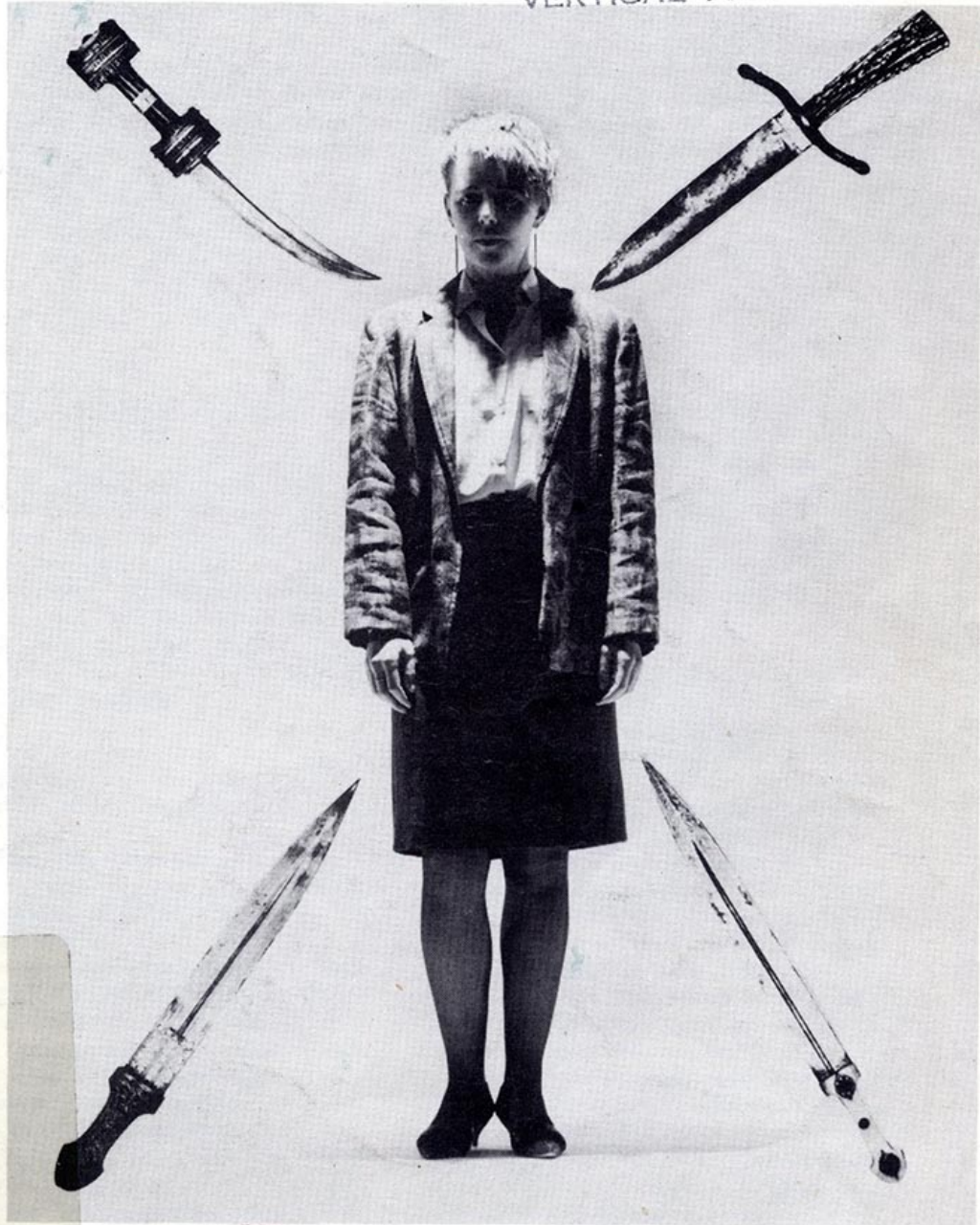


WOMEN ARTISTS, CANADIAN

# IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

CONVERSATIONS WITH WOMEN ARTISTS AND FILMMAKERS

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VERTICAL FILE



Norma Bailey • Anna Gronau • Janice Gurney • Jamelie Hassan • Ingrid Oustrup Jensen • Michaelle McLean •  
Tahani Rached • Premika Ratnam • Rhea Tregebov • Carolyn White • Jean Young

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CURATED BY JUDITH DOYLE

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# IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

## RECENT FILMS PERFORMANCE AND ARTWORKS BY WOMEN

### FORWARD

This is a book of artists' voices; a text made from discourse, listening, transcription, and editing. In fact, there is a shortage of stories like these. The thirteen conversations trace key themes for local women artists, including issues of generation, ethnicity and feminism, in the context of background and daily life. The catalogue accompanies a gallery exhibition and film series. This book is an impoverished version of what was intended or hoped for, without illustrations, film stills, a bibliography, etc., because the project was rejected for Canada Council funding. David McIntosh put in dozens of hours of work; his collaboration made it possible to complete this text under adverse circumstances. I thank him and all the artists for (yet again) contributing so much.

### INTRODUCTION JUDITH DOYLE

Judith Doyle is a writer, performance artist and filmmaker living in Toronto; she was born in 1957. She has made three films; the most recent, 'Eye of the Mask' has been screened in Canada and the U.S., the Havana Film Festival, the Grierson Documentary Seminar, and at the Mannheim International Film Festival in West Germany, where it was awarded with a Special Citation by the Third World Jury. She is Managing Editor of Impulse Magazine.

Anna Gronau: Can you describe how the catalogue relates to the films and the work in the gallery show?

Judith Doyle: The series arose from an idea, an intuition perhaps, of connections between certain themes and structures in women's artworks that I wanted to elaborate. I chose not to do this in an essay, but rather through recorded, transcribed conversations with the artists. I'm not taking an anti-critical position in choosing dialogues over an essay, but I do feel there is a shortage of artists' own voices on their work. Over the years, I've been influenced by some of the women in the series. I feel these people speak about their work very well, so I wanted to take this opportunity to bring some of this discussion to the text. In the interviews, several women complained that a lot of recent critical writing does not reflect their own ideas or working methods, especially the processes of remembering and

forgetting, and accident. So, there is a lot of discussion of work process, and daily life. Finally, this is a curated series - the works are grouped together with certain ideas in mind. I felt it was important to play them out in the space of a catalogue. The catalogue is supplementary to the exhibition in that way. I'm still the author of the catalogue in that the artists are answering to questions I raise.

As the title, 'In A Different Voice' suggests, the series has to do with giving voice to, or articulating, differences. I found in a lot of recent works, artists reclaim elements from their past. Often, this is done by assembling a group of fragments, in part as a way of speaking of absences. These fragments are not simply appropriated from a 'public history' - they are part of the artist's personal inheritances. So, for example, Janice Gurney's work includes an inherited portrait of her Grandmother, a photograph of herself, and a film still, side by side. In many of these works were what one artist calls 'trans-generational' references - images of two or three generations of women, often Mothers and Grandmothers. The experience of emigration - of coming as an outsider to another place - is sometimes represented. The past appears in flashes of memory rather than continuous history; there are ruptures, breaks and displacements. Perhaps it sounds paradoxical to talk in terms of locating one's self by retracing a series of dislocations, but this came to my mind.

To focus on these interests, it was important to me



that the series be multidisciplinary. I wanted to comment on patterns of imagery and disclosure that occur in more than one medium like film. In the beginning, I wasn't sure if it would be all women's work, but I did feel the tendencies and approaches I was describing were mainly evident in women's work. A lot of women I know are working in a multidisciplinary way, and the series reflects that too. In looking at personal history and memory in art, I found that many artists portrayed a sense of otherness and difference. So, I wanted to look at culture outside the mainstream or dominant one.

When one lives all one's life in a country, say Canada, a lot of elements of our culture are invisible, because they are being mirrored all the time by other people living the same way. But in the process of going elsewhere, you can become very conscious of your cultural patterns as a series of differences from the society around you - differences of language, custom, territory, and constitution of the family. This is perhaps one example of gaining a sense of identity through dislocation.

AG: I think one thing that's unusual about this catalogue is that it's not speaking about the formal issues. It's a more general approach.

JD: There is a lot of interpretation, a lot of remembering and forgetting, in the artists' descriptions of their work. I think the catalogue should give a sense of a community of women artists, sharing certain themes. In some cases they've influenced each other through a process of discussion and conversation.

