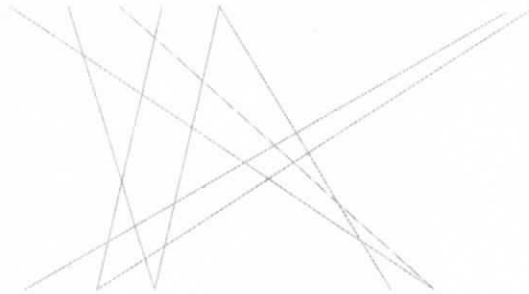


ART / WOMEN / CALIFORNIA 1950-2000

Parallels and Intersections



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CONTENTS

Preface · ix

Foreword

SUSAN LANDAUER · xi

Acknowledgments · xiii

Introduction: Art in Context

DANIELA SALVIONI · 1

CULTURAL OVERVIEW

I DREAM I'M THE DEATH OF ORPHEUS
Adrienne Rich · 17

Reflecting on History as Histories
WHITNEY CHADWICK · 19

KOPIS'TAYA, A GATHERING OF SPIRITS
Paula Gunn Allen · 43

Other Landscapes

ANGELA Y. DAVIS · 45

PARALLELS

RECONSIDERING THE TERRAIN:
FIVE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

COAL
Audre Lorde · 57

Liberating Blackness and Interrogating
Whiteness

PHYLLIS J. JACKSON · 59

YES, WE ARE NOT INVISIBLE
Janice Mirikitani · 79

What Is an Asian American Woman Artist?
KARIN HIGA · 81

FROM "THE POET IN THE WORLD"
Denise Levertov · 95

Constructing a New Paradigm:
European American Women Artists
in California, 1950-2000
LAURA MEYER · 97

TO WE WHO WERE SAVED BY THE STARS
Lorna Dee Cervantes · 121

Calafia/Califas: A Brief History of
Chicana California
AMALIA MESA-BAINS · 123

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #21
Diane di Prima · 141

Uncovering/Recovering:
Indigenous Artists in California
JOLENE RICKARD · 143

INTERSECTIONS

LEY LINES

Burning Down the House: Feminist Art in
California (An Interview with Amelia Jones)
DANIELA SALVIONI AND DIANA BURGESS FULLER · 163

A Collective History: Las Mujeres Muralistas
TEREZITA ROMO · 177

Indigenous Visionaries:
Native Women Artists in California
THERESA HARLAN · 187

How the Invisible Woman Got Herself
on the Cultural Map: Black Women Artists
in California
JUDITH WILSON · 201

INTERSECTIONS

THEMES AND PRACTICES

Landing in California
JENNIFER GONZALEZ · 219

Women Artists in California
and Their Engagement with Photography
SANDRA S. PHILLIPS · 241

California Filming:
Re-Imagining the Nation
ROSA LINDA FREGOSO · 257

Construction Sites: Women Artists in
California and the Production of Space-Time
PAMELA LEE · 275

Exchanges
MOIRA ROTH AND SUZANNE LACY · 295

Women, Art, and Technology:
A Brief History
JOANN HANLEY · 311

What Do We Want? The Subject Behind the
Camera: Women Video Artists and
Self-Articulation
NANCY BUCHANAN · 321

EPILOGUE

The Baby or the Bath Water; Being an
Inquiry into the Nature of Woman,
Womyn, Art, Time, and Timing in Five
Thousand Words or Less
ALLUCQUERE ROSANNE STONE · 335

List of Contributors · 349

List of Illustrations · 353

Index · 357

PAMELA LEE

CONSTRUCTION SITES

*Women Artists in California
and the Production of Space-Time*

Reflecting on a childhood spent in Los Angeles, it is hard to square the memories of one's past with the received wisdom on its built environment. Clichés surrounding the space of the metropolis wreak havoc with personal history. How does the image of the city as an endless, grid-like tract, veiled in penumbral smog and lacking in both interest or incident, reflect the reality of everyday life, with all its material complexity, social engagements, and intimate gestures? In what ways do its labyrinthine freeways, the architecture of road rage and "sig alerts," speak to personal history? Where, in other words, is the space of individual dwelling in this picture? The City of Quartz of cultural mythos—a city of both masculinist proportions and presumptions—is not the topography of my own city.¹

The images of this city, oft-repeated, monolithic and grim in their capitulation to the dictates of urban planning, tend to repress or marginalize alternative visions of space produced by its female inhabitants conventionally left out of the official narratives of the city's history. How might women represent their *own* relation to space, one that exceeds the notion of a geographically fixed and determined place alienated by the strictures of cartography, real estate, and property rights? Space is not to be understood here as an absolute, immutable, and neutral category, something which one occupies passively. Rather, to follow Henri Lefebvre on the subject, it is as much a product of its subjects' daily habitus as it produces them in turn.²

In this essay, I wish to consider the ways in which women artists working in California deal broadly with the terms of what I will call constructed space. This notion of space is as diverse as its artists' respective aims are distinct, ranging from architectural and domestic space, to sites of cultural memory and exile, to spaces of spiritual and meditative retreat. Where one works, where one plays, where one reflects, what space one is allowed access to or alternately barred from: all of these concerns are implicitly addressed by these artists. The spaces that they construct, however, are not simply physical in nature, for to speak of artistic construction is to appeal to the self-fashioning of women and the production of artistic subjectivity itself.

