), *Fishing Harbour, Spain* (1963), and *Flowers and Fruit* (1965), are lightly painted oils.

Although Stern was technically avant-garde in South Africa at the time, her work was not as advanced with regard to its subject matter. Even Arnold (1996: 88) acknowledges that Stern's use of stereotype was a source of difficulty. Subject only to her romantic obsession with the other and fulfilment of an evasive self, she endorsed (much like Tretchikoff) the existing stereotypes of her time.

5.3.2 Portraits

Having defined Stern's work as stereotypical, the question arises as to what is left to be said about her work within the context of this study. As was the case with Tretchikoff, most of the women she depicted were harnessed to fulfil her

specific self-indulgence, while the model's identity and reality were of a secondary concern. In the case of Stern, it would seem that she was driven by her passionate and romantic quest for 'self', as Arnold suggests, and her work did not pretend to comment on constricting social conventions. The very structures that Second Wave feminists isolated as subjugating women to their confined status in society are therefore contained in Stern's work. For the purpose of this study, however, this remains to be shown.

In *Great Women's Dance* (1922, fig. 44), which was inspired by the visit to Umgababa, for example, images of the women's primitive existence are subjected to Stern's idealised and romanticised vision of a rich, rhythmic Africa. In this context, it is important to remember that the artist's objective was the act of painting and not social comment (Arnold 1995: 71). Stern's close perception of people seemed to result in a division between the 'realities of form' and her natural awareness of the 'decorative demands of colour and shape'. Arnold explains that she filtered out of her consciousness what she did not want to contemplate, such as the political and economic issues of the African people. Her grasp of their situation seemed to be limited and out of touch with the "social ramifications of her subjects" (Arnold 1995: 71). In idealising their 'natural picturesqueness', however, she denied their meaning, or more specifically, their identity. According to Schoeman (1994: 92), "[i]t is probably not unjust to say that to Irma Stern black people were decorative objects rather than individual human beings..."

Daydreaming (1927, fig. 48), *Repose* (1927), *The Water Carriers* (1935), and *The Water Carrier* (1937), are all examples of paintings in which decoration receives more attention than the social reality of the subjects. It would seem that her interest in the decorative qualities of women stayed with her throughout most of her life. *Watussi Queen* (1942), is not only an example of interest in decorative qualities, however, but illustrates her exquisite drawing skill. Other examples of her interest in the decorative qualities of her models are, *Congo Woman* (1942), *Reclining Figure, Zanzibar* (1945), *Seated Malay Woman* (1945), *Congo Group* (1946), and *Congo Natives* (1946) in all of which Stern

seemed to concentrate on decorative clothing.

“Although Stern was separated by race from the culture of her models, she was united [with them] by gender” (Arnold 1995: 71). Given Stern’s unhappy marriage with her body and her ‘self’, it is not altogether incomprehensible that she responded to people who were beautiful, graceful or exotic and different from her own society and concentrated on physical appearance rather than social circumstances. All the women in *Composition* (1923, fig. 49), in which Dubow (1991: 88) describes the models as ‘nubile girls’, *Two Zulu Women* (1923), *Daydreaming* (1927, fig. 48), *Repose* (1927), *The Water Carriers* (1935), *The Water Carrier* (1937) *Wood Carriers* (1951), and *Head of African Woman* (1959), are examples of a “sensuous interplay of warm flesh tones, dark glossy hair, rhythmic bodies and brightly coloured and patterned cloth” (Arnold 1995: 102).

The sensuous and romanticised images of Africa appear throughout Stern’s journal, *Paradise*, which was edited with a commentary by Dubow (1991). In this work she describes her impression and the influence of the people of Umgababa on her psyche as “Brown people – peace” (Dubow 1991: 71, journal page 46). *Ritual Dance* (1922, fig. 50) is an example of her views that the “[n]atives” are “as beautiful as gods” (Dubow 1991: 86). Idealisation formed a critical impetus in Stern’s images of Africa. As a result, most of the images comply with the stereotypical portrayal of the sensual ‘other’. More examples are, *Pondo Woman* (1923), *Calabash* (1927), *Fruit Carriers* (1927) and *Swazi Girls* (1931). In *Initiation Dance* (1941) the bodies of the young dancing women in the background create magnificent rhythm, while the two ‘matriarchs’ in the foreground are subjected to stereotype. In *Mother and Child* (1941) the two figures are generalised to become representative of a certain culture, instead of individuals. Stern’s use of stereotype can be seen in works as late as the 1950s, as in *Watussi Queen* (1945) and *Pondo Woman* (1952).

In stark contrast with Stern, these women are not only at ease with their environment, but also with themselves and their femininity. In fact, nothing seems to be able to disrupt their peaceful idyllic existence. Stern subjects them to

her own personal perception of femininity and sensuality and to a visual stereotype that emphasises categories such as gender, race, class and profession (Arnold 1995: 101). As a result they become an “object [that embodies] the viewer’s ideas of identity” and are stereotypically thought of by viewers as black (Arnold 1996: 18, 88). As objects, these women’s meaning is determined for them, effectively leaving them without choice (see 2.3.5).

Albeit unwittingly on Stern’s part, the women in *Daydreaming* (1927, fig. 48), *Repose* (1927), in which two Swazi women are portrayed as languishing in a romantic paradise, *The Water Carriers* (1935), and *The Water Carrier* (1937), are also fixed in colonial and patriarchal subjugation. *Daydreaming* (1927, fig. 48) and *The Water Carriers* (1935) both give rise to the question of female sexuality and seem to “eroticize black women, presenting them in a state of seminudity” (Arnold 1995: 71). In *Daydreaming* (1927, fig. 48) the figure lounging in the foreground with a section of her breast revealed is the focal point, while the other figures seem to be part of the decorative background, where three young women manage to keep the decorative cloths from slipping from their wrapped bodies. Described by Arnold (1995: 71) as “young, nubile and available to the viewer’s gaze within a situation that is erotic in art terms”, the women in the painting are immersed in sensual innuendo, which is what objectifies them and robs them of individuality. *The Water Carriers* (1935), on the other hand, was painted in a more naturalistic style, although this too presented a certain “reality of a life style that legitimizes the display of the body” (Arnold 1994: 71). The beadwork emphasises the “‘natural’ state of the young women” as well as their status as decorative objects. Other examples of such portraits are *Swazi Youth* (1924) and *Three Swazi Sisters* (1925).

Fruit Carriers (1927) is a portrayal of two African women carrying baskets of fruit. The woman on the left is portrayed with a basket of fruit on her shoulder and her body posed in a particularly sensuous way. In *Orangenpflückerin* (Orange picker) (not dated), Stern seemed totally unaware of the model’s reality, depicting her in traditional regalia in strong contrast with her Westernised orange grove setting. An exception to Stern’s repertoire of the female ‘other’ would be

Mangbetu Bride (1947, fig. 51). In this work, Stern portrayed the bride as seated rigidly, reminding the viewer of an African sculpture. A decorative environment surrounds the model and her face becomes like a mask, with no expression and endowed by scarification marks.

In *Portrait of an African Woman* (1941, fig. 52), a young Pondo woman is subjected to a 'colonial portrayal' of her seductive, exotic and decorative nature. Displayed to colonial eyes as the 'natural woman', her prominent breasts and artefacts imply her cultural origins (Arnold 1995: 101). In contrast, the woman portrayed in *African Woman* (1940) is subjugated by her exclusion from her 'natural environment' and her confinement not only indoors but also to a westernised dress and headscarf. Although Arnold (1995: 102) feels that the barred window could also suggest the loss of freedom, such an interpretation would go beyond what Stern is generally thought to have intended. A similar barred window in *Maid in uniform* (1955, fig. 53), fails to support such a fixed interpretation.

Another example of models portrayed in a 'natural environment' from a colonial perspective is *Composition* (1923, fig. 49), in which Stern portrays three native women surrounded by an abundance of fruit and blossoming proteas. Yet another is *Native Woman, Dakar* (1938), which was described by some reviewers as the embodiment of a 'Mother Africa' figure (Arnold 1995: 120). This woman is stripped of her self and given a governed identity, a symbolism which Black feminists later warned had shaped the societal roles of women (see 2.3.6), leaving them mute.

In contrast to her portrayals of elegant African women, Stern portrayed deeply unhappy women during the 1930s, (Arnold 1995: 72, 1996: 87). In the context of this study, this change could testify to Stern's sensitivity toward female subjugation. Arnold (1995: 35) describes *Fate* (1935) as a woman "contemplating a spindle and thread and pondering on fate and the meaning of life." The women's expression is mask-like and her solemn mood is increased by Stern's use of sombre colours. Feminine submissiveness is also possibly portrayed in *Indian Woman* (1936) and *Watussi Woman in Red* (1946), in both of which the model's eyes are averted. In the latter work, the model also clasps her knees, which are

drawn up in front of her. *Dakar Woman* (1938) not only looks resigned, but also sad. *Women with Yellow Scarf* (1939), shows a 'self-possessed model' (Arnold 1995: 34), with her legs and arms crossed, her expression tired and worn. *Woman in Kitchen* (1941, fig. 54) is another portrayal of a tired woman who is confined to her designated environment, that is, the kitchen. Yet another example of a woman constrained by tradition is *Arab dhow* (1945).

Lelemama Wedding Dance (1945) and *Malay Wedding* (1957) testifies to Stern's seduction by the abundance of colour and rhythm that such events would have supplied. The fact that the women portrayed show little or no expression comments on their lack of celebration in the midst of celebratory events. In *Nude* (1947, fig. 55), Stern portrays with vicious brush marks and raw colour a female nude resting her head on her hand. This work also somehow communicates the isolation of the woman.

Stern was confined to South Africa during the Second World War, in which time she painted several studies of Cape Malay people (Berman 1983: 439), which Tretchikoff also liked to portray. Her portrayals of Islamic Malay and Arab models³³ reveal the social constraints of these patriarchal societies on women's lives. Examples of her instinctive response to visual impact, these portraits reveal the stereotypical perception of the "western belief in oriental languor and occidental energy" (Arnold 1995: 102). Many also confirm the stereotypical idea of femininity, which Arnold (1995: 102) describes as "elegance, passivity, [and] modesty".