**In the process of going elsewhere, you can become very conscious of your cultural patterns as a series of differences from the society around you - differences of language, custom, territory, and the constitution of the family.**

AG: What are your thoughts on the fact that many of the artists in the series are part of your own community. Are you perhaps over-generalizing when you draw links between their sense of dispossession, and that of native or immigrant communities?

JD: I'm most interested in exploring directions and tendencies in my own community now, but I see an irony in that. In exploring my own community, I find how complex it is, when I see it as more than my own generation or peers. The artworks themselves point away from that sort of isolationism.

If we look at ourselves just as the same generation of people who are submitting grant applications to the same juries, it seems like we're very much alike. Yet, for the series, I've tried to look at these people who are 'the same' as me, and stress the differences as well. So, for example, Rhea and Carolyn are peers who went to the same pre-natal classes. But, if you go back one generation, during the Second World War, Carolyn's German family had their house occupied by Nazi troops, and participated in Nazi Youth, while Rhea speaks of her Mother's generation as a community of holocaust survivors.

There is not much written on the question of first, second and third generation positions, acknowledging that the heritage of immigration is more than a one-generation thing. I haven't found much written from a psychoanalytic position on these issues. This perspective sometimes enters into the conversations. As I said, I wanted to look at my own community, in terms of differences. I wanted to give a hopefully more complex picture of the 'local'.

In addition, I've included films by people outside this community, particularly documentary films. They document the experiences of immigrant and native Canadian women, and their experiences of being 'not here but not there'. These aren't included to generalize experiences, but to make links and establish limits as well.

I think the experimental work and the documentary film give voice to experiences of not being able to speak the language, concern with the structures and values of the family, and feelings of being out of

place, of estrangement from both the people who are absent and those who are immediate neighbours now. The imagery, structures, and experiences of displacement being described - the sense of otherness, of not being able to speak, or being able to speak only in a fragmented way, as well as a sense of strength - bear certain correspondences with those of women who have emigrated.

AG: Ingrid Ostrup Jensen, in her interview, talks about the value of some of the traditions. Actually, that came out in a lot of people's talk. There was an



interest in letting people speak for themselves - in not classifying other people.

JD: Personally, I think feminists here want to listen to immigrant women and indigenous people, women with language differences, and women from religiously and culturally very different societies. We have to start acknowledging these communities. One way, I think, of doing that, is to try and find points of entry ourselves.

AG: Do you see that kind of approach being what Carole Gilligan talks about in "In A Different Voice"?

JD: Yes, in terms of trying to make connections rather than severing connections. She also spoke about the difficulties. She spoke of a feminine voice as one which tries to establish linkages and connections, and tries to speak for different interests. She said that can be at the expense of uncovering the truth, or recognizing limits - one's own limits, if nothing else. I haven't made reference in the title of the series to ethnicity, even though it was a pivot point for me in putting the series together. This is because, in the course of doing the interviews and choosing the films, other common threads have come up which I think are equally important, like matrilineage, language difference, the representation of women in film, and of course feminism.

AG: One common thread I found in the interviews was the idea of the retreat to the ghetto. What does this say about deterritorialization - is this too unstable a position to maintain? Are you advocating the claiming of some territory, debased or otherwise?

JD: I guess the question was, is there a place within a place which at the same time is outside it?

AG: The position of the Mother in the family is a classic one.

JD: The place within a place and yet outside it might be the clubhouse, the ethnic association, or newspaper ....

AG: Or the myth of the extended family?

JD: Yes. That place fills a lot of different roles at different times. When an immigrant first arrives here, it might be the only place to go. When you don't speak the language or have your papers or know one street from another or how the buses work, that's where you go. Jamelie Hassan talks about her Father's house fulfilling that role because her Father was the first man to arrive from the Middle East in

London, Ontario. When people came to his house from the Middle East, they brought food and records and messages or letters from home. The house was a crossover point, and a gathering point for information about the place that was left behind. One's relationship to these places changes. Madi talks about the second generation rebelling against the ghetto, which was seen as confining and limiting in terms of self-definition. This reminded me of a lot of very heated discussion about the art community - whether we are ghettoized, whether we should try to 'cross over' to reach more mainstream audiences by working in different media or forms which are more 'accessible'. And do we, after these attempts to broaden our audiences, become nostalgic and start tapping our heels together and saying, 'There's no place like home! There's no place like home!' I guess I feel both attraction and repulsion to the ghetto image.

AG: I find that a fascinating idea - the idea of retreat to the ghetto, whatever it is. In a way, it's kind of a luxury; in a way, it may be a kind of displacement. If there is a way in which you can somehow afford to not live totally in your dispossessed state, then this is like a relief. In some senses, it's a denial of the full weight of your political reality.

JD: I don't think we've talked too much about the art community in terms of 'What is this place? How does it feel to be here?'. I hoped people would try and describe what they felt was their community, what they felt its features were. I think, by appropriating a term like ghetto, I was suggesting not describing this community as an elite, a castle on the hill that everyone would like to be in. I was suggesting we describe our community in terms of such things as displacement in language, lack of money and job security, a sense of difference from mainstream culture, and in the case of women artists, almost a difference within a difference. Along with the idea of the ghetto, the subject of community and estrangement from community come up; there's the image of a place - the home or the house. It is also both a positive and negative image; the house can be the site of manipulation and control on the familial level which reflects social control in a broader context. There's the sense also that, in order to disengage one's self from these patterns of manipulation, one has to return to the memories of the family and describe some of its mechanisms. Carole Gilligan suggests that, in fact, women have an ethic based on considering and maintaining connections and links between sometimes very different people, places and positions. This was an idea I began with when assembling these works and doing these interviews.



## TAHANI RACHED

*Tahani Rached is a filmmaker who lives in Montréal and works with the National Film Board there. She emigrated from Cairo, Egypt to Canada twenty years ago. In this conversation, she talks about her own background and work, particularly her recent film 'Haïti : Québec'.*

JD: When were you born and when did you come to Canada?

Tahani Rached: I was born the 16th of May, 1947. I emigrated here in 1966. It was for the future of the family, for 'America'. I was already eighteen when my family applied, so I applied on my own since I was considered an adult. The rest of them applied altogether. They considered my Father too old to come, so I came on my own and worked so that I could sponsor them.

JD: What was that experience like?

TR: I worked for an airline answering phone calls. Finally I managed to sponsor them because I was working and had enough money to get an apartment and their expenses. You know, here, when you're nineteen you're allowed to make decisions on your own - it doesn't work that way when you come from the Middle East, because you have a sense of responsibility for the whole family. The sense of being an individual is not developed so much as it is here. I came here in '66, and my family arrived in '68. In '70, I moved out on my own. I think that the fact that I was in Montréal helped me a lot. My first language was Arabic, and my second was French, so the fact that I spoke French made it easier for me. Also, in Montréal, there was an Arabic community that I landed in; my cousins were here. So it was much easier for me to get involved in the French community rather than the English one. To me, it was much more open. I found the interests that were mine there.

JD: The late sixties and early seventies were a really intense political period in Québec. How did you intersect with that?

TR: It started because, when I was a kid, one of my big dreams was to go to an art school. I started here part-time, because I was working. I ended up in 'les Beaux Arts'. At the time, there was the occupation at the school. This is how I got close to, and started to get involved in, the student movement. But then, when my family joined me and my Father and

Mother started working and got themselves settled, I decided to go back to study full-time. But, by that time I could not deal with it anymore. I had already gone into the workplace. When I went back to the 'Beaux Arts' the occupation had stopped, and everything had returned to being very quiet and organized. There wasn't that effervescence and movement that I experienced when I was there part-time. For my needs at that time, everything was too self-centered. I had this big summer, with all these questions in my head - 'what do I do with art?', 'how do I move with it?' - and I was very isolated in those questions. So, I decided to drop out of everything and do something completely different. For one summer, I worked as a waitress, then I decided to get much more involved in community work. But then, I felt I wasn't fitting in. So I decided on maybe doing something that had to do with images but also dealt with the social or political needs and consciousness I wanted to keep on moving within. Also, I started getting involved around Palestinian issues.

JD: What was the relationship between your involvement with the Palestinian movement, and the French Canadian nationalist movement at that time?

TR: At the time, as you said, political issues were very much discussed. The Palestinian issue was one of the things that made me drop out of art school. With a group of Québécois, we organized one of the first sensibilization weeks around the Palestinian questions - in high schools, in universities. We invited people, we had film projections. For me, it was the first time I was really getting involved, and it was the first time the question was raised here in Québec. This allowed me to get involved with people who were working on the Québec separatist question. I did not know a lot about it before that. For me, everything went together in a way. People were very much aware that countries and people had the right to determine themselves. It was very easy for me to link the Palestinian need to have their own land with the Québécois who wanted to have their own country. Any people in the world has the right to self-determination. Also, at that period, it was much more international. People were making links between here and there. It was a kind of awareness that made people want to know and understand what was happening somewhere else.