The Promise of Space

The feminist philosopher and theorist Elizabeth Grosz reminds us that female subjectivity is also an embodied subjectivity, and that the terms of that embodiment, however socially constructed, are necessarily sexed terms. She speaks crucially to the corporeal stakes of that subject in space and the importance of rethinking its terms. As she writes in *Space, Time and Perversion*, "If bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their matter and form be rethought, but so too must their environment and spatio-temporal location."³ Female subjectivity might be understood dialectically as a process that acknowledges both the

history of the space occupied and the relative autonomy of its inhabitants over it.⁴

It is hardly incidental that one of the canonical texts of nineteenth-century feminist literature, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wall-paper," is devoted to a woman's lack of control over her external surround.⁵ The fictionalized, diaristic account witnesses its narrator forcibly restricted to an upstairs bedroom, where she progressively suffers hallucinations about the confines of the room. Gilman's text is a brilliant early assault on patriarchy and domesticity, on a woman's restricted social and political autonomy reflected in her limited freedom within architectural space. But as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, it is also a story of creativity blocked and censored.⁶ The protagonist's husband sternly forbade her to write and accordingly limits her spatial mobility. The question or possibility of art making for Gilman's protagonist is thus analogized to the promise of space, with the narrator's domestic scene understood as a prison and the act of writing seen as model for negotiating the symbolic order. As such, Gilman's famous narrative of architectural space represents not only the historically repressive conditions of lived space by women but also, importantly, serves as an allegory for women's potential liberation and productivity as artists through space.

Gilman's text historically anticipates (and im-

plicitly theorizes) the chiasmatic relationship between women's space and the processes of art making: how space affects—but can also be affected by—its female occupants. But it also suggests that works of art have their own instrumental value and can themselves shape spatio-temporal experience. In conflating the terms of space with the art object, women's art-making assumes a formative (not merely reflective) logic all its own.

Home Work

At roughly the same time that women were staking a claim for themselves as artists in the late 1960s and 1970s, other feminists were discovering the rewards of building as architects, construction workers, and contractors—of producing space in ways both metaphorical and literal. Tirza Latimer, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University, recalls the struggles, politics, and ultimately, pleasures of being a woman construction worker in the 1970s. As a member of a women's carpentry collective formed in Berkeley called the Seven Sisters, she remembers the "centering" experience of constructing, of defying roles conventionally assigned to men, and of finding satisfaction in contributing to "certain stereotypes of lesbianism: [being] physically and mentally tough, competent and aggressive."⁷ Among the collective's priorities were "to establish and defend a feminine position in the trades, to train



85

Tirza Latimer, *Tirza Latimer*, a construction worker with the Seven Sisters Carpentry Collective, Berkeley, early 1970s. Black-and-white photo. Courtesy of Tirza Latimer.

women in construction, and to make it possible for women (including ourselves) to own/build/remodel houses/businesses."⁸

Latimer's recollections point to the historical necessity for women to construct their own space, as well as an implicit critique of their relative inaccessibility to the means for producing (and thereby controlling) the spaces that preceded theirs historically. Women artists in the 1970s took on these issues in other ways. For many, it was the space of the domestic that served

as a critical focus point, soliciting a range of artistic responses. Some artists thought through and parodied its structural codes (as in Martha Rosler's at once biting and hilarious 1975 video *Semiotics of the Kitchen*); others performed and thereby re-situated its activities as critique (Mierle Ukeles's 1974 series *Maintenance Art*); while still others reclaimed the debased arts of the home through the notion of a feminized (if not wholly feminine) aesthetic (the pattern and decoration movement). There is no doubt, however, that the challenge to and reclamation of domestic space by women artists in California found its principal locus in the collaborative 1972 project *Womanhouse*.

Located in Hollywood, *Womanhouse* was constructed over a period of six weeks by twenty-one students of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts in conjunction with their teachers Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, and their teaching assistant, Faith Wilding. Granted use of the abandoned house by the city of Los Angeles, the students worked on the site for (at least) eight hours a day in endless dialogue and collaboration with one another, transforming the building's seventeen rooms into environmental works of art. While each room partook of a relatively distinct aesthetic, all of them suggested the tasks and cultural roles assigned to women in their homes.

The process-oriented component of the work

revealed a certain transformation of labor within the domestic sphere. As Arlene Raven writes:

Abandoned and condemned, the house on Mariposa Avenue was still architecturally imposing but also in need of extensive reconstruction . . . for the Feminist Art Program workers, skills such as carpentry and window glazing became part of the creative process. Before picking up a paint brush, etching plate, sculpting tool or video camera, each young artist had already used electric saws, drills and sanders.⁹

Thus the collaborative efforts of female art students implied a new model of pedagogy—a creative and intellectual exploration of the cultural imago of the house. Raven's remarks also speak to women literally reshaping their metier through the acquisition of new production skills. Finally, the work recuperates from the mandates of alienated space the most vexatious cultural site for feminists.