It is interesting to note that Stern's studies of men "deal less with a generic masculinity than with identifiable individuals" (Arnold 1995: 102). Such a definite distinction between the two sexes is portrayed in *Arab Youth* (1945, fig. 56) and *Zanzibar Woman* (1949, fig. 57). These two works describe "youthful sexuality" and "reinforce social norms about masculinity and femininity" (Arnold 1995: 102). The fact that *Zanzibar Woman* (1949, fig. 57) is contained in her traditional veil

³³ Arnold (1995: 102) writes that Islam also fulfilled the role of the exotic for Stern and it was her contact with the Cape Malay people that first introduced her to Islam. This

and sari and the woman's arms encircle her head and seated body allows Arnold (1995: 102) to interpret the composition as contributing to a feeling of restriction. The woman's eyes are also modestly downcast, her gaze directing the viewer's gaze to the pot that she holds in her lap. Arnold writes that the pot also functions as a metaphor for the womb, which suggests that the "woman is constructed in terms of her biology." This in turn "prescribes her place in a social system that conceals its women and limits their capacity to move freely in public spaces" (Arnold 1995: 102). In stark contrast with these portrayals, the young man is free of constraints such as dress code. Arnold (1995: 102) also describes his body language as confident and radiating masculine freedom.

Other examples of similar portrayals of Arab or Malay women are, *The Mauve Sari* (1944), and *The Yellow Sari* (1946). Stern herself described these women's lot as: "The women do not count, they have no say in the men's lives ... they are of no consequence, as the Arab believe [sic] that the women have no souls..." (Arnold 1995: 113).

A depressed Stern spent three months in Madeira in 1931. Through her painting, she projected her own turbulent feelings onto the two prostitutes who posed for *Harlots, Madeira* (1932, fig. 58). Roworth describes this work as possessing a 'sinister quality', in which colour is used to express "...the hectic, feverish atmosphere of this remarkable picture" (Arnold 1995: 80). According to Arnold (1995: 72) Stern confronts both the issues of sexuality and lust in this work. The women are portrayed as weary and resigned, and as having discarded their seductive roles for the painter, who seemed to have associated with their dismal existence at the boundaries of society (Arnold 1995: 72). This is in direct contrast with the challenging attitude of the semi-nude woman in "Vice walks the street" on page 14 of her journal (c. 1921) (Dubow, 1991: 68).

Possibly "influenced by the German Expressionist preoccupation with corruption and the modern city" (Arnold 1996: 82), Stern makes another reference to female sensuality in her journal:

fascination was fuelled by her visits to Zanzibar.

Only the women look depressed, the women are like the cows – they work in the fields – in the houses – they drag heavy loads – they bring a number of children into the world and look upon it without joy themselves – grown sour somehow with deep lines around the mouths - in quite young faces already ... the heavy incense-laden air of the Catholic Church prevents them from breathing. And then the customs ... A woman is not a person, she is a female – a sexual being, and must be protected carefully against the lust of men ... What must the women look like who serve the lust of such men? What must the prostitute be like? Probably the one who best characterises/contradicts the nature of men. (Schoeman 1995: 101-102).

All of these sentiments reflect the concerns of Second Wave feminists of the time: restrictive social structures that succeed in keeping women passive, affectionate and obedient and confined to gender roles, and their subjugation on the basis of division of labour (see 2.3.2). Stern seems to have perceived such restrictions not only as confining women to a subordinate positions in society, but as robbing them of the joy of life. The patriarchal and Catholic culture Stern found so oppressive (Arnold 1996: 86), would be addressed by Radical feminists only a few years later (see 2.3.2).

Despite the fact that Stern has been criticised for her lack of social consciousness, she seemed acutely conscious of certain social constraints placed on the women of Madeira, for example. Passages in her journal give proof of her awareness of these boundaries. Although the same clear awareness is not revealed in her portraits, as a woman, Stern was naturally preoccupied with the concept of femininity. In *Paradise*, in her journal on page 21 (Dubow 1991: 69), Stern portrays a female figure lying on her back with the inscription “[f]or everything is but a relative truth – and all cause lies in the womb” and “-thus Nature wills it”. According to Arnold (1996: 82), this work is a “representation of birth, emphasising the womb as the source of female identity”, which she describes, perhaps a little strongly, as “epitomis[ing] biological essentialism, which posits sex, not gender, as the essential difference between men and women”.

Be that as it may, several other nude studies, show Stern's interest in or investigation into being female. Although the early nude studies, such as *Reclining Nude* (1923), *Nude* (1930), and *Woman in Pink Camisole* (1934), show a preoccupation with young and thin and possibly idealised bodies, her later portrayals of nudes tend to more true to form. *Seated Nude* (1943), *Reclining Figure* (1948), and *Figure on Beach* (1962, fig. 59) are good examples. The latter work, however, becomes an abstract form that fills the entire canvas, and leaves the body almost without gender or identity.

Stern's work of the 1950s shows her interest in religious subject matter. As she had sought emotional fulfilment in her art in earlier years, she sought spiritual fulfilment at this stage in her life. During the 1960s, however, her work is characterised only by pure colour, loose brushstrokes and thin gestural paint. In contrast with her earlier work, some of these forms and images are undeveloped, while others are "confident visions of life transformed into art" (Arnold 1995: 21). Portraying harvesters, field workers, and fishermen occupying themselves with what she described as 'everlasting things' (Arnold 1995: 21-22), she defined art shortly before her death as "strength-giving and wholesome" (*Sunday Times* 26 September 1965).

Arnold (1995: 73), writes that "[i]n the context of South Africa with its history of ethnic classification and separation", the "depiction of groups and types have become problematic". She therefore notes that the current emphasis in the visual analysis of art on social commentary has left Stern open for criticism regarding her patronising attitude toward Africans³⁴ (Arnold 1996: 78). Although Arnold justifies Stern's lack of awareness and her "romantic nature and absorption in self" in terms of the political reality of her time (Arnold 1996: 78), she concludes that Stern was socially immature and insensitive.

The analysis in this chapter shows, however, that in later years Stern does seem to have developed some form of consciousness with regard to the duality of female

³⁴ Arnold (1996: 82) writes that Stern's discovery of the rural village of Umgababa in Natal in 1922, offered her an authentic experience of 'paradise' and seemed to match

sexuality and female bodies. The burden depicted in the *Harlots, Madeira* (1932, fig. 58) is a striking depiction of female bondage. Stern also became increasingly spiritual in her later work, appearing to move away from her earthly struggle with herself. Despite these signs of growth, however, Stern's portrayal of the other, in particular the black other, but also the female other, does not contest the social confinement of the women she depicted.

5.4 CONCLUSION

Both Tretchikoff and Stern were world-renowned figures, but clearly for very different reasons. While Tretchikoff's work was seen as 'cheap sensations' and kitsch, Stern was known for her artistic achievements and credibility. Both these artists received enough attention to have been able to shed light or raise public consciousness on issues that concerned female subjugation. However, for very different reasons, they remained apathetic to the quest for women's liberation.

Stern's importance as a leading figure in South African art cannot be denied. In stretching the boundaries of visual representation of her time, she made a significant contribution to South African art history. It was necessary for Stern to succeed as an artist; she had no doubt in her capability and professionalism. She therefore worked very hard, even selfishly, in establishing a niche for herself in what was seen to be the barren artistic environment of South Africa. This may have affected her life-long insensitivity to the plight of especially the black women she painted.

According to Arnold (1996: 89), Stern's "attitude to her art-making, and her need to make art, were shaped significantly by her experiences as a woman". Although her search for self has left a valuable and abundant body of work, however, the absence of self-portraits seems to confirm that Stern could not face her own image. Although she had visionary perception of the lot of women in society, as revealed by her journal, not much of her work reveals this. In fact, she

her expectations of harmonious social interaction.

does not seem to have been able to afford the 'other' much empathy at all. Most of her earlier portraits are idealised and generally depict unobtainable beauty in a stereotypical way. They focus on the specific culture rather than on the individual.

There could be several reasons for this shortcoming. In the first place, it would not be fair to judge Stern's seeming short-sightedness with regard to women from a different background without mentioning the fact that she lived and painted at a time when the women's liberation movement was experiencing a lull. Had she remained in Germany, for example, where women seemed to enjoy a greater social freedom, she might have developed a greater sense of indignation about the subjugation of women in general, which might have been reflected in her work. Secondly, the establishment of her modernist career might have absorbed all her energy. Had she not had to fight to maintain her position as an artist, she might have had the resources to embody a more conscious reaction to the lot of women. In the third place, her self-absorbed search for love, security and acceptance might have clouded her vision of the confinement that also black women experienced.

Whatever the reasons, within the parameters of the hypothesis of this thesis, Stern can not be seen to have actively challenged the boundaries that confined women by her painting. She did not use her portraits to challenge significantly the boundaries that confined women to a subordinate position in society.

CHAPTER VI

MARLISE KEITH: RECLAIMING WOMANHOOD

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Chapter, I discuss, in the first person, my own work, which was submitted for the practical component of the master's degree. Having analysed Stern and Tretchikoff's portrayal of women in terms of feminist movements, it was with trepidation that I approached this task. However, once I understood how different my context was from theirs, I realised that comparison could serve no constructive purpose. As the requirement of the Department that Master's students pursue theoretical issues raised in the practical component of the degree course, seems to have been fulfilled with the completion of the preceding chapters, a more productive conclusion to the study would be to explore my own work in terms of the theoretical framework established in Chapter Two.

I would also personally benefit more from an examination of the relationship between the visual and theoretical components of my own degree study. The exhibition, which served as the independent visual or artifactual component of my course, had been completed before I started my research for this thesis. This chapter therefore constitutes my first attempt at critically analysing my own work, an exercise that I had unwittingly, but strongly, seemed to avoid. When I started with this chapter, I found it difficult to examine my work objectively and to display my private thoughts. I now consciously know that my art making has always been a very personal experience and that I might subconsciously have feared that cerebral interference would confound my intuitive creativity.