JD: Magazines like 'Vice-Versa' in Québec have talked about the specific position of immigrant groups in relation to Québec nationalism.

TR: It's different for the Palestinians, because there is not a very large Palestinian community here.



There is an Arab community, made up mainly of Egyptians and Lebanese. Most Palestinians are in the United States because of the whole historical development of the Middle East. The geography of the Middle East is such that the frontiers are very recent. They did not exist at the beginning of the century the same way as they do now. The Palestinians are very central, at the heart of it, and all the Arab people feel a sense of identification and a sense of responsibility toward what the Palestinians are going through. So the Palestinian question was raised within the larger framework of the Arab community.

JD: Did you want to provide alternate representations of women in the Middle East, to offset some of the misunderstanding through your work?

TR: I had a film that I wanted to do, about Egyptian women, but I could not raise the money over here, or rather, could not have it produced at the Film Board. The main issue of the film was the one you spoke of. I felt that people had very narrow ideas, most of which came out of ignorance and cliché. I knew Egyptian women and felt that they were very strong. I did not want to ignore a situation where women are, because of the economic, political and cultural situation, in a way more oppressed than women are here, but rather to make a film that would show both sides. The film could never be done, but it was one of my preoccupations at one point.

I started working in video, with Vidéographe in Montréal. The first videotapes I did dealt mainly with local issues - the Quebecois, within the union movement. One way that I could characterize myself is that I never got involved in a union or in a party in a continuous way. I would say to myself at some points that I could produce this kind of a film for this group, then I would go and try to work out something with them. Later, in 1974, I worked in community TV - St. Jerome. Then I went to Tunisia and set up a video program over there through CUSO. I was to go and bring video equipment to a group of amateur filmmakers, to allow them to work with that equipment and make videotapes. I was there for six months.

JD: What kind of cultural and political links did you feel with the people you worked with in Tunisia at that time? Were you acting strictly in a technical capacity, teaching people to use equipment, or were you formulating ideas and subject matter with them?

TR: The first thing is, the amateur filmmakers were mainly students and unemployed people - they were

very politically aware. The other thing was, it was very clear to me that I was there for six months. One of the main criteria for me was that, when I left, people would know how to use the equipment. I did not get very involved in political questions. I did not disagree with the ideas the people were moving around. What was more difficult was to get the whole thing organized and working. We put most of our energies into that - to forming groups that could work together, getting scripts written, shooting schedules.... I wanted them to make at least two films - maybe short ones, easy ones - so that they could learn from the mistakes they made.

When I came back I started doing the research for my first larger film - 'Les Voleurs de Job' - in English, the title is 'Where Dollars Grow On Trees'. It was a documentary film about immigrants in Québec. I did it independently. In Québec, people had the feeling that immigrants were not like other people - needed for their labour. There was much more talk about the food, the culture, dance and all the esthetic stuff. The basic things of life were not talked about a lot. So I decided I wanted to do a film that dealt with the relationship of immigrants to work - how Canada needed them, and how they felt about it, how they related to other Quebecois and other Canadians around those questions.

JD: What is the structure of the film? Is it primarily interviews?

TR: Yes. Interviews and situations. People in their workplaces, and re-enactments. For instance, there was one woman I met. She was very clear and fantastic in what she said about her life. She worked in a factory taking threads off garments. Whenever a garment is finished, you have to clean it, to take off certain threads. She was doing that all day long. At one point, she was on a bus, and she saw a thread on somebody's coat. She thought, 'Oh my God, do I take it off?'. She had this gesture which was particular to her work, and she got up and took the thread off of a person she did not know. She said, at that point, she decided she couldn't go on like that. So, we re-enacted that in a bus.

JD: When did you start working with the National Film Board?

TR: 1980. I made the film on Lebanon. The film was sponsored, to start with, by UNICEF. I decided on the production in fifteen days and left immediately for Beirut. UNICEF wanted to do a film on the daily lives of people in there during the wartime, and on how they managed to survive. We landed in Beirut just after the Israelis left. They were still in Lebanon, and



it was fifteen days after the Sabra and Shatila massacres. We started going around to places, to choose what we were going to film. We ended up in a refugee camp mainly of Lebanese people coming in from the South, or people who had moved from the East part of Beirut to the West. The place for the refugees had been, to start with, a resort that was later occupied. We were shooting, and an old woman came up in front of the camera and said, 'Hello. I want to talk to you.' She took us to her house and started really telling us about what the war was. She was very strong and moving and she was mad at everything. The next day we went back, and she came up and covered my eyes with her hands from behind. I said, 'My God, who can do that to me here?'. It was her. We decided that we would make the film with her. We moved all of our things and stayed in that place, and filmed there for three weeks. She is the main character. In Arabic, there is 'ataba'. Ataba is a form of lamentation song. Everybody uses it, and improvises their lives within that song. She sang to us of the war and the death of her son, and that is also a main thread of the film. She was a very strong character, who was mad at all the leaders of the world, all the rich. So, the film talks about the lives of poor people in the war.

JD: It seems you often base your decisions as to what you'll film on people who are dynamic and have a certain chemistry with you - and they're often women. Is that true?

TR: Yes. What I've found is that women have the capacity of linking everything. They talk about their lives whenever they talk about their work - they have a capacity for not just making compartments. Their view seems to be wider, larger. Also, they talk with emotion. They don't rationalize everything.

JD: After the Lebanon film, the next film you made was 'Haïti - Québec'. Can you tell me about how you decided to make it?

TR: I did not decide directly to make the film. I had two other projects in my mind, but they did not seem to be moving. At the Film Board, somebody said to me that nobody had dealt with the issue of the Haitian community and what it was going through in Québec, and there would be money to do that if I wanted to. It's very rare that somebody comes to you with money, so I jumped at it. As I told you, in 'Les Voleurs de Job', the Haitian community was in the film, so I knew a little bit about their situation. But it was an old knowledge, from five or six years before. When I began the research I noticed that the racism had really increased - the problems, the violence. This is how I decided that I really wanted to focus on

the question of racism.

JD: I wanted to ask you about the structure of the film. How did you choose the letter form - having people speak letters into cassettes, or read from letters which would remain unmailed? Why did you use it?

TR: It comes when you go out and meet people. You don't want just to do an interview. You want the person to really talk... not to address themselves to me, who is the filmmaker, but to address either one of their counterparts or the person that you hope the film is going to go to. I wanted to get more active with the people I was filming - not to just go to a person and say, 'I want to have your opinion about this and that'. It was an effort for me. Also, I am not a black person, and I wanted to let the characters in the film speak the way they are.

For example, Julio, the guy who works in the factory, writes a letter to his co-worker in the factory. In true life, Julio writes. The first time I met him I thought, a person who writes and is also working in a factory and is an immigrant - he has that kind of crystal-clear, revealing experience about what goes on. It must be fantastic. I asked him, 'Is there a person around who you would like to tell things but cannot speak with?' He said, 'Yes, there is the person who I work with every day.' It started like that between him and I, by trying to write down what he wanted to say to that person. Meanwhile, while we were talking, there were things he would say and I'd say, 'Oh, we should include this.' That's how it went on.

The cassette - it was already clear to me that I wanted the film to be structured around the cassette, because the Haitians do that. They don't write but they send cassettes one to another. The idea to begin with was to receive a cassette from Haiti, then to answer that cassette. The incoming cassette would be a way to say what was going on over there and why they emigrated. But, that didn't work out. One of the difficult things with the film is that, since it is documentary, and the repression is very, very strong in Haiti, we had to do it in a way where people would say whatever they wanted, without pushing them to say things they would not agree with later on. The Haitians felt very uncomfortable fabricating the incoming cassette because of the repression, so in the end, I only used the cassette to be sent to from Montréal to Haiti.

JD: The structure of this film includes more ambiguity, more room for questioning than many more conventional documentaries. It leaves room for



the viewer to draw their own conclusions. Can you talk about that?

TR: For me, it's very important that I don't come out with an answer. For me, a film is not done for that reason. I'm always very reticent about answers. The film has to raise questions and to raise discussion in one's mind at least, if not within a group. I think that reality is very complex and many questions arise. It's not so easy. Whenever you come up with a straight answer, many people won't be at all interested in listening to you, because they already know whatever it is you will say at the end. I would rather do films that raise questions than bring answers.