By contrast, Ann Hamilton's approach to domestic space assumes a more personal, and perhaps more ambiguous, cast. In her performative and installation-based work, the small, repetitive, and intimate gestures at the heart of domestic life are endowed with a gravity that approaches ritual. The "labor of hands" is a pervasive interest for Hamilton, who has taught at the University



86

Ann Hamilton, *Still Life*, 1988.
Installation (dimensions variable).

of California, Santa Barbara, and has produced important site works throughout California. These projects involve the collaboration of numerous co-workers obsessively engaged in tasks which seem to monumentalize the banality of everyday life and its materials.¹⁰ However, Hamilton suggests a more equivocal relation to these jobs than what they might initially seem. Photographs of her installation entitled *Still Life* (1988), produced for the group exhibition *Home Show: 10 Artists' Installations in 10 Santa Barbara Homes*, present the artist sitting at a dining table piled high with a mass of white men's shirts. When the work is seen in profile, however, the shirts are barely recognizable. Ironed, folded, starched and flattened, they appear as brittle sheets of paper, with none of the sheen or texture associated with fabric. The "labor of tending" to the shirts was matched only by Hamilton's treatment of the room's walls, which she covered in a sheer scrim of wax. In a painstaking and equally tedious process, the artist then pressed eucalyptus leaves into its surface, producing a delicate, shadowy pattern on the walls.

Hamilton's treatment of the shirts invokes the gestures of women's domestic labor critiqued in *Womanhouse*. Acknowledging the drudgery involved in producing such work and its larger associations with the space of the home, she writes, "The home is often a sanctuary, a refuge, a place where one is tended, but tending can get

claustrophobic. It can strangle and destroy the very thing it's trying to create. [The shirts] . . . were so tended they were rendered dysfunctional."¹¹ At the same time, the place of touch in Hamilton's work—the sensuality of a gesture such as preserving a leaf in wax, for instance—endows her installations with a sense of intimacy. The notion of rendering something "dysfunctional," literally "workless," under the auspices of house work underscores the paradoxical streak in Hamilton's art. Asked whether or not *Still Life* was a "critique of needless labor," the artist spoke to a more personal reading of the piece.

The day the piece was completed, the homeowner told me about the death of her first husband. Although the house wasn't built at the time, they had lived on the same property, and her husband had been an opera singer. . . . Anyway, they used to sit around the dining room table and sing opera. There was an opera playing in my piece. And then she said that when he died she had continued to wash and iron his shirts and that it wasn't until a friend came and took them away and made a quilt for her that she started to live again. And there I was, bringing all these shirts back in and placing them on a dining room table.¹²

However unintentional, Hamilton's piece recalled a different kind of work for the home-

owner: the work of mourning. The loss of her husband was acknowledged in an activity with seemingly mundane implications. But also at stake in the washing and folding of his shirts was the homeowner's attempt to connect metonymically with a loved one who had recently died, as if the repetition involved in treating shirts was an act of remembrance and recollection. Hamilton had no recourse to this biographical information as she constructed *Still Life*, but its reception attests to the dual meanings of work in the domestic sphere. As much as it can be read as claustrophobic and "dysfunctional," it might also reflect a more personal history of the woman who tends to the home, who transforms the acts of everyday labor by investing it with the dignity of her touch.

The Work Room and the Museum Space: Maria Nordman

Maria Nordman engages phenomenological and architectural space that resists being narrated or described in any easy or coherent fashion. And yet what this difficulty suggests for the reception of her work is at the crux of her practice. Just as it rejects being fixed through language, particularly the language of the visual arts, so too does the experience of the work deny the stable grounding of space. Indeed, the relationship between the uses of language and the image of her art is a central concern of the artist. Of her early *Saddleback*

Mountain project, she has remarked that "The information is not coming in only visually . . . I am interested in a range of experience that happens with one's whole body sensing and conversing over a period of time."¹³ Paradoxically, because the temporal dimensions of architecture and space are deeply internalized in her work, Nordman's articulation of space-time is a dislocated one.

Born in 1943 in Goerlitz, Silesia, Nordman now lives in Los Angeles and abroad. At UCLA, where she studied film and sculpture, she encountered the work of the filmmaker Josef von Sternberg, and her work is deeply informed by a cinematic as well as photographic logic. Its consideration of temporality and its effects on the status of the "image"—in this case, the self-imaging of its viewer's experience within her environments—is not far removed from the phenomenology of film, with its shifting modes of address to the spectator. The effect is further reinforced by Nordman's use of light within her work, which is always bound to its material or urban context. The viewer becomes "self-inscribed" or "self-imaged" in her art with the passage of light through the day, much as the development of a photograph depends on the quality of light bestowed upon it. Nordman clears the space for the emergence of such an image, with her work serving as the "screen" onto which her observers are projected.

The artist's particular engagement with light and the spatial dynamics of interior and exterior space stems further from her research on coherent light models. Having investigated these issues in her studies and early work, her interest in the material quality of light was subsequently reinforced by the architecture of Richard Neutra, with whom she worked as an editorial assistant. Accordingly, Nordman's sculpture (the term she prefers over "installation") highlights the confluence and contact of various registers of space, challenging the divide between interior and exterior, public and private, often by reversing the conventional roles each term plays within architecture. As one critic observed of her practice, "the human body cannot be distinguished from its context. The environment is not the product of a demi-urge, projected a priori, but an individual's contingent construction, situated in concrete space."¹⁴

Nordman's project *Workroom*, begun in 1969 and inactivated by the city of Santa Monica in 1999, eloquently demonstrates these principles. Located on Pico Boulevard in Santa Monica, *Workroom* was installed in an empty storefront reshaped by Nordman's subtle investigations of space. Ann Goldstein has observed of this space:

The room is entered through a door directly from the sidewalk. Three steps lead up to a wooden seating platform, which is at the base

of a large window glazed with a two-way mirror filter. The fixtures of electrical illumination have been removed. From the outside, in the daytime, the window reflects the passerby in the mirrored surface. From the inside, the window frames the images and sounds of the street. A passerby would see an image of the room, and the person inside would see him- or herself reflected in the window.¹⁵

Nordman enabled the viewer inside to watch the activities of the street without being seen (due to the coating on the window) in the daytime. Interior or "private" space was granted access to the outside, without itself being made a spectacle. As Nordman wrote of the work, "Street sound and twenty percent of the light enters to the person inside and the rest of the light is reflected back out as an image of the street during the daytime."¹⁶ The reversal of interior and exterior space—their mutual projection and introjection into each other—was underscored by her use of light.

Nordman continued to explore the concrete potential of light, reflecting upon the meeting ground between architecture and art in *Negative Light Extensions* (1973; also called *There are no Ocean Streets*), created on the occasion of a group show at the Newport Harbor Art Museum. It consisted of a concave wedge that opened onto an alley that had the effect of "subtracting" space from the museum itself.¹⁷ As Nordman wrote:

Tangents of the sun light at 12:39 February 28, determine shape construction that projects into building through existing opening in alley. On that time and day sun light completely fills the white construction. Removal by addition. Viewer walks from street into alley ½ block from ocean.¹⁸

Again, the internalization of time within architectural space generated the construction of Nordman's sculpture. But the terms of this space were also coordinated around the dictates of the museum, in which the public viewing of art is expressed through the works' visual accessibility within public space. Just who has access to museum space—regarded as both neutral and open—is implicitly addressed and criticized by Nordman's work. As *Negative Light Extensions* literally subtracts from the space of the museum, it is hardly "readable" as a work of art to the casual passerby. At the same time, the work's quietude and subtlety belied its physical openness. Removed from the spatial hierarchies of the museum's architecture, its portal remained accessible through the passage of light.

Nordman works in contexts that are nonseparatist. Her use of space is not gender-specific insofar as she treats the structural boundaries of spectatorship itself. Playing with internal and external, public and private, museological and work space, one may extrapolate to other binary

oppositions conventionally assigned to those spatial registers, particularly the feminine and masculine. Nordman's emphasis on the temporal specificity of the viewer's encounter with her works underscores the performativity of its observers—the sense in which the formation of spectatorship itself, insofar as it is socialized, is processed in time. And because this formation is a process for Nordman—and not a mandate—she grants some spatial latitude to those entering into her work. As she writes of her practice, "I propose to give the unknown speaker the first word."¹⁹

Dislocations: Sites of Cultural Memory and Spaces of Difference

Accepting the terms of Nordman's art is to recognize the inadequacy and rejection of absolutist models of space. Her installational "conditions" give rise to a more fluid sensibility of constructed space, one that is not tethered to the immediately pressing conditions of architecture and urbanism.

For women artists who are considered doubly "Other"—because female and of non-European descent—the possibility of producing such space takes on particular cultural meaning. What constitutes the space of everyday life in California might be construed as a different matter for artists of color, many of whom have produced work that underscores the specificity of their dif-

Yong Soon Min, *Dwelling*, 1994.
Mixed-media installations, 6 x 5
x 3 ft. Photo: Eric Landsberg.
Executed for the Asia Society,
New York. Collection of the
artist.



ference, the particularities of their habitus, and the importance of reclaiming sites of cultural memory.

The work of Yong Soon Min points to the heterogeneity and the decidedly nonmonolithic character of these sites, recuperated from the official cartographies of American culture. A Korean-born artist who lives in Los Angeles, Min articulates a sense of cultural liminality throughout her work, which includes photography, installation, and sculpture. In *Dwelling* (1994), the artist has constructed a place of contemplation in the present and a recollection of more distant topographies from her past.²⁰ A mixed-media installation, the work is organized around the form of a *hanbok* (a traditional Korean dress constructed from gauzy material), which is suspended above a display of items with telling personal attributes. A set of open books and a model of a Western-style house placed beneath the dress attest to the question of personal domain in a transcultural upbringing. Yet as delicate as *Dwelling* at first appears, the installation has a sculptural presence that suggests that this traditional costume represents a space of inhabitation nonetheless. And as a feminine attribute, the *hanbok* locates the politics of spatial identity along gendered terms.

Issues of cultural and spatial dislocation are explicitly referenced in the work. Min cites the words of the Korean American poet Ko Won to

reflect upon this condition: "To us . . . a birthplace is no longer our home. The place where we were brought up is not either."²¹ Such words articulate a condition which is not the province of Korean American women artists alone. If Min points to the phenomena of dislocation that is at the crux of transcultural experience, she also resituates the thematics of dwelling on her own terms in this work.

The Imaging of Spiritual Retreat

While my account has focused on the externalization of space and its social and phenomenological implications, other variants of constructed space are spiritual in nature. The attempt of women artists to give such space physical and visual form suggests that it is not wholly transcendent and immaterial. In fact, the imaging of spiritual retreat for women artists working in California bears markedly feminist implications.