6.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

I was born on the 9th of June 1972, in Christiana, in the then Western Transvaal.

Because my father was a Nature Conservation officer, my two brothers and I were privileged to have fourteen thousand hectares as our back garden. We therefore grew up in relative isolation, well provided for against the dangers that my father's employers thought might threaten us. Although I was the first Keith daughter in three generations, I was not over-protected.

One of my earliest memories of making art was at the age of five. My mother's friend gave me all her old make-up. Instead of using it for its intended purpose, it became my 'paints'. Despite this early introduction to the muse, I could not take art at school, first because it was not offered and then because I had not taken it previously. Only during a GAP year after school, did I take private art lessons with Liesl Roos for six months to prepare a portfolio for my application to the University of Pretoria, for the four-year BA Fine Arts course. In 1998 I applied for the post-graduate study at Stellenbosch University of which this project forms a part. Both periods of study offered technical and conceptual development that was of great value to me. However, both also provided experiences on an emotional level that, although they informed many of my works, were extremely negative.

During this time, my entries were accepted for *The Thembisa Fine Arts Award* in Kempton Park, in 1995, the *Sasol New Signatures* competition in Pretoria in 1995, 1996 and 1997, and *The Volkskas Atelier* in 1997. I was also invited to participate in *Bezar*, at the Durbanville Cultural centre in 1998, *anima(l)*, at the Bellville Association of Arts in 1999 and several other group shows at the now extinct Theatre Gallery in Durbanville. My first solo show, *Fugitive Pieces*³⁵, was held at DC Art in Cape Town in January 2000, at which thirteen works were sold to a German art buyer from Düsseldorf. In August 2000, I presented another group show, *Wrap*, at the same venue, with artist Liza Grobler and jewellery designer Saar Maritz. At this stage, I am fortunate that 29 of my works are in private collections in Pretoria, Cape Town, Minnesota, Germany and Sweden.

³⁵ The title of the exhibition was inspired by Ann Michael's novel, *Fugitive Pieces*. I felt that this title was appropriate because it circumscribed the physical as well as the subject

My first conscious encounter with gender discrimination was at the age of six, when institutional values prevented me from participating in male-related activities. Although I do not see myself as an activist, similar experiences throughout my life have made me question all kinds of boundaries. In my art, I respond to today's society, first as an individual and then as a woman. My encounter with what I perceive as constructed social parameters and confining attitude shapes my ideas. Norms, structures, institutions and moral values are therefore a primary source for my artwork and seem to manifest in my art.

The above apparently clear exposition of what inspires my art gives a false view of my creative process. What really transpires when I make art is that the process provides a private space, a retreat in which I am free. I therefore agree with postmodern feminists' belief that 'freedom from oppressive thought' is the most fundamental key to liberation for women (see 2.4), or any individual for that matter. This freedom is perhaps best found in the 'imaginary domain', a term proposed and described by Drucilla Cornell (see 2.4.1).

In this imaginary domain³⁶, I name the monsters in my head, and they calm down - I am almost safe. Although the creative process can also be extremely frustrating, senseless rules hold no power. It is a domain in which the sign *don't step on the grass* can be disregarded. No one contests, denies or ignores my imaginings, which become concrete here. Despite its origin of violence, a bruise becomes something beautiful, a multitude of colours, stripped of its power of memory. I am free to challenge.

As my research has shown, being female can be limiting and even hazardous. Rather than viewing my 'femaleness' as a burden, however, I see it as a source of pride that should be reclaimed. I would rather 'affirm women's essential femaleness' in my work and focus on the value of the traits traditionally and culturally associated with women, than view it as a burden (see 2.3.2). At the

matter of the works.

³⁶ From Drucilla Cornell 1998: *At the Heart of Freedom. Feminism, Sex and Equality*. Princeton University Press, p ix.

same time I altogether reject society's view on these grounds of women as lesser beings.

6.3 ANALYSIS

In contrast with the works analysed in this thesis, my work cannot be described as portraits, portrayals or even depictions. All that can really be said is that this body of work turned out to be an inquiry and a comment on the structures that are responsible for feminine oppression.

6.3.1 Stylistic Background

The relationship between existing and imposed structures is a major consideration in all my work. Gallery space is therefore specifically selected to further the dialogue between these structures. When the visual content borders on the abstract, the artwork and title usually inform one another. Thus, words and sentences function as visual elements rather than clear expression. For my solo exhibition, *Fugitive Pieces*, I felt that the dialogue between pattern, image and environment, such as moss and watermarks on very thick walls, would contribute to the content of the exhibition. This idea seems to have been conveyed, since the External Examiner's Report (2000)³⁷ notes that "space, space relationships, format, surfaces and framing received careful consideration" in my exhibition. Examples of my work in which dress patterns form the ground, are *The Led* (1999), *Rose* (1999-2001), *Blue* (200-2001) and *Waste* (2000).

My interest in the technical aspects of mark- and art making directs most of my work in their initial stages. I therefore often use alternative mediums. In this exhibition I used dress patterns, which are extremely fragile. Most of the works are also no bigger than 17 cm x 17 cm, which invites a closer look from the

³⁷

While I did not know at the time of the exhibition who the examiners were, they have since been identified as Ms Elfriede Dreyer-Drury and Dr. Marion Arnold, and Prof. Gregory Kerr.

viewer, suggesting a certain intimacy or even precious regard. The fragility and small scale of my works resonated with my own vulnerability and, as a subordinate concern, contested the conventional view of art as lasting and a valuable investment. This may have led to the view expressed by one internal examiner (Internal Examiner's Report: 2000) of my work as "transgressive with regard to pictorial conventions and accepted use of materials".

Artist and critic Cobus van Bosch (*Die Burger* 31 January 2000: 4) also notes this aspect of my body of work, writing that the dress patterns were "*'n ontradisionele medium in die beeldende kunste ... gemoeid met identiteit, maar ook met alternatiewe materiale, proses en die dialoog tussen geskepte en bestaande beelde - alles aspekte wat vierkant binne formele kontemporêre kunskonvensies staan.*"

He adds that the use of dress patterns are: "*... betekenisvol ten opsigte van Keith se onderwerp – sosiale patrone waarbinne die vrou verskillende identiteite en rolle verkry ... Keith se onderwerp is die vrou binne die sosiale bestel, die verskillende rolle wat sy daarin neem en die identiteite wat aan haar toegesê word ...*" (*Die Burger* 31 January 2000: 4).

Despite this acknowledgement, van Bosch (*Die Burger* 31 January 2000: 4) criticises me for allowing my medium to hamper public interpretation:

[A]kademie se tentoonstellings is mos daar om die akademië te oortuig... In dié opsig doen sy alles reg hier, maar in watter mate vind dit inslag by die gewone kyker? ... Die kunstenaar moet laasgenoemde aspek in ag neem as hy of sy vir ander wys, want dit is immers die kyker wat deur die aanblik aan 'n objek wyer beslag gee as kunswerk.

I must acknowledge that my work appears to show a certain disregard for the public. Worse still, the 'disregard' is not restricted to the form of my work, but emerges from the content as well. As a result, the works in *Fugitive Pieces* all seem to deal with conventional roles that women are expected to fulfil and portray in society. Despite appearances, however, I never deliberately intended to alienate the public. While I cannot deny forgetting about the public when I am

making art in my private space, I do not feel a total disregard for the public. On the contrary, I see *Fugitive Pieces* as responding to society's on-going restriction of women, challenging viewers' established perceptions.

In this regard, Kant's 'enlarged mentality' comes to mind. He describes the 'enlarged mentality' as an attempt to think from everyone else's standpoint. According to Cornell (not dated: not numbered), this does not turn the individual to "everyone in a given community, but to anyone who can be included in the idea of humanity". This in turn "does not mean for us to accept the standpoint of any given community ... [but as] a representation of what this *might* mean." (Cornell, not dated: not numbered). Therefore, when a person judges aesthetic objects, whether it is either sublime or beautiful, it is important to "include the *should be* ... of the universal". According to Kant (Cornell, not dated: not numbered) judgement "is inseparable from an idealised humanity" and connected within "the time we make it; without empirically consulting any other standards than our own, and without discussing it with anyone else before making the judgement." Cornell (not dated: not numbered) concludes that "judgement creates the community, not vice versa."

It would seem that my creative process could be described by single-minded and secluded aesthetic creation. Perhaps this is why I relate so strongly to Cornell's interpretation of Kant's definition of the aesthetic idea as "...the representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with, or render completely intelligible. - It is easily seen, that an aesthetic idea is the counterpart (pendant) of a *rational idea* which, conversely, is a concept which no *intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate." Thus, according to Cornell, "[i]n reflective judgements, we ... cannot reach rational, or even imaginative, foreclosure".

My imaginary space therefore allows me to create single-mindedly and prevents me not only from submission to a *rational idea*, but also from pandering to

public taste. In this way, I exercise my right to investigate reality, which becomes the informant for most of my works. I address the visual stereotype with reference to women specifically, which has proved to be a recurrent theme. These stereotypes have grown to include pictures of girls in conventional environments. The images, which were appropriated from printed material, were taken out of their conventional context and imposed on dress patterns, thereby giving them an alternative content. I was interested in how the printed marks on the dress pattern the collaged images and my own drawings would communicate. One examiner (Internal Examiner's Report: 2000) did indeed respond to this intention, describing my work as "co-opting standardised images based on sexist stereotypes, and placing them on pieces of paper patterns which function to reinforce the ideas of social control."

According to Brouder and Garrard (1997: 12), the Feminist Art movement of the 1970s "reinstat[e] ... figurative imagery, portraiture, and the decorative..." In the sense that my work contains figurative images and decorative elements, I do seem to fall into a category of artists who have 'reinstated' images traditionally associated with women. *Botterblommetjies* (2000), *Ease* (1999-2000), *Babs* (2000), and *Seam Line* (1999-2000) all appear to reflect the spirit of postmodernism. Adding colour to this process, introduced a further possibility to probe visual assumptions about assumed identities. *Grace* (2000), *They witnessed the murder of a proverb* (1999-2000), and *Beteuel* (1999-2000, fig. 60) are good examples of my work in which colours that are conventionally associated with women, such as pink, mauve and pastels, were used to reclaim womanhood.