JD: You also expose contradictions.

TR: Yes. It's important because life is made of contradictions. They have to be there - they're the motor of things.

## JANICE GURNEY

*Janice Gurney is an artist working in Toronto; she was born in Winnipeg in 1949. Her work has been exhibited across Canada and in New York City. She has also produced "Moveable Wounds (An Essay in Composition)" and "Emphasis Mine" - works conceived for the printed page. Her work is an exploration of the structure of inheritance and personal history, from a subjective position.*

Janice Gurney: I think it was almost a lack of information about another generation that caused me to be interested in that generation. In my family, there wasn't that much known about my grandparents. A lot of people have a sense of their history and background going back for generations. For me, I knew where my Mom was from and where my Dad was from, and not that much about their parents.

Judith Doyle: Why was it, do you think, that your family didn't talk much about your grandparents?

JG: I'm not sure. Perhaps, it was because it's a big family, and my grandparents did come from England after the First World War and started homesteading in Canada. It was much more a present-tense kind of life. What I had was remnants that I've used in my work - photographs of my Grandmother as a child and my Grandfather from the First World War. In the piece I'll be doing for this show I use a watercolour painting of my Grandmother that was in her house. I

knew it was there, yet nobody asked about it. I didn't ask about it as a kid. It was just a part of her house, but there was no opening somehow for talking about where it came from, why she had it. All those kinds of things weren't dealt with in our family.

JD: What piqued your curiosity, and what were the feelings you had when you started to reclaim those elements?

JG: It was because there was a very powerful presence about my Mother's Mother. She was matriarch, and I wanted to explore the reasons for that position she had in the family. I knew a bit about the background - that she raised eight kids with essentially no money, and had to fulfill almost a double role. At the time my Grandfather wasn't making any money. He was trying to farm and he didn't make a go of it. I came to know her as a seventy-five year old woman, knowing what she must have been like, what she must have gone through, the strength that she must have had. It wasn't particularly visible in the physical body in the present-tense, but was there as a kind of emotional strength. She still had that power to bind and control. It was a negative side of her too that interested me - how the negative and the positive came together, and how she had to project a more negative aspect of control in old age.

JD: What do you mean by bind and control?

JG: The piece that I did, 'Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults', was a kind of working-through of the control element that I always felt she exercised. She had a way of manipulating the people in her family, her sons and daughters, in order to bind them to her in some ways. I think that she had less real power in the world, so she used ways of manipulating people like having knowledge of one daughter, which was supposed to be a private kind of information. She could pass that on in situations where it would cause problems, or get something that she wanted to have happening. So, she would use information to manipulate a certain situation, which would always cause a lot of problems. The family was in a sort of turmoil when I was growing up, over what my Grandmother was doing to cause those problems.

JD: It's interesting when you say she manipulated people by using knowledge she had, yet you knew very little about her. You can't really alter her at this point in time. But you can disengage yourself by having knowledge and confronting what you do know about that person, instead of the myth of the family.

JG: Right. Actually, I didn't really start thinking and doing anything with these ideas until she died. So, in a



sense, she was gone - she was no longer present, so I could start to make it mine.

JD: Was it shortly after she died?

JG: She died when I was still in Winnipeg, so it would have been four years after she died that I started thinking about making some sort of connection to the generations. It started with a more art-based connection, with another artist of another time - Uccello. However, the drawings I used juxtaposed with his imagery had a connection with my Grandmother, because they were done by her relation - I think he was my Great-Uncle. These were drawings handed down. Nobody knew much about him, except that he was an artist of some kind. Even at that point, it was trying to connect not just to another artist and another person in time - it was bringing in a family connection too, to try and balance it out.

JD: In 'Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults', you juxtapose the tin-type photograph of your Grandmother, which you've violated by painting over a large part of the image, with the photograph of Madras famine victims, posed in the Victorian studio style. It seems to me that you were subverting or engaging in a critique of the family. By posing the famine victims in the Victorian style, it was like the photographer was making them part of the Victorian family, but also trying to show a horror at the centre of such colonization. It was not just the disparity between the condition of the people of the colonized country and the colonizers, but also an image of fear at the centre of the family.

JG: I think they come together in terms of the control element of the family, which is the smaller area of colonization. Looking at that image of my Grandmother as a child, I'm thinking again back to what I knew of her and her power and control. I was trying to look into the face of her as a child and see those things.

JD: What were the parts of the photograph you covered over, and why did you?

JG: I covered everything except her hands and face, and there's a tiny strip at the top which shows the tin and the original colours. It's again that claustrophobic element of control, yet it's a taking away. It's the conflicting thing of demonstrating control, and taking away a lot of the image, so that in a sense you are only left with the physical sense, rather than the visual appearance.

JD: She was posed on a ship. The image is semi-visible still in palimpsest under the white paint. If you really look, you can see some elements of the image.

JG: Yes. That's because I painted each element separately. The ship - that's a Victorian photography prop. She's gone into the studio and had this ship as a prop with the American flag. Her connection with an American flag is pretty ambiguous. I know that her Father was supposed to be in the American navy. But why, I don't know. This is the whole element of not-knowing in our family. He was a British citizen, but he ended up being in the American navy for some unknown reason. With the famine victims, that kind of control by another nation is brought out - the desire to impose control onto another group of people in the way that the photographer is showing his desire to project his way of control onto the people, by causing them to be photographed in this way.

JD: In your work, you use elements from male ancestors and female ancestors - from patrilinear and matrilinear streams. Do you consciously use them to juxtapose with each other?

JG: It's again part of a lack of knowledge, in that my Grandfather, when I knew him, was the one who was controlled by my Grandmother. It seemed to be a reversal in roles, from how my Mom remembered them. He basically did what he wanted with his life and my Grandmother held the family together in whatever way she had to. I saw him in the present-tense as ineffectual and tried to figure out how that could have happened. To look back at the times that he must have had a role, it seemed to be the war and his experience in the war that delineated him.

JD: So you would say it's the image of war that separates the matrilinear from the patrilinear?

JG: Yes, for me, it is. Women were cut off from war, especially in the First World War where there were no women involved directly except as nurses. Even in that, they were cut off from the actual experience of being in battles. To read about that, it seemed to me to be the most alien experience. What could he have taken from that? How did he even survive the experience? A lot of my images from a patrilinear kind of point would be, not him as represented in the family, or as a part of an understandable, knowable situation in the family, but in something that happened before this family began, that seemed to close him off.

JD: This question relates to the new work, which is about women as subjects of representation. Can you talk about what you are thinking about that now?

JG: I'm not sure - I'm just sort of throwing this out now - about whether there's a relationship to the physical which is tied to a realm of a not-knowing, a



realm of something acting from the outside on a person in some way. That may be a male kind of aspect. I'm not sure. It seems like those two streams are always there and I think when I was specifically dealing with the 'damage-to' - whether it be surfaces or bodies or psyches - I was trying to sort out a way that it was possible to be damaged, marked by the outside world, yet still use those things to make something else, to repair.

JD: You often spoken about your work in terms of damages and making reparations. Do you think your

constructively, then the women are protecting themselves by becoming introspective. This is especially so in one piece, where there are three film stills of women, but they all have the same kind of introspective look, the same self-absorption. It seems a protection, specifically from the knowledge that they are being looked at by a camera and by an audience. They're so exposed. Their introspection is a protection from that looking and exposure. There's a pretense that they're actually involved in themselves. There's a belief that we are seeing them in a way that they actually are rather than the way

**Looking at that image of my Grandmother as a child, I'm thinking back to what I knew of her and her power and control.**

work is engaged in a making of reparations? If so, in what ways?

JG: In "Emphasis Mine" - the piece in 'C' Magazine - I use images of damaged paintings and text from a woman who's an artist who's talking about a certain kind of damage that's being done to her, as a woman, as someone who's growing older, and also as someone who's not at home in the world in some sense, who's not able to use those occurrences to build on. They just enter into her and don't become part of her. I think that piece moves away from reparations. I'd been more involved with reparations when I was taking someone's work and adding to it, by making a repair in a certain sense, making a bandage, a healing process. This was the first time that I think I've looked at someone who was talking, and the healing process didn't seem possible for her, because she wasn't aware enough of her ability to make that happen. It was just too removed.

JD: It seems to me there is a bleaker aspect to your new work.