Part of this may be a function of California's religious and spiritual pluralism, itself attributable to deeply material phenomenon: its geographical proximity to Latin American countries and its Pacific Rim orientation; the diversity of its native and immigrant populations; and its widely held cultural status as a progressive state. Indeed, none of the artists discussed in this grouping take institutional religion at face value, often challenging its restrictive and patriarchal conventions by producing a more personal or private

spiritual vocabulary. Since the late 1970s, for example, the photographer Linda Connor has made spiritual questing central to her artistic project, but her iconographic references are heterogeneous, finding the sacred in a diversity of multicultural sources ranging from Nepal to Peru to Ireland to Egypt to Thailand.

Connor is frequently described as a landscape photographer, but the designation seems strangely limited, as if the subject of her work is little more than a topographical phenomenon. Instead, her richly shadowed black-and-white images illuminate the geography and architecture of sacred places, as well as the almost spiritual resonance of objects. Images of ancient ceremonial caves in Hawaii or dolmen formations in France evoke premodern ritual, while photographs of crumbling monasteries, still in use, convey the continuity of religious traditions in the present. Connor's representation of these spaces is understood in feminist terms. Writing on the artist's work, Rebecca Solnit suggests that "her reverence for the earth, like that of many contemporary feminists and ecologists, has affinities to the earth-worship of earlier cultures, and the ties between respect for the earth and matriarchal cultures, as discussed by Lucy Lippard. . . ." ²² But Connor's practice, while turning its focus on earlier cultures, has marked implications for the contemporary status of women. As Solnit reminds us, "both the identity

Linda Connor, *Kapekoho, Lele, Ancient Ceremonial Cave for Pele, Goddess of Volcanos*, 1986. Toned photograph, contact print, 8 x 10 in. Puna, Hawaii. Collection of the artist.



of the sacred and the role of women are fundamentally different in cultures where the earth is sacred."²³

The painting and print work of Sylvia Lark (1947–1990) follows similar principles. A Seneca born in Manhattan, she was a highly respected teacher at the University of California at Ber-

keley. Lark painted in an abstract idiom throughout her career, but while her art bears some resemblance to abstract expressionist work, her practice was not dictated by the formalist criteria of high modernism. Her work was a far more personal treatment of abstract space that attempted to link her contemporary search for spiritual



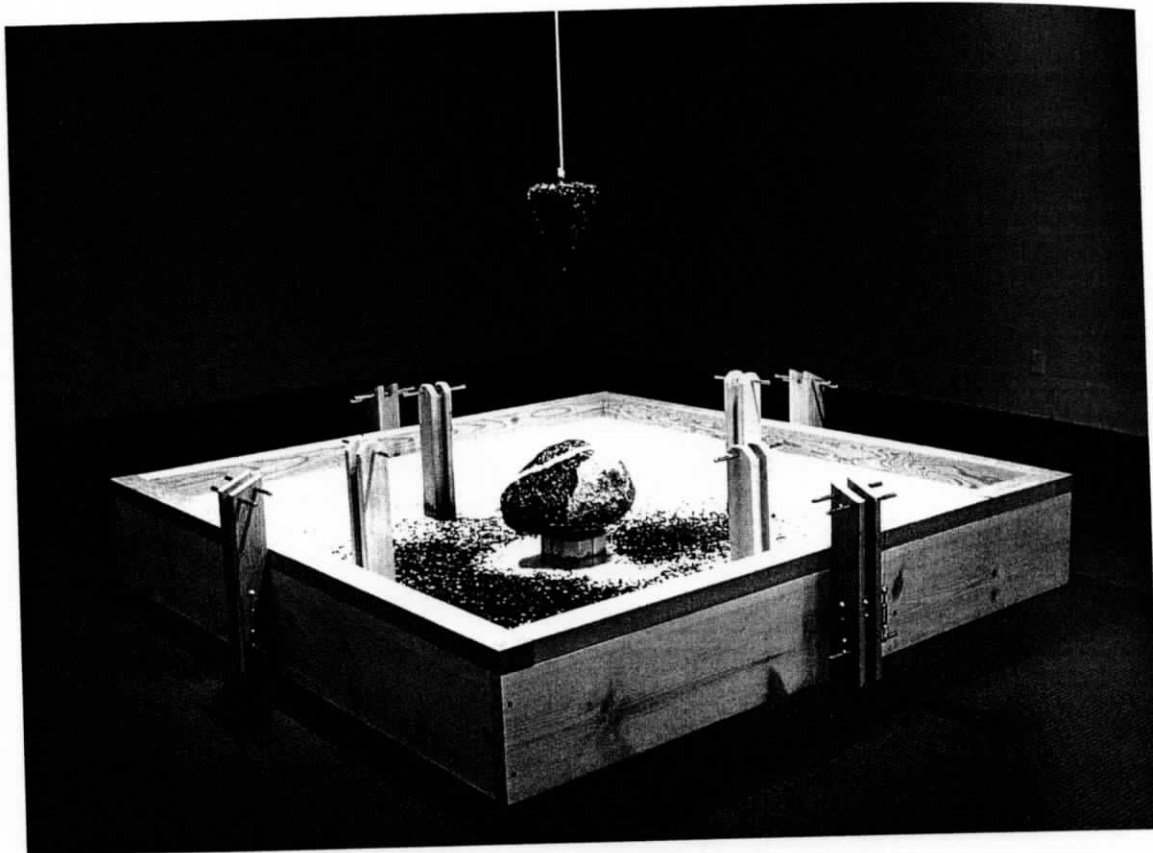
89
Sylvia Lark, *Jokhang 1*, 1983.
Oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.
© 1999, The Estate of Sylvia
Lark. Collection of Allan Stone,
courtesy Jeremy Stone, Business
Matters in the Visual Arts.

meaning with her Native American heritage and its system of beliefs.