6.3.2 Works

According to one examiner (Internal Examiner's Report: 2000), the work in *Fugitive Pieces* is described as fragile and sensitive. From my perspective, these values traditionally associated with women and those mentioned by radical feminists (see 2.3.2) ("gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassion, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity, and unselfishness")

(Tong 1998: 131)), should indeed be celebrated. *Nessy* (2000, fig. 61), *Babs* (2000), *Straight and narrow* (1999-2000), *Nonna* (1999) *Ouch* (1999), *Simplicity* (1999), *Their pets* (1999) and *Harvesting* (1999), all deal with these traits. In *Babs* (2000) for example, painted roses and flowers symbolise gentleness, tenderness and growth. In the same way intuition, generally considered as an antithesis to masculine rationality (see 2.3.4), is represented by the forest in, *Babe got lost in the woods* (1998) and *Fugitive Pieces* (1998-2000).

In *Grace* (2000, fig. 62), I subconsciously addressed the fact that women are mostly expected to be well behaved. In *Beteuel* (1999-2000, fig. 60), 'positive' feminine traits, such as self-sacrifice and restraint form the main theme. The figure was therefore intended to communicate self-control, the fact that a woman is not (usually) expected to act out of free will. As the burden of emotional responsibility and consciousness is traditionally associated with women, *They witnessed the murder of a proverb* (1999-2000), further explores the theme.

Babs (2000, fig. 63), which in essence comments on motherhood or nurturance, is shaped like an apron with stencilled blue flowers and a note which I found in a parking lot that read as follows: "*Babs, hou asseblief 'n ogie oor my boontjies op die stoof, dankie E*". The note exemplified for me the constraints imposed by 'women's work', the domestication of female nurture and nature. This theme is also explored in *Nessy* (2000). In this work, the title was intended to add to the content. The word play on '*nessie*' (small nest) and 'nesting syndrome' refers to women's inclination to create a secure home. It is therefore ironic that this is where she becomes trapped. The fact that *Nessy* is also the name of the mythical Loch Ness monster is therefore not unintentional, as I could purposely celebrate the status of women as the 'other' instead of viewing it as negative. In claiming my 'otherness', I was free to ask questions, to disregard some arbitrary boundaries of society (see 2.4).

Female sensuality and not so much sexuality were of particular interest to me as part of a female identity. An examiner (Internal Examiner's Report: 2000) writes that many of the works "speak provocatively, and at a very intimate level, about

female identity and sexuality”. While this may be the impression created, I intended only to emphasise the duality of the sensuality with which the girls had been illustrated and their inherent innocence as a subtext to stereotype. The exploitation of female sensuality was also addressed in *Their pets* (1999, fig. 64), *Gi Gi* (2000), *Girl Pocket* (2000), *Seam Line* (2000) and *Whole View* (2000), in which the figures of girls that were traced almost disappear against the strong and imposing lines of the pattern. Existing words on the pattern were manipulated and juxtaposed against images of young girls to protest this practice as well as the implicated negation of individuality.

The fact that men always assume the dominant, masculine roles, while woman fill subordinate feminine roles in patriarchal society (see 2.3.2), is justified, reinforced and achieved through institutions such as the academy, church and the family (see 2.3.1), and seems to be a subconscious driving force in many of my works. According to an examiner (External Examiner’s Report: 2000), my “drawing plays on patriarchal sentiments”, while further describing the technique and “concept of layering [as] effective in manifesting [an] awareness of psychological and emotional depth and sociol-cultural [sic] inquiry.” Works such as *Simplicity* (2000, fig. 65), *Beast, Boar Cow* (1998), *Better to have Love and Lost* (2000), *Botterblommetjies* (2000) *Grain Line* (2000), *Ease* (2000) and *Kroesies Porselein* (2000)³⁸, are examples of this investigation into oppressive gender rolling (see 2.3.4).

Although *Chi chi Chii* (1999-2000), *Wheee!!* (1999-2000), *Off with it!!* (2000, fig. 66) and *Onttrek* (2000), all deal with such restrictive institutions, there is no clear visual reference to such institutions. Instead, I used symbols, such as school uniforms, specifically ties, to give some indication of the way in which schools tend to curb the development of identity, specifically female identity. The onomatopoeic titles emphasise the subversive nature of the ‘societal rules’ that confine women within these institutions. While the references to ‘belt, strap, and

³⁸ *Kroesies Porselein* (2000) specifically questions the popular perception of religious figures as necessary male.

tie' (and the grid) indicated to one examiner (Internal Examiner's Report: 2000) "ways in which society uses its norms, and imposes them on clothing – and by extension on people - to maintain ideas on femininity", however, Van Bosch pointed out that the visual elements in these works were dependent on 'covert symbolism', which means either that symbolic interpretation alone is possible or that the works are too abstract or even inaccessible (*Dictionary of Art*, Sv "iconography").

Several of the schoolgirl figures are depicted showing adult emotions or executing traditional feminine tasks and responsibilities. *Harvesting* (1999-2000), *Grain Line* (2000), *Beteuel* (2000), *Facing Back* (1999-2000), *Babe in the Woods* (1999-2000) and *Fugitive Pieces* (1999-2000, fig. 67) exemplify this trend. Coupling the schoolgirl image with the adult world may be linked with the surrealist concept of the *Femme-Enfant* or 'Woman-Child', who was "regarded as the incarnation of spontaneity and innocence, untrammelled by reason or logic, and therefore naturally in touch with intuitive knowledge and the world of dreams and imagination" (Broude & Garrard 1997: 12). Instead of "celebrating - according to the values of patriarchal society - a relationship of inequality", my inclination is to embrace these so-called inferior qualities, not only as a source of inspiration, but also with respect.

Other minor themes contained in this body of work include conventions such as ownership and power over individuals. *All the King's Horses* (1999), *My Horse My Grain* (1999-2000, fig. 68) and *Grain Line* (2000) deal with these issues. The chance discovery of literature on the Japanese Comfort Women, a book that deals with Japanese women who were taken as prostitutes ('comfort') for soldiers during the Second World War, led to works such *Gi Gi* (2000, fig. 69) and *The Comfort Women* (2000). The abuse of women in general was addressed in *POW* (2000-2001) and *Hung* (2000).

6.4 CONCLUSION

Although the writing of this chapter on my work seemed daunting at first, I must acknowledge that it has offered me the “opportunity to construct a theoretical argument around [my] practical work”, as the Department suggested. While I could not have written this chapter without outside assistance (it was too close for comfort), I am grateful that I have persevered. I now feel as if I do not only understand current gender limitations better, but also how my work seems to function within these boundaries. The aim of the Chapter has forced me to examine not only my work, but also my very identity, first as an individual, and then as a woman. My work seems to question, probe, analyse and examine, but refuses to make a statement. As a vehicle for clarifying my own identity as a woman, within a postmodern context, it is personal, hesitant, indecisive and vestigial. The symbols and images I use are sometimes female and sometimes male, they are saturated with knob knees and frilly blouses; sometimes inviting and sometimes cruel. Together, however, they seem to reflect my attempt to reclaim my womanhood.

I cannot offer an excuse for this language. My questions are about the influence of social patterning on everyday life. While I hesitate to accept the label of ‘woman artist’ or ‘feminist’ when my only intention is to paint, I cannot but echo Marlene Dumas’s (2000: 1) words: “I paint because I am a woman. (It’s a logical necessity)... It’s okay to be the second sex. It’s okay to be second best...”

POSTSCRIPT

SUMMARY

The research question of this thesis was: *What is the nature of the social boundaries that define women as a group, how has this been depicted throughout the ages and, more specifically, in the work of Tretchikoff and Stern, and what comment does my own work seem to make on these boundaries?* An analytical approach was used to pursue these questions, while the works of art were analysed according to the levels of interpretation suggested by Panofsky (1955: 54) and Dietrich. While Panofsky's emphasis on the placing of a work of art into, what would today be called *context* has been of special value, Dietrich's (2000) translation of his three sets of criteria for the evaluation of artworks (content, form and context) were used extensively. His comprehensive method, which includes the intention of the artist, the environment in which the work is produced, the biographical background of the artist, the context in which the work is presented and the public's reception and interpretation of artworks, has directed the analysis of the substantial amount of art analysed for this study.

To establish a framework for the analysis of conventions that have restricted women as they have been depicted in the pictorial art of specified artists, a broad outline of the development of feminist thought was provided in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three approximately 144 works were analysed to see whether the depiction of women in art formed any correlation with the development of feminist theory. The study has shown that it is indeed possible for art works to reveal the societal conventions that have subjugated women to a subordinate position in society through the ages. As mentioned before, this approach does not suggest that artists intended to portray such conventions. Yet many boundaries that have restricted women in the past are clearly detectable in art. During the second wave of feminist thought women's oppression began to be expressed purposefully, especially by women artists. This was achieved not only through controversial content, but through alternative mediums and methods. It would seem that works

by women of the 1970s, for example, have dealt more aggressively with issues that were directly responsible for the subjugation of women.

As remarked before, both Tretchikoff and Stern were world-renowned figures, but clearly for very different reasons. While Stern was known for her artistic achievements and credibility all she wanted to be was a successful and recognised artist, Tretchikoff was relegated to the position of 'King of Kitsch'. Despite this, his contribution to the South African Art scene remains extraordinary. The enormous amount of money that he made, which might have been the motivation for his pandering to public taste, gives proof to his worldwide popularity.

Be that as it may, both artists were successful enough to raise public consciousness on issues that concerned female subjugation. Seemingly for very different reasons, however, they remained apathetic to the quest for women's liberation. Tretchikoff's work reflects a blatant disregard of the identities, individualities, or social realities of his models, and romanticises their constraints instead. As mentioned in Chapter Four, it testifies to his detached observation, which confines women to the picture plane, the realm of object and sanctions the process of objectification. Both his gender and the fact that he painted during the feminist lull may have contributed to his patronising attitude. Within the parameters of this study, therefore, Tretchikoff did not contest the boundaries that subjugated women to a subordinate position in society, but in fact reinforced them. From a postmodern perspective, his attitude is both patriarchal and patronising, and his art disempowering.