JG: The newer work uses film stills, and I think it's more direct in some way than the older work, which had a certain structure to work through. They're all of women, who are being looked at from the outside, looked at in this case by a film camera. It's a film still, but you don't know the narrative, you just know the one moment. After doing "Emphasis Mine", and feeling that this woman was being damaged and didn't know how to deal with that damage, these new images seem to be a retreat from that knowledge for the moment, or a protection I suppose. If you're unable to deal with that damage, if it's not being made use of

that they are told to be by somebody else, by the narrative of the film, that they are undirected at that point. But that's obviously not true.

JD: You've used a lot of the elements from your family, like photographs and paintings. But you never include anything in your work that identifies the source of those materials.

JG: A lot of people have talked to me about that maybe being a problem, that I'm not giving people that information. It becomes a kind of puzzle or something that people have to enter into. But I guess I don't want to give so much information that it's a kind of given, that it excludes the viewer from entering into it.

JD: Do you think they get a sense of the generational relationship and the sense of family obligations and damages and reparations?

JG: I think they get a sense of the other more immediately, of somebody else's connection to the world and how I'm relating to them through that.

JD: Can you talk more about that sense of otherness, because I think it's a very important element in your work.

JG: It worked in the beginning at a very personal level, that I was different than other people. There were also connections and a continuity of either a family, or in choosing to do art, connections with other artists. There was a need to know how I overlapped and interconnected with those other people. I guess it comes down to the idea of location. I



had to find out where I was situated, whether it was in a culture that was momentary or just present time. There was also a whole background to that culture. I came from a place with different ideas, a different context. Then I wanted to find out why I was located in this position I was in at this moment and how it could connect to what other people had experienced, what other people saw as their connection to the world. Were they able to relate directly to the world? I think that's why I used artists who were more primitive or naive, or were beginning and at a point where they had that more direct connection to the world, which I wanted to build on. Specifically, using my husband Andy's Aunt Vida, working with her images of herself, her self-portraits, in order to find a connection to how she saw herself, how I could see myself through her, what the differences were between us and what the similarities were.

JD: So the trans-generational element is not specifically in your own family?

JG: No. Not in that case. I met her when she was in her seventies and she was working with her image, trying to sort out her location in the world too.

JD: How was she doing that?

JG: She was doing it in a much more direct way than I felt possible to do at the time. She had a belief in appearance, that she could translate quite directly what she saw on her face and make marks to represent that.

JD: Is the image of the self-portrait important to you?

JG: I think it is because in a sense it's the most direct representation of a location in the world. In my case, losing the sense that there was a way to make that direct connection. Now I'm moving onto another kind of representation of women, with a more mediated view, like the films. I'm talking a bit about the denial of the process of believing that the women I've presented are really like how we see them in the film. They have a sense of self that doesn't get wiped out by that directorship.

JD: Who do you see as the audience for your work? Do you imagine that many of them read the criticism that surrounds the work which includes personal information about you?

JG: That's interesting to think about. I guess I see the audience for my work as being more willing to project themselves into a place that isn't known, that they wouldn't be frightened or scared off by it.

JD: Do you see them as being like yourself, in the sense of being part of the art community, people who have also had this sense of otherness, people that belong to the same ghetto?

JG: I would have thought that at a certain point, when I was just beginning to work this way and thinking it was something that may be more for an art audience who are willing to involve themselves, are willing to take that time. But I've been surprised that the people who respond, a lot of them are involved in professions that would be more open to a psychological exploration. It seems to get response from people who have been trained in psychiatry.

JD: That leads directly to my next question, and that is how psychoanalytic discourse and psychoanalytic practice have effected your work? What elements have you used from that discourse?

JG: I've always had a sense that artists have to reveal themselves and by revealing themselves they're entering into a kind of psychoanalytic space with the audience being there, not as the analyst, but as the other. The art that I am most drawn to has that aspect of revealing, and there's a sexual connotation already. I haven't really gotten into the theoretical side of the effect of psychoanalytic practice on the work, but I think there's an exhibitionist element to art and that leads into a number of things. If that is powerful enough or it is conveyed to the audience, that has a kind of psychological working back and forth, changing places almost with the artist.

JD: Can you describe the structure of the pieces for the gallery?

JG: I'm thinking of two pieces. One will be a simple, almost direct connection to my sense of film and its power to present the sense of another person. That person becomes so present we feel we can understand so much more about that person just by looking at their face. There's a certain belief that we have, that we have this knowledge of a person just through the presentation of their image. I'm going to call the piece "film". It includes a film still of Lillian Gish, the one that I have shown you. It's ambiguous in that she's got her mouth open and she's pointing up to her tooth. As an image it's quite powerful because it's a face that's recognizable as a film star. I want to use that one image and on either side of it, top and bottom, like a strip, would be a stat of a light-dark texture that looks like film grain. It could be any kind of film, from another source. But it has that connection, the suggestion of the location of where



that image would be projected.

The other piece is more complex in that it has more to do with location rather than the location of an image on a film strip. This one has to do with the location of women and their relationships to images that are either related to them directly as an image of them, or as images that have a connection at more of an appearance level, a similarity of pose or dress. There are three parts. One part would be a complete film still where a woman is standing in front of an image of another woman - a painting. She is standing and looking out at the camera and the image in the painting is looking out. They're both standing in the same pose, they're dressed the same way. There's an offering to the view of the camera, and a certain sexual element there. In the image in the painting, the woman's dress is half off, and one breast is exposed. The woman who is supposed to be the actual woman in the film, has just got her dress off the shoulder. There are those kinds of similarities. We're looking at this woman and she's not looking at the image behind her, she's looking out at us. There's another film still I'll be using which is a woman looking at a painting of herself and you see her as a reflection of that painting. You're seeing the same person, but one is a painted representation of her, and one is a reflection of the real person looking at herself. In between those two images will be another kind of relationship, in this case myself, to another image, an image that is related as a member of my family - my Grandmother. There's a painting of her as a teenager. That painting would be closer to the image of the woman standing in front of the portrait, in time. It's a film that was made around 1917, 1918. It has more relationship in time to this image of my grandmother as a teenager, as a fourteen or fifteen year old. The image below this painting of my grandmother is of myself. It's shot to resemble a film still, it's got that stark lighting. It has been processed as a stat, taking away the particularity of a photograph in order to become more filmic. I'm bringing myself into that context of film even though it isn't actual film.

JD: Have you ever felt that women were unrepresentable?

JG: This is, again, an aside, but Nicole Jolicœur - I met her when she was here - but she has consciously decided that she will not represent women in her work. I thought that was an interesting thing, but to me... The background of her work is that she has seen a lot of photographs that Charcot did of hysterical women. They're so powerful because they're so contradictory when you know what he was trying to achieve - how he was trying to represent these women, and the conflicts behind his failure to do so. I

think it is more powerful to deal with than to just say 'I'm just not going to do anything about this at all, I'm not going to use woman's images because they can be misread', or whatever.

## RHEA TREGEBOV

*Rhea Tregebov lives in Toronto; she was an editor of 'Fireweed', a feminist quarterly, and is well known as a poet. Her book 'Remembering History' won the annual Pat Lowther award from the League of Canadian Poets for the best book of poetry in 1982. Presently, she is co-editing a critical anthology on Feminist Culture for the Women's Press.*

Judith Doyle: To start off, I wanted to ask you about your own background, and why you decided to do the piece.

Rhea Tregebov: It came from two streams. One was the rediscovery of my own ethnicity, and the other was an interest in language form. When I think of the ethnicity element now... this is like therapy, actually. (Laughter).

JD: Why?

RT: Because I was thinking of two things at once. I had an insight as I was talking. It seems to fall into the intellectual and the emotional streams. The intellectual stream is the concern with the form of language, and the emotional theme is my own feelings about my ethnic background. I had, really, a very Jewish upbringing. I went to private school from grades one to six, a Hebrew school. My sense of self was very much one of Jewishness, and the rest of the world was not Jewish. It was something that I came to rebel against at a certain age, maybe as early as twelve, when it suddenly became stifling and suffocating to see things in that simple way. The bigotry inherent in that became apparent to me. Not that the family itself was bigoted, but the outlook - to see everything as 'them', 'me' and 'not me', defining the world in such sharp terms as that. Now I would call it almost bigotry, and in its worst forms it is. In its better forms, it's just a sense of identity and separateness. So, I went through a period of wanting to put that all behind me and see myself in a more global way, a more openminded way, liberal way, I suppose. It wasn't until four years ago or so, prior to beginning this piece, that I started re-examining what it meant to me to be Jewish. I guess after going into a wider world, I was interested in putting it behind me and gaining a more liberal, more broad perspective on some things, and identifying



as a socialist, as a feminist, as an intellectual, as a writer, and not having being Jewish as a primary thing.