Like Connor, Lark traveled extensively in order to chart the religious activities of diverse non-Western cultures. Her work attempts to close the space between such religious practices and her own. Visits to Africa and Tibet, for instance, pro-

vided inspiration for a series of paintings dating from the early 1980s. In Lhasa, the Jokhang Temple in particular became a source for her *Jokhang* paintings (1983), shadowy, lyrical works which in their translucent layering of color and form evoked the dim light admitted into the space of the monastery. In later paintings, the addition

Mineko Grimmer, *Seeking for the Philosopher's Stone*, 1985. Mixed-media installation, 96 x 96 x 24 in. Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Hollywood, Calif. Photo: Grey Crawford. Collection of the artist, courtesy of Koplin Gallery, Los Angeles.



of fragmentary objects to her abstract tableaux is suggestive of the collection of relics and amulets. The paintings' shifting tonalities and arrangement of simple materials produce an intimate and reflective space.

If Lark uses color, gesture, and relics to such ends, the minimal, architectonic installations of Mineko Grimmer employ silence and sound to produce a space of resonant contemplation for

her audience. Born in northern Japan, Grimmer moved to Los Angeles in the 1980s. Her work bridges references from both Eastern and Western sources, including the architecture of Shinto shrines recalled from her youth, minimalist aesthetics absorbed in art history classes, Zen gardens, and notions of time common to both contemporary American art and Shinto philosophy.

In 1980, Grimmer began making work that incorporated ice, and she noticed that it took on a sonorous character as the melting process began. Inspired by the work of John Cage, Grimmer arrived at the idea of producing art that incorporated chance in the making of sound. While Grimmer is hardly alone in this practice—indeed, she is part of a long tradition of artists interested in chance procedures—she directs it to specifically meditative ends. The basic elements and structure of Grimmer's work would remain constant, including, as Mary Davis MacNaughton writes, "an open wooden box, holding a shallow pool of water, into which pebbles [drop] from an inverted pyramid of ice, suspended by a rope."²⁴ When the ice pyramid begins to melt, "the solitary note of the first pebble [dropping] from the ice pyramid . . . slowly builds with a staccato of falling stones, and finally reaches a crescendo of cascading pebbles before ending in serene stillness."²⁵

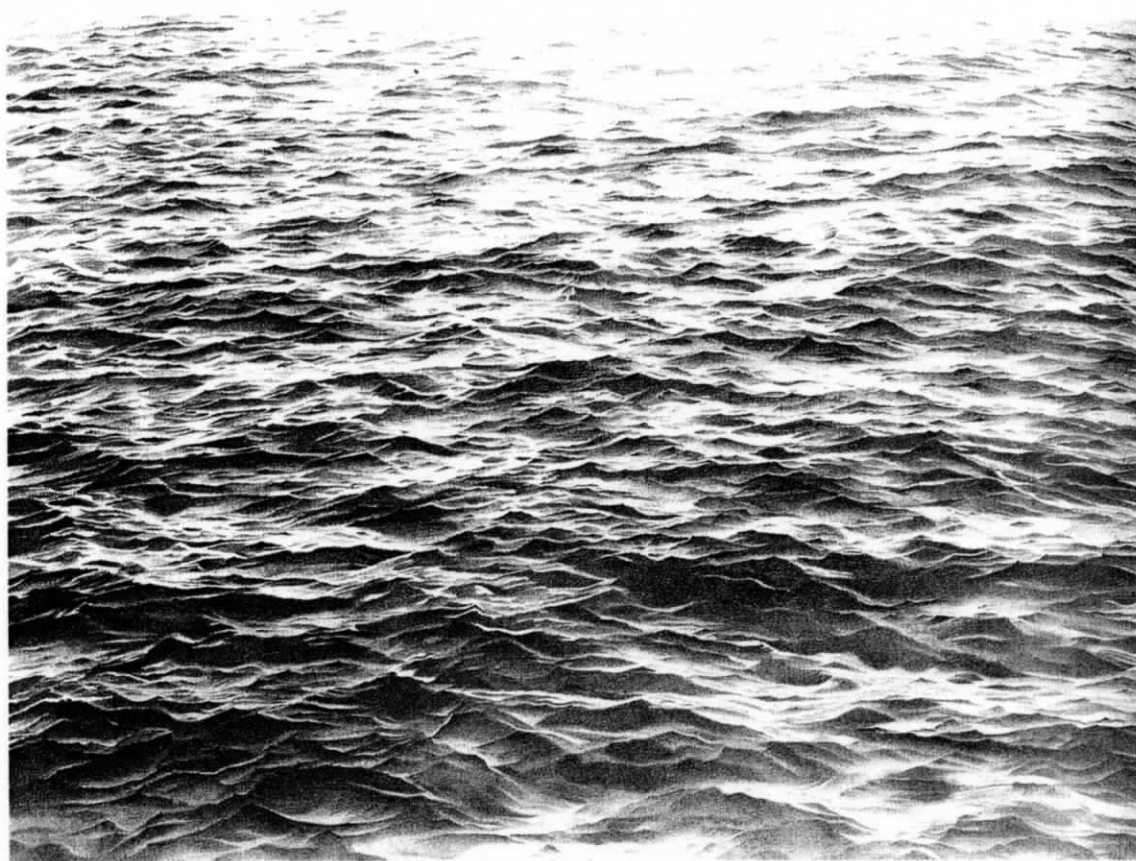
Grimmer's art internalizes the experience of duration for the viewer, who must wait patiently for each installation to produce its unorthodox music. While her work is kinetic, the quality of its movement is dramatically slow, demanding a degree of endurance on the part of her audience extremely rare in the consumption of contemporary art. As a result, stillness takes on an almost palpable quality in her work and silence reverberates as loudly as the occasional sound of a