Stern, on the other hand, could not have been unaware of the societal limitations imposed on women. Yet she chose to remain aloof. While she seemed to be able to move masculine requirements and the demands of society to the background to depict women as natural and almost free of stereotype in some of her works, she cannot be seen to have made a major contribution to the liberation of women. However, she remains a remarkable woman. Given her context, that is, her placement in the feminist lull and her removal from the hub of European art,

her lack of consciousness of the confinement of women is perhaps comprehensible.

In addition to the expected outcome, i.e. that the subjugation of women could be visible in artworks over time, the study has also shown that developments in feminist thought can be traced in art. As mentioned above, the failure of both Tretchikoff and Stern to contest societal conventions that served as boundaries for women's freedom, may be attributed to the lull in feminist thought that occurred between 1930 and approximately 1960. Chapter Three shows that further, more detailed, studies should be undertaken in this regard.

NOTES

One of the aims of this study was to gain some distance from my own work and to *explore it more theoretically*, specifically against the background of feminist thinking (see 1.5). While I had vigorously rebelled against the task, I was surprised at the outcome of the exercise. I now realise how privileged I am to base my inquiry on established and successful feminist discourses. Throughout the study, I have found many similarities between feminist thought of the Second Wave and my own thought processes. I have also realised that I clarify my changing identity through my art within a postmodern context.

Although my work seems to depart from convention on a technical level, this was never my intention. The decision to work on dress patterns, for example, was informed by my interest in alternative surfaces. The dress patterns were not selected to enforce or contest any ideology. Yet, many of the works seem to comment on the boundaries of womanhood.

The stark difference between my work and the assumptions that seem to underlie both Tretchikoff and Stern's portraits of women, not only informed the study, but also led me to reconsider my opinion of feminism. I have to admit that I am indeed a feminist, but do so grudgingly, because of my inborn fear of being classified or categorised. I recognise the debt today's women owe to the early pioneers who engineered the more fertile environment in which women live

today. I also recognise women's suffering, their struggle for equal rights and for 'being' without discrimination. Although it would be premature and overly idealistic to assume that there is no more discrimination, I appreciate a world in which womanhood can begin to be celebrated.

Although millions of women are still subjugated due to ignorance, underdevelopment, poverty and strict social structures that restrict individuality, it is my belief that a feminist consciousness resides in every woman, and that, given the opportunity and courage, every woman has the potential to find her voice.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The choice of Tretchikoff and Stern, who worked during the feminist lull, could be criticised. Artists who have worked in a feminist paradigm may have been a more suitable choice for analysis against the framework of feminist history. However, the study has shown that the work of most artists can be analysed against such a framework. The traces of a 'feminist consciousness' found in the work of both these artists gives proof of this.

The fact that my work does not deal with issues of race might be another concern, but I am not ignorant of these issues. In this particular stage of my life and work, I seem to be questioning my own identity as a woman. In future, issues of race may well become part of my creative expression.

My youth and inexperience may also give rise to criticism. I failed to compare my work with that of postmodern women artists, or with the work of Tretchikoff and Stern for that matter, because I do not consider my work in the same league as theirs. Although a comparison might have led to some alternative conclusions, I hold that it was not essential for the achievement of the aim of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The requirement to fit my creative being into the confines of an academic structure, to expose my most personal domain to academic scrutiny, (for me) bordered on the violation of my personal rights as an individual and a woman. Although the exercise has proved to be possible, it remained excruciating throughout the relevant chapter. I cannot stress enough, the need for academic and personal support in this regard. Not only does a student depend on the support from the Department and the supervisors involved, however, but also on their respect.

To conclude, I have avoided contriving to systemise my art and its contents. Instead, I have attempted to define the pivotal question in my work. Regarding the last question, I now realise that it is not in my nature to protest in anger. For me, making art, commenting, is a matter of ironic observation, awareness of the entrapment of social conventions and a very personal expression of the images that accompany these ideas. Through the study, I have therefore not only gained a great deal of insight into the work of the two selected artists, but have developed what I hope is a more mature approach to aesthetic criticism and an understanding of how we all judge from our own particular perspectives.

APPENDIX

REGISTER OF WORKS SOLD

- 1994: Christo Potgieter, Pretoria. *Still life with pears* @ R250.
- 1995: University of Pretoria, Pretoria. Untitled @ R900.
- 1996: Buyer, Minnesota, "*They shoot horses don't they?*" @ R1600.
- 1996: Miss Hanlie Beyers, Untitled @ R8000.
- 1996: Work sold at gallery, Untitled @ R900.
- 1998: Willem Bouwer, Untitled @ R1800.
- 1998: Mrs Hermie Vougaleris, Untitled @ R1900.
- 2000: Sandra Hanekom, *Grace* @ R450.
- 2000: Matthew Haresnape. *My Horse My Grain* @ R250
- 2000: Mark O' Donaghue. *All the King's Horses* @ R150.
- 2000: Mrs. Lizette Vermaak. *Rose* @ R450
- 2000: German Gallerist, x 13 Works total of R3500.
- 2000: Buyer, Dorp Street Gallery, *Sunset* @ R250.
- 2001: German buyer, DC Art, *Modesty* @ R250.
- 2001: Swedish buyer, DC Art, *Soel* and *Holwater* @ R1200 each.

COMMISSIONS:

- 1996: Commission: Mrs. Yvonne Reily, Pretoria. Two Nude studies in charcoal @ R 200 each, and *Poppies*, (oil paint), @ R 1500.
- 1997: Commission: Mrs. Celia Uys, Pretoria. Small oil painting @ R600.
- 1997: Commission: Mrs. Sue de Villiers, Pretoria, Oil (2. X 1.5 m) @ R2500.

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September: 32-37.

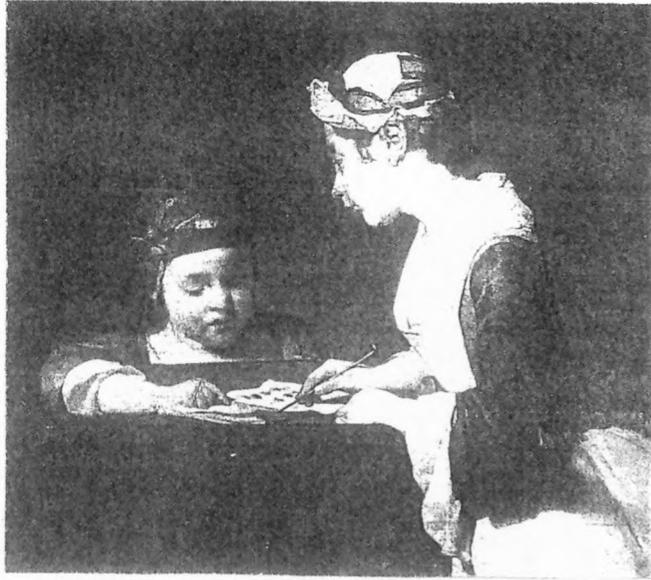


fig. 1. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *The Schoolmistress* (c. 1733-1736).



fig. 2. Benjamin West, *Venus and Cupid* (1765).



fig. 3. Jane Bowkett, *Preparing Tea* (c. 1860).



fig. 4. Louise Jopling, *Weary Waiting* (1877).



fig. 5. Francis Haymen, *The Play of Skittles (The Enraged Vixen of a Wife)* (c. 1741-42).



fig. 6. Anna Blunden, *For Only One Short Hour* (1854).



fig. 7. Paul Gauguin, *Nevermore* (1897).

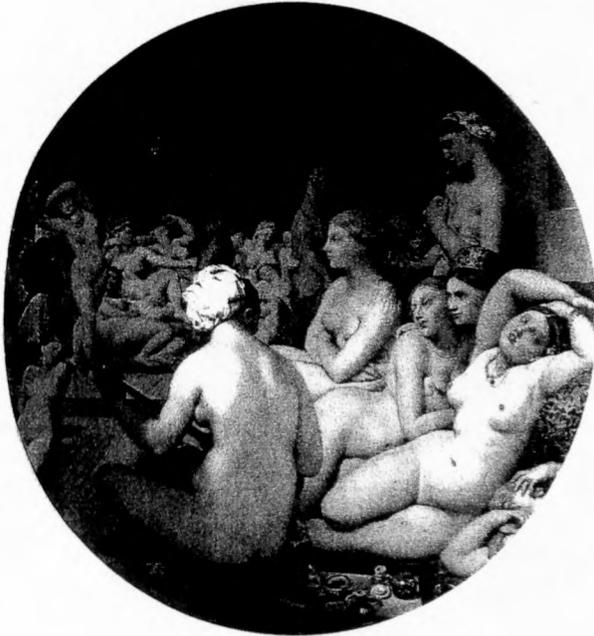


fig. 8. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath* (1862).



fig. 9. Honoré Daumier, *The Third Class Carriage* (1860-62).



fig. 10. Käthe Kollwitz, *Mother with Dead Child* (1903).



fig. 11. Francis Benjamin Johnson, *Self-Portrait* (c. 1896).

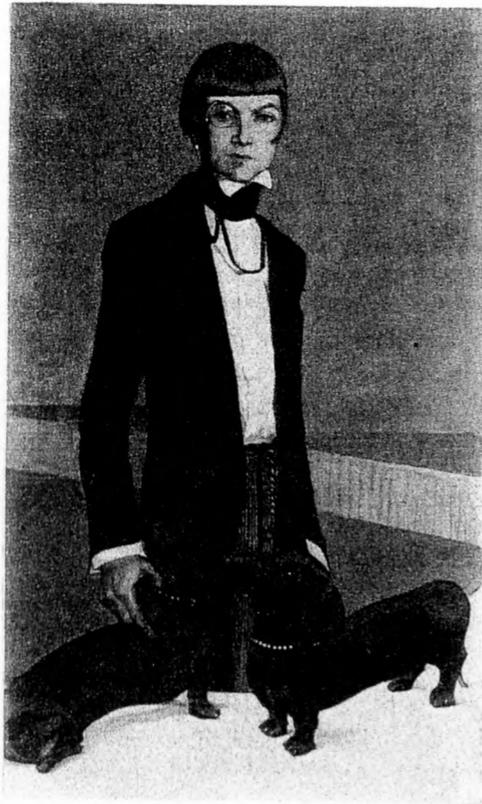


fig. 12. Romaine Brooks, *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924).



fig. 13. Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940).