JD: Mide said something similar to that, in terms of identifying herself more as an artist than as a Japanese Canadian, or as gay. Yet the work she's doing now seems to be an attempt to weave those three things together in a way. Maybe you can talk about the relation between your interest as an artist in form and this choice of subject matter.

RT: This project happened by accident in many ways. (My husband) Alan was actually packing to go off to Winnipeg to visit his Grandmother, and threw his little tape recorder in the suitcase, just on the spur of the moment, and said, "Well, I'll get some of Baba's stories when I'm talking to her." He came back with the stuff, which I started obsessively transcribing, without editing, and almost without even knowing what I transcribing. Volumes and volumes, large sections of it. I got very interested in the spoken voice as opposed to the written voice, or more particularly the literary voice. I think this first happened through a course in linguistics that I took, where you'd see transcripts of conversations and you'd see how far they were from standard grammar. Then, partly through transcribing interviews. This was part of my work when I was editing 'Fireweed' (feminist quarterly magazine). I transcribed a lot of interviews and would see how people never finish sentences and how one person will fill in another person's thoughts, and how close to the edge of silence communication is. I got quite fascinated by looking at the difference between written and spoken

there was this very powerful and lucid communication that happened regardless. I felt that she was free; she didn't have the conventions of standard grammar because she just didn't know it. She was unconstrained in that way. She was talking with a beloved Grandchild, so there was a very strong desire to communicate that in it's more banal form becomes just maternal or grand-maternal solicitude, or platitudes, or whatever. But, it didn't come out that way because she was on the brink of something. Maybe it's because she knew that her death wasn't that far away. In fact, her mental incapacity wasn't that far away. There was this real urge to tell him what the stuff of her life had been. I think that she did that, in a way that she wouldn't have if she wasn't so much on the edge of things. When she was more settled in her life and more accepting of it, when she was healthier, when it wasn't so hard to communicate, I don't think she would have said so much.

She was pushed to an extreme, even though at the time she met him, she was feeling fairly comfortable. But there was this tremendous will to say what she had to say, so all the barriers were broken down. The language became something very extraordinary. I think it was a particular moment in her life, as well as her own character that made her an artist at that moment, in many ways. Also, she was isolated at the time. It was rare for someone to sit down and talk with her.

JD: How did you approach writing and editing the other text that goes with it?

**If you identified yourself as a Jew, you identified yourself as a victim. Of course it was very important to me in terms of my own feminism not to be a victim.**

language. I selected a portion of the transcript and showed it to someone before the project had defined itself for me. She said, "Oh, is that your new poetry?" These were the words of a semi-literate woman to whom English was the fourth language that she'd learned. When you put these words on paper, suddenly they have this authority. She seemed to me at the time the tapes were made to be on the edge of something, on the brink of communication itself in many ways. She had all the physical handicaps, her hearing, all the things that happen with extreme age, so the language was ruptured in many places. Yet

RT: Well, I listened to the tapes over and over. At some points, I stopped transcribing because it was crazy. It was taking so much time. Once I realized how fascinated I was by the language, I listened to the tape over and over until I picked out the themes. One thing I was quite interested in was her use of repetition. Some of the more important stories in her life had become distilled, so that they would be repeated in slightly different ways in the narrative. Depending on the context, she'd put slightly different emphases on them so that different facets of the story would show, because there was not one story.



There was one critical episode of the decision to move from one country to another, which was like moving from one reality to another. It was this story about her brother; they said, "Have you got a home?" and he said "I have no home." They told him, at the school, "We'll send you home now." And he said, "I have no home." They said, "What do you want to do? Where do you want to go?" He said, "I want to go to Canada." It was the first time the word 'Canada' was in the narrative. There's this fullness of an alternate reality that was offered. He identified the 'Old Country' as she would call it, as being not his home, and Canada as being a potential home. It seemed like the experience of thousands and thousands of people was distilled in that one story, that moment of making a definition and asserting a choice. "This is not my home - there's another reality, another country, that is available to me."

JD: It's a potential home, not a real home.

RT: It's like a magic word, 'Canada'. The way she said it was like a magic word.

JD: This feeling of being between two places, or two languages, but not in one and not in the other, was something I've registered as a common ground between the experiences of feminism and ethnicity. Could you talk about the feminist dimensions of the piece for you, looking at language from a feminist perspective?

RT: Part of the reason I wanted the piece to happen is because I felt it was a voice that wasn't heard enough before. Everybody has stereotypes of the Jewish Mother, and here was a woman who was the classic, the ultimate Jewish Mother - she was very selfless and very devoted and enormously hard-working and a fabulous cook, all of the stereotypes - but she was completely her own woman. So I wanted to counter the stereotype. That was important to me, both as a feminist, and as - I don't want to say anti-racist, but anti-stupid-about-other-ethnic-groups. That was the basic thing - to let her speak in her own words, instead of having men write about her, or other people putting words in her mouth. I don't feel it's done enough. There are other feminists, male and female, who are doing this now, but it was important. Also, I think, I was quite fascinated by the way she perceived the narrative of her life. She didn't care about facts and figures at that time, she didn't care about chronology. There were just these nodes of meaning. When she would describe the old country and the old world, she'd say, "You couldn't say no." She'd deny definitions; certain words had no meaning. She'd say, "You couldn't say no," or "there wasn't such thing as this-or-that". Over and over. I remember,

"There was no such thing as a living room." Things that we would take for granted. But more importantly, the old world was described as a place where there was no choice. For generation after generation, it was the same thing. It was an agrarian, peasant culture, pre-industrial practically, and she did things the same way as her Mother and her Grandmother did them ... in fact, she knew her Great-Grandmother. There was that sense of continuity. She saw the beauty of it, but she also saw it as a lack of choice.

The new world, on the other hand, was the world in which there was choice. At one time, she was explaining to me about the different political and cultural sects that were in Winnipeg at the time. She said, "There were those who believed in Zionism, and there were those who believed in Socialism, and the Communists - we didn't talk to them." She was a Socialist. That was the theme of the new world - you could be this or that - whereas, in the old world, you couldn't say 'no' and you couldn't say 'living room'.

JD: Do you think there are any threads between this experience of emigration and feminism, in terms of language and issues like displacement? Did any of those thoughts occur to you while you were working on the piece?

RT: Yeah. It seemed that, to get at the particularity of her experience, by presenting her own words, what was necessary was to work past the stereotypes. What she had to say, her vision, was for me a particularly female vision. It certainly wasn't a feminist vision. I actually tried to get her to talk about feminism, because I remember at one point, she talked about how angry she was that the girls didn't get the same education as the boys did. But the particular morning of the tapes, Alan asked her, "Was it fair? Did you get angry?" She said, "There was no such thing as angry." (Laughter). I included that in there, just to foil myself, because I couldn't get her to be a mouthpiece for feminism. I think there was a "Nya, nya, nya!" quality to the piece. (Laughter). It was neat. I had a bunch of imagined audiences for this. I imagined showing this in Winnipeg; I imagined showing it in Toronto to the art community. The "Nya, nya, nya," to the Toronto art community was, first of all, to teach them something about the West and the Western experience - immigration there. That was more the visual part - what things looked like, and what the world is like there. The world that I grew up in is very different than the world I live in here. It's not just a question of time but of place and of ethnicity and so on. I felt I was going to educate people here, because I find Torontonians almost as bad as New Yorkers, in the sense that there is no



other place that's real. I wanted to assert the reality of these other places, and the photos did that for me. I also wanted to validate. She was a very dominant, very strong woman. But, the things that she had to say - she came to them with great clarity at an extreme age. I think there was a tendency to pat her on the head and say, isn't she cute. She really wanted to say these things and I wanted to give her the place to say them.

When I started to imagine the piece, I would imagine her in the audience. She died about six months or eight months before the piece was actually put on, but I had the sense of seeing her in the audience and seeing her reality validated and paid attention to. I wanted to show her reality and my reality connected, because I think my reality was so much created by hers.