pebble breaking the surface of water. In the quietude and slowness of these installations, the spectator herself shifts focus. Attending to the subtlest changes in time and environment, she is rewarded not only by the music of the object, but the meditative space which it opens up.

Space Studies: Vija Celmins's Perspectivism

The virtual stilling of space that is crucial to Grimmer's sculpture brings us full circle to the question of constructed space that began this essay. In closing, I'd like to consider an artist who, in telescoping distance in her images, conjures for the viewer the strange paradox of the intimacy of space while reflecting on the nature of perspective itself.

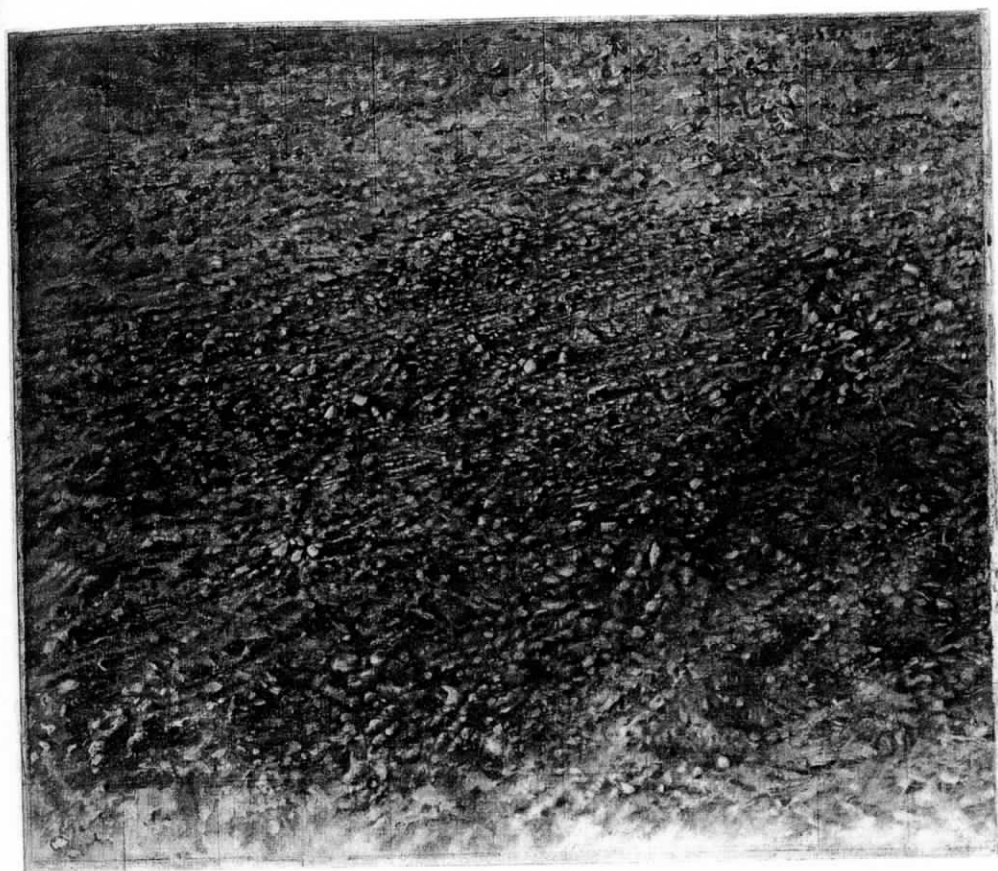
Vija Celmins was born in Latvia in 1939 and emigrated with her family to the United States ten years later; in the early 1960s, she studied art at UCLA.²⁶ She is perhaps best known for a remarkable series of untitled drawings (begun in 1968) of views of the Pacific that simultaneously evoke both the awesomeness and closeness of natural space through a dramatic compression of scale. Composed of graphite on paper that has been covered with an acrylic ground, the drawings are slowly wrought horizontal images, painstaking in their articulation of each crest and swell. Yet, if Celmins's drawings are derived from photographs taken from the Venice Pier, her emphasis on visual detail is not photorealistic.²⁷ The absence



of a horizon line renders the process of scaling the scenes extremely difficult, paradoxically conveying the effects of both nearsightedness and magnitude. Oceanic breadth is thus telescoped into intimate focus, and determinations of perspective become a decidedly subjective matter.