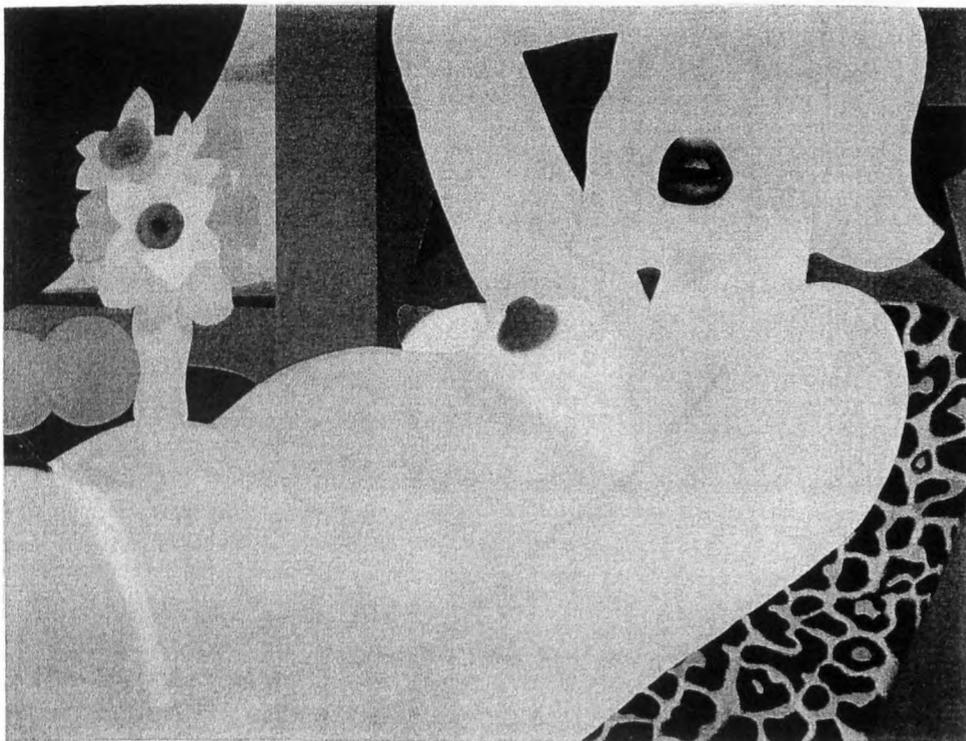


fig. 14. Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude # 57* (1964).

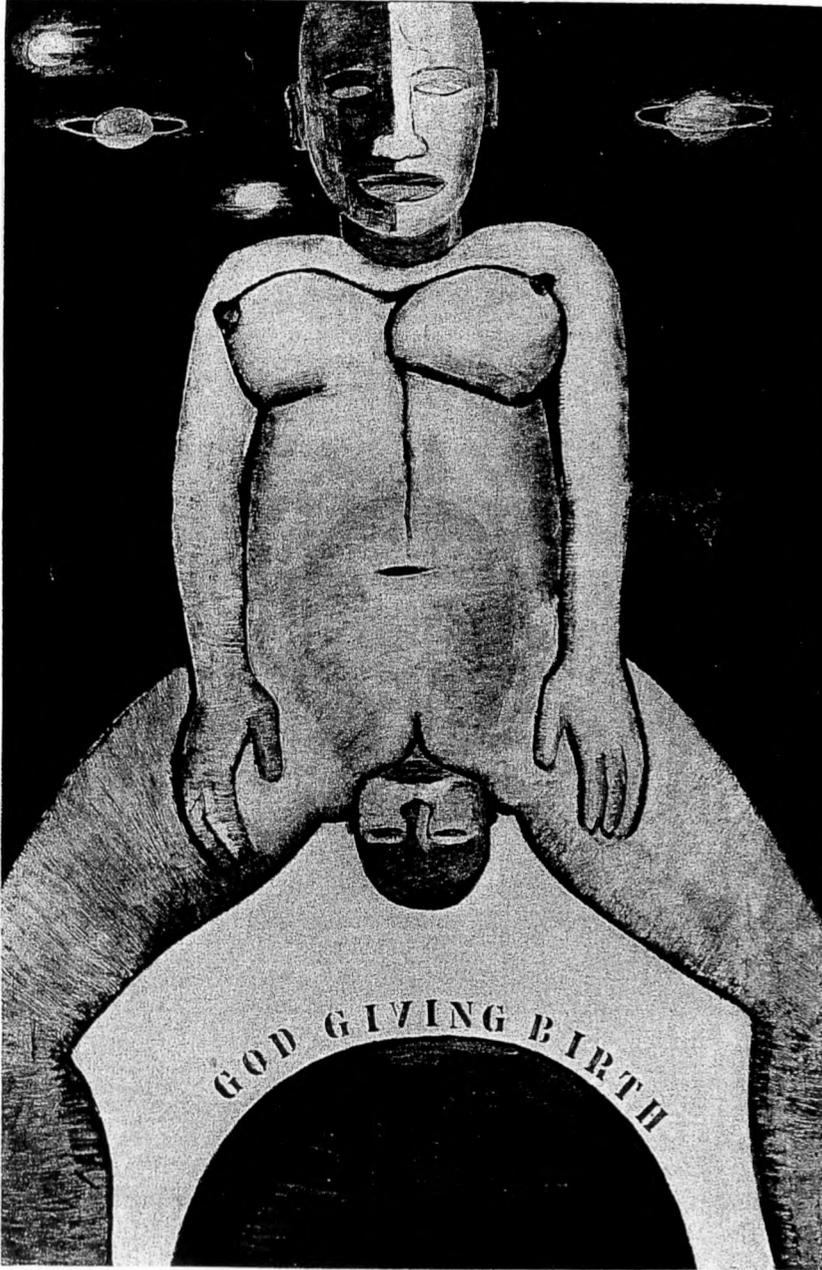


fig. 15. Sjöö Marcia, *God giving Birth* (1969).



fig. 16. Rosy Martin (in collaboration with Jo Spence), *Dapper Daddy* (1986).



fig. 17. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still # 3* (1977).



fig. 18. Barbara Kruger, *We have received orders not to move* (1982).



fig. 19. Debbie Humphry, *Computer Operator with her Male Colleagues* (1996).
Colleagues



fig. 20. Debbie Humphry, *Female Fire Fighter in Sleeping Quarters with Male* (1996).



fig. 21. Paula Rego, *Sit* (1994).



fig. 26. Thomas Waterman Wood, *A Southern Cornfield, Nashville Ten.* (1861).



fig. 27. Hélène Rudder-du Ménil, *Liberty* (1897).



fig. 28. Marion Greenwood, *Tribute to women* (1965).



fig. 29. Audrey Flack, *Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Marching for Freedom* (1965).



fig. 30. Audrey Flack, *War Protest March* (1968).



fig. 31. Faith Ringgold, *Mrs Jones and Family* (1973).

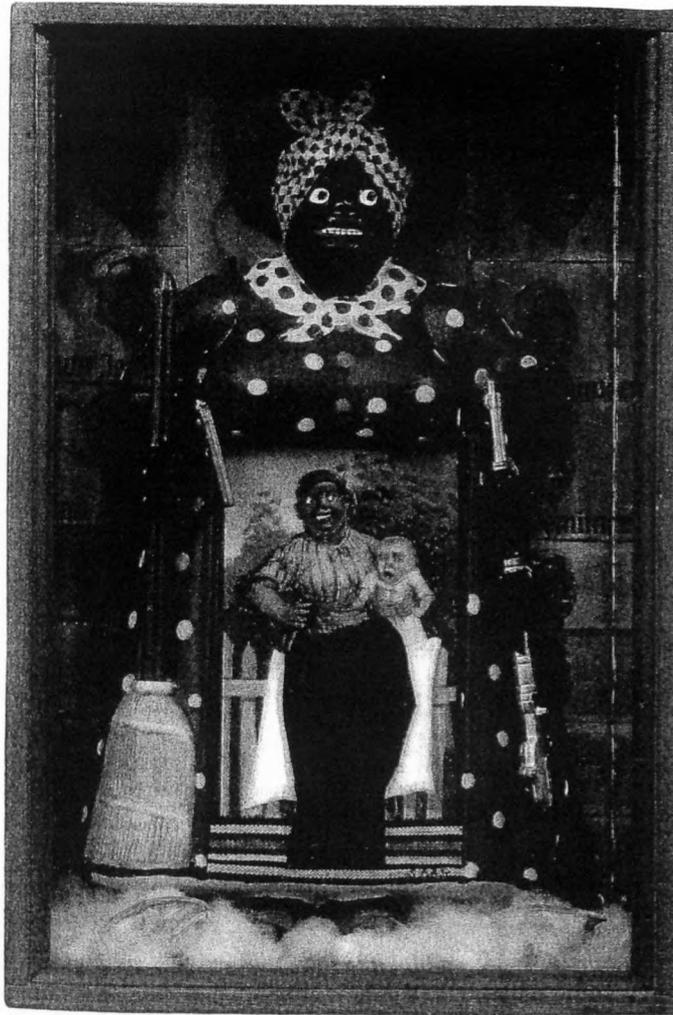


fig. 32. Betye Saar, *Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972).