I was a child who grew up in the shadow of immigration and the shadow of the holocaust, with this strange sense about my own Judaism, which was really a very painful heritage in many ways. I grew up in a community of holocaust survivors, so there was a sense of the past as being something that would absolutely drown you. If you identified yourself as a Jew, you identified yourself as a victim. Of course, it was very important to me in terms of my own feminism not to be a victim. So that heritage seemed like such a heavy, heavy, onerous thing to accept. It seemed if you were a nice, shiny, bright, new Canadian then you had a future instead of just a past. There was far too much past, and I didn't really think about how much that was a shadow on my life until I started working on this piece and thinking about it, going back to the childhood sense of my Grandparents, and the shame about their otherness.

JD: Midi talks about being third generation, of having to go back to her Grandmother to find out about her own past, because her parents denied it here. Did you have an experience like that?

RT: I think my parents were and continue to be more Jewish than I am in terms of observance, and a sense of it being a more primary part of a sense of themselves. They were Canadian-born too, so they were not shameful, in the sense that my Grandparents were. I was embarrassed that none of my Grandparents spoke English without an accent. Some of them were illiterate in English, though they were literate in Russian and Yiddish and so on. Did I ever tell you that story about a friend of mine whose parents and Grandparents were English? She said that she just got a letter from her Grandmother, and I said, "Really, that's nice. You mean she can write, and in English!" (Laughter). She looked at me as if I

was completely insane. I mean, French, German - what other language would her Grandmother possibly be writing in? I don't think my parents were embarrassed by their parents, but I was. I think perhaps they were a bit more comfortable in their Judaism. Also, they grew up pre-Holocaust, so I don't think there was that heavy load in terms of what it meant to be a Jew for them, informing their sense of self. But they were definitely Canadians. It was a class thing as well. Because they were university educated the ethnicity didn't carry so much of a stigma. I guess that's a class thing, isn't it? Since they were well-spoken, there wasn't the language thing. I grew up with all my Grandparents, I knew them all - it was a very close family, which it continues to be. I mean, I didn't know that I was ashamed or embarrassed by them. That was nowhere near a conscious feeling. As I said, I took it for granted to such a degree that I didn't know there was such a thing as a Grandmother who didn't speak their own particular language. My parents were very comfortable identifying themselves as Judeo-Canadians, like Italo-Canadians - that was a very comfortable slot for them, to be a little chip in the mosaic. That was how their self-definition worked. That became a problem for me because I wanted to define myself in broader terms. My parents are quite liberal, so there wasn't that much to buck against.

JD: The Grandmother in your piece is actually Alan's Grandmother, and you've said that your families are very much alike. Were you friends when you were quite young?

RT: We were boyfriend and girlfriend when I was about sixteen, and were married when I was eighteen. So, I adopted her as my Grandmother. In this piece, I really wanted to claim her as my Grandmother, as if to say, this is the kind of inheritance I wish I had, and in fact I do have, because she did take me in and accept me as a Grandchild, and knew me when I was almost a child. You know, you cast about, looking for someone whom you hope you could come from. Of course, the ones that are closest are the hardest for you to grasp or see as clearly. It's easier someone who's at a little bit more of a distance.

## CAROLYN WHITE

*Carolyn White is an artist and filmmaker living and working in Toronto; she was born in this city in 1960, studied at the Ontario College of Art, and is currently the Art Director of Impulse Magazine. Her sculptures have been exhibited locally, and her films shown in Canada, and London, England.*



Carolyn White: My Mother is German as opposed to Canadian, but she's very uncomfortable with German politics. She's not proud to be German, in the purely political sense. She and her family went through the war. They were very anti-Hitler, and suffered for that. They had a very large house on top of a hill, and an apple orchard. This was a very strategic point. German troops occupied the house, and destroyed it, the land and the house which had been in the family for a long time. It was a treasured possession, and it was destroyed by these people occupying it, some officer and a bunch of his troops, who were young boys, just very rambunctious. My Mom thinks a lot of the excitement for Hitler was youth, and a desire to do something exciting and different, as opposed to people really understanding politically what they were doing. She thinks a lot of the Hitler Youth were just having fun. She was required to go to Hitler youth rallies. It was something she had to do, whether she believed in the political situation or not. It was illegal to listen to specific radio stations, those broadcasting information that the political party didn't want you to hear. It was banned, but her Father always did, and this was discovered, and he got in a lot of trouble for that. Her Father had been in the First World War, and suffered a shrapnel wound which left one of his hands useless. Yet, they forced him to go out and do drills. Any men in the village who could still move or walk had to perform these drills and dig trenches and prepare for war. Her and her Mother were very upset about things like that. That's what she sees Germany as.

JD: How old was she when the Second World War was going on and people were occupying her house?

CW: She was born in 1930. She was just a young girl. She kept a diary. I saw it. She drew pictures of planes, and leaflets that were dropped from them. She didn't know what they said. A lot of it was foreign writing to her, but there were swastikas scratched out in the earth in this fairly rural area, in a very small town called Michelstadt, which was close to Frankfurt, actually.

JD: That was an area where there was a lot of bombing.

CW: Exactly. They used to see bombers going down and burning in their fields. People would run to them after the burning had stopped and actually loot, because people were very poor and there was very little food. I remember going to Germany to visit my Grandmother, and her showing us these weights that she used to weigh food and flour. They were bits of airplane - weights made from shrapnel and so on. It was very interesting. These were things they took

from the planes.

JD: Did your Mother stop keeping the diary after she came to Canada?

CW: She kept it for a few days, just after she got here. She said that as soon as she got a job here, she stopped writing, simply because she was too busy.

JD: When was it that she emigrated? How old was she?

CW: She left Germany in 1957, and arrived here after a week and more on a boat. She was twenty-seven. She arrived in Québec on a boat with a lot of other Europeans, not only Germans, but Swiss and French and Hungarians fleeing political oppression in Russia. They were the only people leaving for political reasons. The rest of the people on the boat were seeking fame and wealth. They thought North America was a great place to make lots of money. They all had dreams of coming to Canada, making lots of money, then going back home with it all.

JD: Did she speak any English when she came?

CW: Yes, she was very fluent. She'd studied languages when she was in school and spoke, I think, four languages. Consequently, when they arrived in Canada, she was hired by Immigration at the port to translate. She thinks a lot of immigrants were treated poorly because they couldn't speak the language well, or at all. Because she did speak the language she was prepared. She was able to escape that poor treatment and get a job immediately.

JD: What elements made you start taking an interest in your Mother in terms of this piece?

CW: That's very easy to answer. As soon as I knew I was going to have a child, it immediately imparted all these very strong feelings, an interest in my heritage and in my Mother's heritage and the continuation of the family line.

JD: How did the fact that you're pregnant influence your feelings toward your work? One thing you said that interested me - you said that you wanted to make this piece quite permanent and stable, whereas with other works you didn't mind throwing them away after the show was finished.

CW: Having a child is not a frivolous experience. It's very stable, and it also cements an idea in my mind that perhaps I didn't think about that often - the fact that I did come from somebody, and that person in turn came from somewhere, and it's other, it's



different than where I came from.

JD: I want to bring it back to your identity as an artist, and some of the formal decisions in your work.

CW: I think that I'd like to label myself within this series as an artist, as opposed to just a woman, or somebody who's going to be a Mother, or a filmmaker, or sculptor. I'm an artist, that's what I see myself as. Consequently, I see this whole situation in my life as very visual. I immediately thought of two visuals when I found out I was pregnant. The first visual is a very primitive image of myself. All of a sudden, I wasn't somebody from 1985. I could have been a cave woman, in a really good sense of being basic - and strong. I joined in this huge long line of women that span the entire world. It was a very nice feeling, to be part of this big membership. Nobody knows the feeling or the experience until you've had it. The second image I had was of a photograph. It was a photograph of myself, my child, my mother and her mother. The child was female in this image I had, and it was taken in Germany. This was a very strong image which has stayed with me from the onset of my pregnancy, until I found out it was a male child. It set me to thinking about the new piece I wanted to do and I knew that the image would relate to the strength of generations and heritage. When you invited me to do this series, I found it very odd because it's along the lines that I was thinking of for my next work.

JD: Now, many feminists are re-examining the place for children, in the workplace and in relation to professional lives. We have to rethink the traditional family unit. Do you think your strength comes from the sense you can restructure things from when you were growing up?

CW: I don't have a job that requires me to work from nine to five or specific hours at a specific location. I work at home and make my own hours, and that puts me in a very privileged situation as a Mother. These are things that the man I live with and I actually discussed before agreeing to go ahead and have the baby. It was very important that we be able to retain our lifestyles to the degree that we could do our own work, because this is very important for us. The baby isn't going to be the central focus of our lives. We didn't want that to happen. So, this was a big discussion topic before even deciding.