Her drawings of the lunar surface (also begun in 1968) reiterate the strangely equivocal character of her space. Inspired by a photograph of the

moon from a Russian space mission, they represent scenes taken at an enormous distance from the artist—literally studies of space in space. Yet Celmins makes each feel proximate, intimate, as if her eye were little more than a few inches from the moon's surface. The effect is such that the perspective reads as miniaturized or compressed, even though the distance between viewer and object depicted is great.



91

Vija Celmins, *Untitled (Big Sea #1)*, 1969. Graphite on acrylic ground on paper, 34 1/8 x 45 1/4 in. Private collection, courtesy of David McKee Gallery, New York.

92

Vija Celmins, *Desert Surface #2*, 1992. Oil on canvas, 17 1/2 x 22 1/2 in. Photo: Josh Nefsky, New York. Collection of the artist, courtesy of David McKee Gallery, New York.

The oscillation of distance and proximity in Celmins's work provides the ultimate object lesson for the notion of construction sites. Space is rendered deeply intimate and subjective for Celmins; it is the ground of both lived experience as well as an evocation of sublime distance rendered close through the artist's hand. To claim transcendence for this space, however, is to miss the point. On the contrary, Celmins's

work underscores its subject's perspectivism, conveyed through her art's own radical attenuation of perspective.

What this suggests for the "fate" of space for California women artists is salutary, offering a parallel to other developments in the larger culture. There is no doubt that conventional notions of space have undergone a dramatic transformation since mid-century. Developments in digital

technologies—the rise of the Web and the Internet in particular—signal the progressive collapse of traditional conceptions of distance and space. If women artists working in California sought to intervene into or reject totalizing spatial forms, perhaps the virtual worlds of new media offer

another means of expanding their spatial semantics. It is a promise of space long understood by the artists treated in this essay, for whom the act of construction both registers and exceeds the dictates of conventional site.

Notes

- 1 By "masculinist space" I am referring to recent urban-studies discussions of the city, which universalize the experience of urban life as necessarily male. For an important critique of such accounts, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Boys Town" and "Men in Space," both in her *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
- 2 A "sig alert" is a familiar term to Los Angeles and Southland residents and commuters who use the freeway on a daily basis. "Sig alerts" are regular radio announcements that detail traffic jams, general congestion, and automobile accidents. They have come to symbolize the frustration Southland drivers experience on the highways.
- 3 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
- 4 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 104.
- 5 See, for instance, Deutsche, *Evictions*; Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton: Princeton Papers on Architecture, 1992). For literature on the domestic and its relationship to art history, see *Not at Home: The Suppression of the Domestic in Modern Art and Architecture*, ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); *Dirt and Domesticity* (exhibition catalogue), Whitney Independent Study Program (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992); also see Helen Molesworth's analysis of the Duchampian readymade and its repressed ties to the domestic (PhD. diss., Cornell University, 1997).
- 6 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-paper," in *The Yellow Wall-paper and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Denise D. Knight (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994).
- 7 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- 8 Tirza Latimer, e-mail communication with the author, July 17, 1999, p. 3. For a recent history of women in construction work, see Susan Eisenberg, *We'll Call You If We Need You: Experiences of Women Working Construction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 9 Latimer, e-mail communication, July 17, 1999.
- 10 Arlene Raven, "Womanhouse," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 50.
- 11 Lynda Forsha, "Introduction and Acknowledgments," in *Ann Hamilton: Between Taxonomy and Communion* (exhibition catalogue) (San Diego, Calif.: San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990).
- 12 Ibid., p. 67.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Maria Nordman, *Saddleback Mountain* (exhibition catalogue) (Irvine: University of California at Irvine, 1973), n.p.
- 15 Germano Celant, "The Work of Maria Nordman," in Mark

- Rosenthal, Andre, Buren, Irwin, Nordman: *Space as Support* (Berkeley: University of California Press and the University Art Museum, 1979), p. 19.
- 15 Ann Goldstein, "Maria Nordman," in her *Reconsidering the Object of Art* (exhibition catalogue) (Los Angeles and Cambridge: The Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press), p. 184.
 - 16 Nordman, quoted in Celant, "The Work of Maria Nordman," p. 19.
 - 17 Other works by Nordman that subscribe to these principles include the series *DE SCULPTURA: Works in the City* (1986, Munich); *New Conjoint City: Proposals DE MUSICA* (1993, Lucerne); and *DE SCULPTURA 11* (1997, Stuttgart).
 - 18 Nordman, quoted in *Saddleback Mountain*.
 - 19 Nordman, "Notations on a Work," in Rosenthal, Andre, Buren, Irwin, Nordman: *Space as Support*, n.p.
 - 20 Margo Machida, "Out of Asia: Negotiating Asian Identities in America," in *Asia/America: Identities in Asian-American Art* (New York: The Asia Society and The New Press, 1994), p. 94.
 - 21 Ibid.
 - 22 Rebecca Solnit, "The Seventh Direction," in Linda Connor: *Spiral Journey. Photographs 1967-1990* (Chicago: The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, 1990), p. 15.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 Mary Davis MacNaughton, "Sound and Silence: The Sculpture of Mineko Grimmer," *Arts* 5, no. 62 (November 1987): 54-58.
 - 25 Ibid., p. 55.
 - 26 Biographical information on Celmins is derived from Susan K. Larsen, *Vija Celmins: A Survey Exhibition* (exhibition catalogue) (Newport, Calif.: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1979), p. 9.
 - 27 Ibid., p. 26.