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Sofonisba Anguissola	Meta Warwick Fuller	Edmonia Lewit	Oliga Rastanova
Diane Arbus	Artemisia Gentileschi	Judith Leyster	Nellie Mae Rowe
Vanessa Bell	Marguerite Gérard	Barbara Longhi	Rachel Ruysch
Isabel Bishop	Natalia Goncharova	Dora Maar	Kay Sage
Rosa Bonheur	Kate Greenaway	Lee Miller	Augusta Savage
Elizabeth Bougereau	Barbara Hepworth	Lisette Model	Vavara Stepanova
Margaret Bourke-White	Eva Hesse	Paula Modersohn-Becker	Florine Stettheimer
Romaine Brooks	Hannah Hoch	Tina Modotti	Sophie Taeuber-Arp
Julia Margaret Cameron	Anna Hamlingdon	Berthe Morisot	Alma Thomas
Emily Carr	May Howard Jackson	Grandma Moses	Marietta Robusti Tintoretto
Rosalba Carriera	Frida Kahlo	Gabriele Münter	Suzanne Valadon
Mary Cassatt	Angelica Kauffmann	Alice Neel	Remedios Varo
Constance Marie Charpentier	Hilma af Klimt	Louise Nevelson	Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun
Imogen Cunningham	Karlie Kallwitz	Georgia O'Keeffe	Laura Wheelwright
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fig. 33. *Guerilla Girls* (1987).

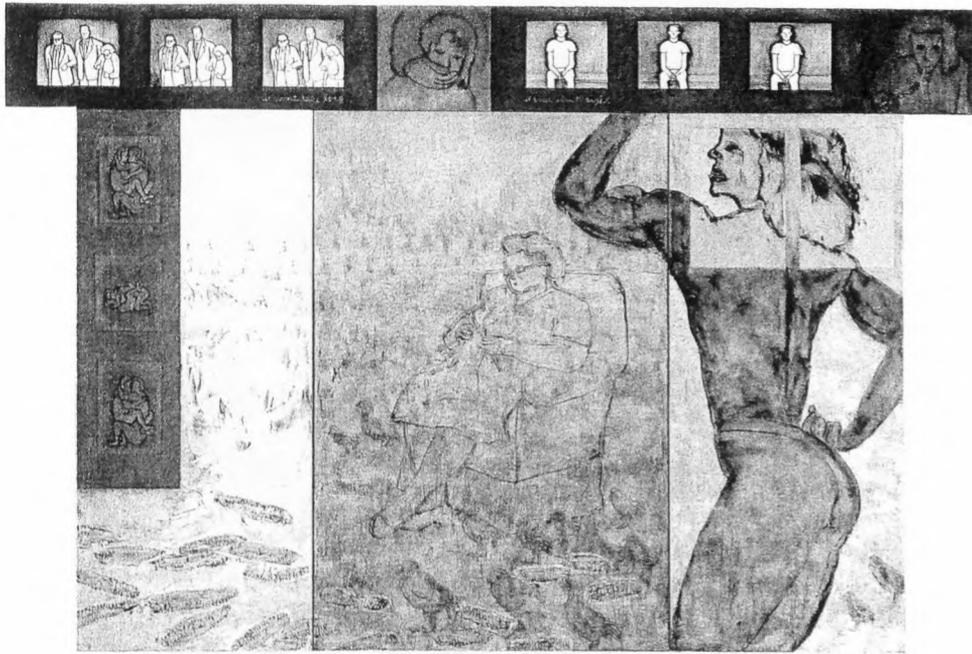


fig. 34. Ida Applebroog. *Rainbow Caverns* (1987).

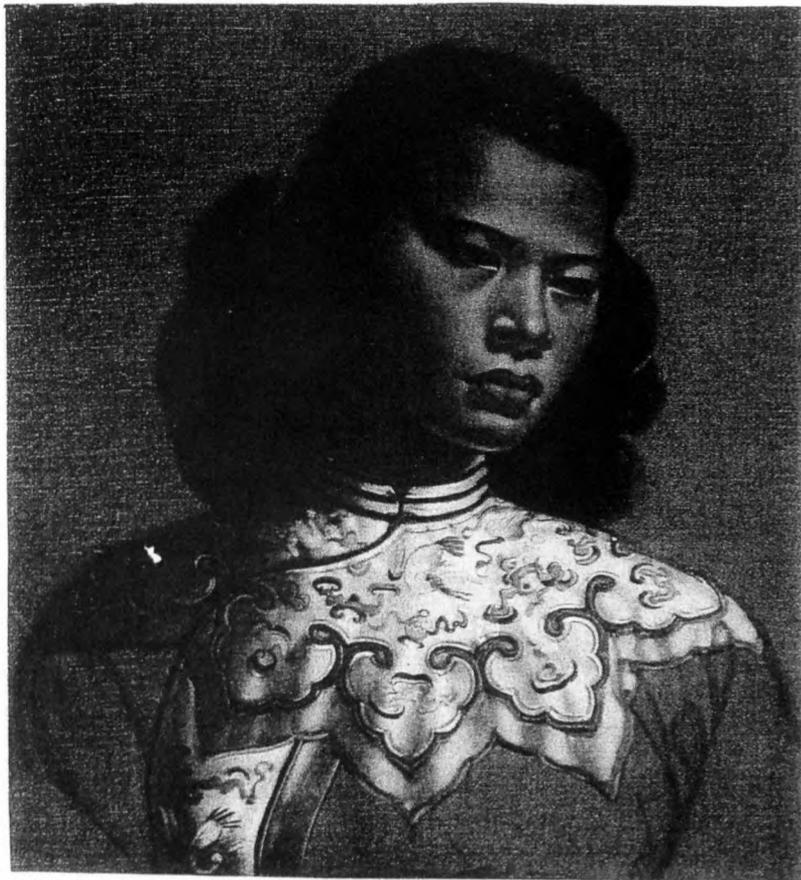


fig. 35. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Chinese Girl* (c. 1952, America).



fig. 36. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Rainy Day* (South Africa).



fig. 37. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Study in Umber* (South Africa).



fig. 38. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Black and White* (South Africa).



fig. 39. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Lady of the Tropics* (Java).



fig. 40. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Lenka or Red Jacket* (c.1946, Java).



fig. 41. Vladimir Tretchikoff, *Civilised Bali* (Java).



fig. 42. Irma Stern, *Das Ewige Kind* or *Eternal Child* (1916).



fig. 43. Irma Stern, *Great Women's Dance* (1922).



fig. 44. Irma Stern, *Woman Sunbathing* (1921).



fig. 45. Irma Stern, *Bed Carriers* (1941).



fig. 46. Irma Stern, *African Woman with Children* (1955).



fig. 47. Irma Stern, *Peasant Woman with Chickens* (1962).



fig. 48. Irma Stern, *Daydreaming* (1927).



fig. 49. Irma Stern, *Composition* (1923).



fig. 50. Irma Stern, *Ritual Dance* (1922).



fig. 51. Irma Stern, *Mangbetu Bride* (1947).



fig. 52. Irma Stern, *Portrait of an African Woman* (1941).



fig. 53. Irma Stern, *Maid in uniform* (1955).

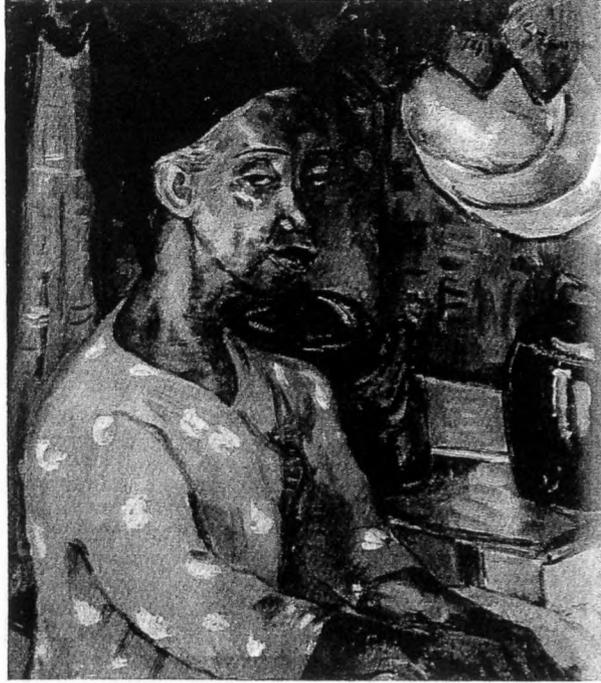


fig. 54. Irma Stern, *Woman in the Kitchen* (1941).



fig. 55. Irma Stern, *Nude* (1947).



fig. 56. Irma Stern, *Arab Youth* (1945).



fig. 57. Irma Stern, *Zanzibar Woman* (1949).



fig. 58. Irma Stern, *Harlots, Madeira* (1932).

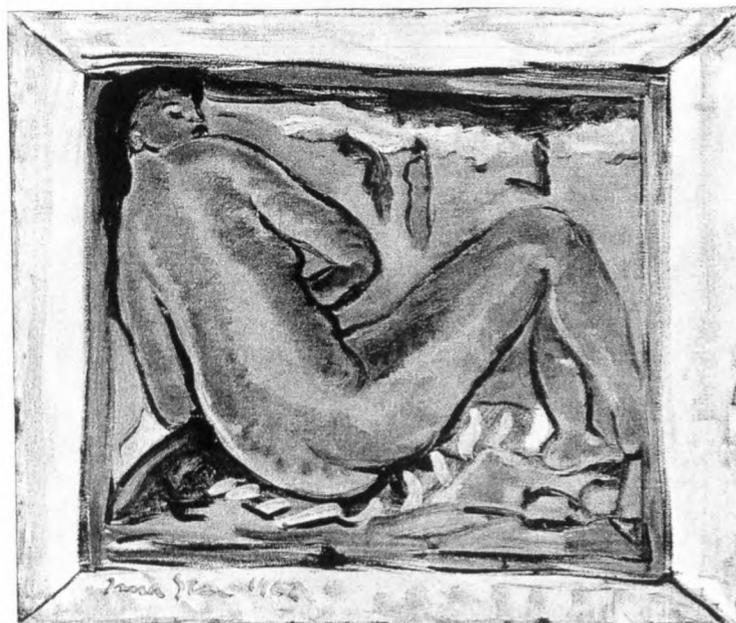


fig. 59. Irma Stern, *Figure on Beach* (1962).



fig. 62. Marlise Keith, *Grace* (2000)

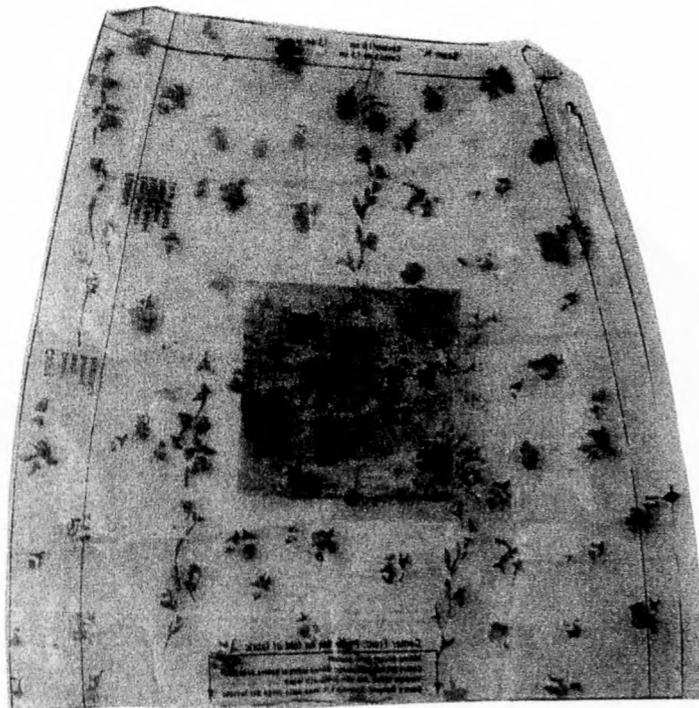


fig. 63. Marlise Keith, *Babs* (2000).

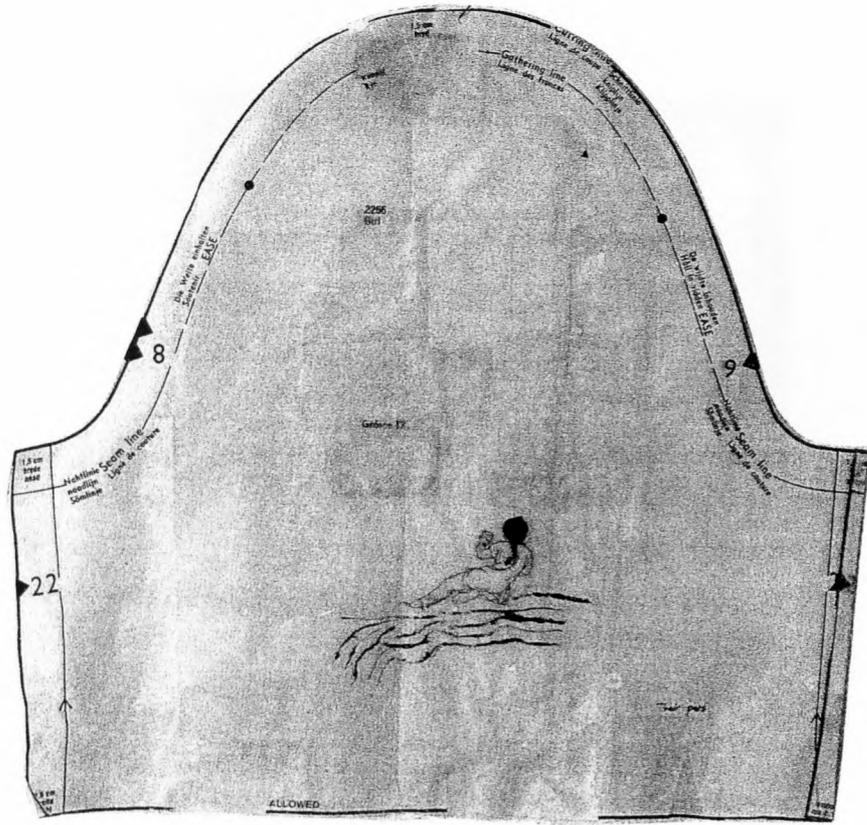


fig. 64. Marlise Keith, *Their pets* (1999).

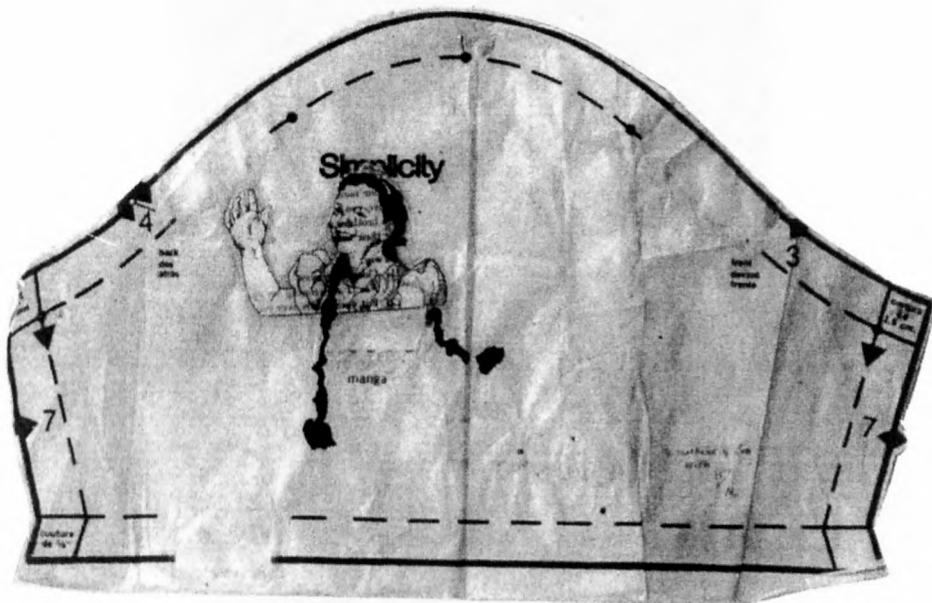


fig. 65. Marlise Keith, *Simplicity* (2000).

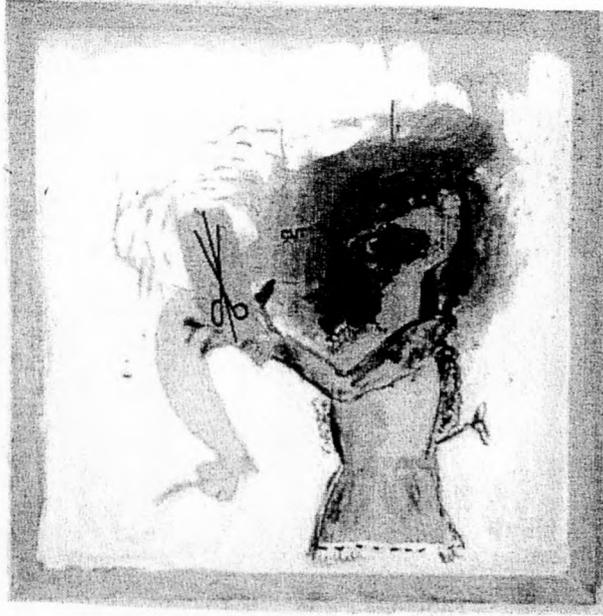


fig. 66. Marlise Keith, *Off with it!!* (2001).



fig. 67. Marlise Keith, *Fugitive Pieces* (2001).

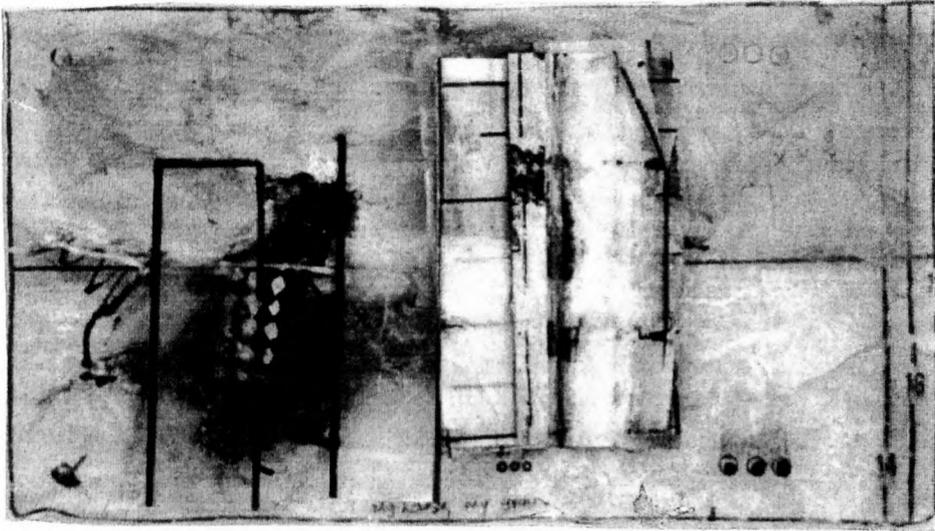


fig. 68. Marlise Keith, *My Horse My Grain* (1999-2000).

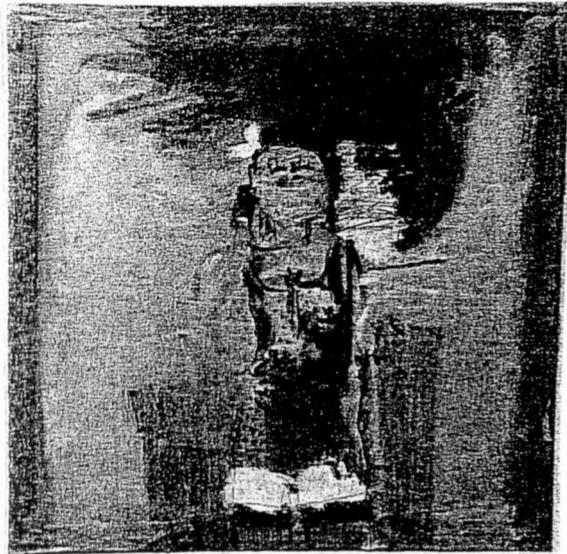


fig. 69. Marlise Keith, *Gi Gi* (2001).