JD: How do you make decisions about what images and what themes to use in your work. How do they come to you and have they changed.

CW: That's a very good question, because in the past

with my work, I think it's almost been a standard within the art community that not only do we have to be intelligent in our source material and our use of imagery and text and so on, we're expected to combine the intellect with the emotional in our work. I think those standards make for a lot of assessing and reassessing of one's work to the degree where I think it can punch it dead into the ground.

JD: Do you think people cut themselves off from making certain images or certain decisions because they're afraid they won't be able to rationalise them later?

CW: Definitely. It seems like a very rational process that we all have to go through and I think a lot of the softness and sincerity in work is missing. That can definitely be said for male art, and there is definitely a male and a female type of work. I've been accustomed to working that way too, going around my entire piece, physically walking, going around in a circle, and scrutinising it and saying well can people get in through here and can people get in through there and find like a loose bolt. And you have to find that and tighten that up.

JD: What kinds of things have you thought when you've walked around certain pieces?

CW: Well, I think can people come in through this little hole I've left and discover something that I don't want them to discover, or will they be able to come in and discover that I haven't read this specific book on French theory or structuralism? It's like a required reading list. Instead of doing that you can plaster it up and say I hope they don't find it. When I first had this image it came at an immediate gut level. I thought, well I'm going to have to rationalise this so I bought books by Piaget and psychoanalytical books on child rearing. It's ridiculous. I'm thinking of these images for very personal reasons and very obvious and basic reasons. To analyse them out of existence and make it into a hard cold piece of art is not what I want to do.

JD: Do you think you've been rethinking who the audience is for your work?

CW: Definitely. The one horror I have with this piece and I'm using that word almost comically, I'm not frightened, is that people are going to say 'Oh it's such women's art'. I thought that was something I always had to be careful of, to not make women's art - what immediately comes to mind is soft sculpture or weaving. But the way I will be constructing the piece, if people take a bit of time, or if people make the effort, or relax enough and look at it, they'll see that it's a very worldly piece and that it's talking about a continuation or a heritage and that's neither male nor



female.

JD: You were saying before that there's a kind of women's art and a men's art. How would you characterise the differences?

CW: Again it's this anxiety or angst feeling that is in a lot of male art. It's very coolly and methodically put together. I think there are very few rough edges in that work, it's following a prescribed notion of what is good or acceptable art.

**I'm thinking of these images for very personal reasons and very basic and obvious reasons. To analyse them out of existence and make them into a cold hard piece of art is not what I want to do.**

JD: In what kinds of ways do you identify with your mother and her experience in Germany?

CW: She wasn't comfortable, she didn't feel rooted, she didn't feel like a German. She kept saying she couldn't classify herself in any way, she would classify herself as a European, she wouldn't say she was a German. I could totally understand what she was talking about because it brought out those feelings for myself, because once I knew that my mother was a foreigner, not a Canadian, once I realised she came from another country and had been surrounded by people who spoke other languages, and ate different food, etc., at one point in her life, other than what I knew her as, as my mother, I found that very exciting and very exotic. I too at one point was very bored with my heritage, and being Canadian seemed very boring. Anything else seemed more interesting or exotic. The different does. It wasn't a disregard for Canada, it was just I didn't feel rooted here. I wanted to see other things, experience other people and places. It was definitely a feeling of other. The school I went to was very conservative. The fact that I wanted to be an artist and dress different from other people made it difficult for me. I was singled out yet I had friends, but I didn't feel I was part of cliques and that was a very big part of school. All I could do was think of finishing and leaving. That's exactly what I did. And she did the same thing, she finished school and left. So we had this really interesting discussion of that otherness, that I didn't know existed in my mother.

JD: So she didn't miss the different culture that she had left?

CW: She said at first of course it was disappointing

because Canada wasn't what everyone thought it was going to be, the land of riches, the land of wealth, everything new. When they first arrived they docked at a port, and the port was on the edge of a slum town in Québec. This was the first image she had of her new country and that was very depressing for her. She said she immediately wanted to write home and say 'Send me money, I'm coming back, this isn't what I wanted'. But after getting over that initial reaction, she said she didn't yearn to return home until ten years later, when she had a

family and she wanted to introduce her family to her other family.

JD: The piece in the gallery is a sketch for your next film in some ways. In the film you have a division between the colour footage and the black and white footage. They're like two views of the same content. Can you talk about that difference and what you're trying to highlight?

CW: The colour footage I saw as being real time or the real life situation. If I shoot my mother now in real time, it would be in colour, whereas if I shot her imagery or her discussion of imagery, or her experience, that would be in black and white. In the black and white footage I plan to have much more, not a dream like quality, but a lot more fantasy or art directed quality. The colour footage would be a lot more realistic. It would be less edited, and less rehearsed, if rehearsed at all, as opposed to the black and white footage which would be very constructed.

In the beginning I thought one would be critical of the other. The black and white footage would show the fantasy world many immigrant people carry with them when they travel from their homeland to here. Critical is a harsh term, but still it would be critical of the fact that these are false hopes or fantasies. The situation is thus, it's colour, it's gritty, it's dramatic and this is how boring or how hard it can be. My attitude now is changing slightly in that it won't be critical as much as a contrast, more storytelling.

JD: Because neither are really reality?



CW: Exactly. When I listen to my mother telling her stories, she can talk very rationally, and talk about dates, places and names and political situations. But when she gets into her personal life, and starts telling stories about situations and personal viewpoints, they almost become little fairy tales to me. They're very endearing, and funny and personal. It's that softer quality I intend to portray, as opposed to a critical quality.

JD: I wanted to ask about the relationship between the three different parts and what you're representing in the film?

CW: What I also spoke with my Mother about was how I was categorizing specific events in a woman's life, on three specific levels or plateaus or notches or what-have-you. The first level is one of youth and innocence and - not a disregard for others, but a sort of - a very selfish point in somebody's life, when you do what you want to do. It's not negative, it's a feeling of youth and finding one's way and experiencing all the different things one would like to experience. You have that energy and no ties with your time, commitments and so on. That was one level. The second level was a gaining of more responsibility, whether that responsibility came from a permanent relationship or a dedication to a certain activity, meaning you'd found your occupation or what you wanted to pursue, working towards that, or having a child - anything that required a lot more responsibility. Also, earning one's own money. The third was, once having gone through all those things, of becoming a little bit more settled. A regaining not of some sort of youth, but of freedom, a new type of freedom. This is what I discussed with my Mother, because I saw myself as being at that second level. I no longer feel like I can call myself young in the sense that I'm not an adolescent anymore, and I'm going to take on the added responsibility of having a child. I don't necessarily see that as a restrictive or a negative thing. It's just another level, and a new experience. It's a nice feeling. It makes me feel stronger and it gives me more of a sense of being and of who I am. I see my Mother as having already gone through that. She's raised her children, she's had her career, she has a job, she has her own financial security and freedom. Now she's looking forward to retiring and regaining a new form of youth and a new form of freedom, and that was her third level. These are the three parts, and it's basically chronological. It has to do with aging, obviously, from youth to middle to older age. Those are the three sections, or the three viewpoints, the fairy-tales or stories of three different women at these three different points in life. That's how I'm going to section it.

JD: How have you come to decide how to construct

the static work, the work that will be in the gallery?

CW: Again, using that three-level theory. The beginning is rooted in my Mother's experience. I'm using her as the basic character, deciding to leave her homeland. That's the first step - the motion and movement, and feeling of 'otherness', of going elsewhere. The second step is reaching new land, acquiring land. That's another topic my Mother discussed a lot. I hate to call it an immigrant preoccupation. It's definitely something that she has inherited, as opposed to a North American standard. Owning land and acquiring land - I've coupled that with the fact of her reaching new land. That's the second peak of imagery in this triptych. The third is the possibility of the future, of what's to come. She's established herself in this new land, and a new freedom has been opened up to her, similar to when she first decided to go on the journey. This new journey is coupled with the fact that her child is going to be having a child.

## INGRID OUSTRUP JENSEN

*Ingrid Oustrup Jensen lives in Copenhagen, Denmark; she was born in 1940, and is the single mother of two daughters and a son. She has worked in a bookbinding factory, as a governess in Moscow, a social worker, supply teach, brewery worker, writing and actress in group theatre. She studied at the National Danish Filmschool from 1979 - 82 as a Director. She has since produced three, award-winning films; her first, a short fiction work on an old man living near the waterfront, won an Oscar from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, L.A. This conversation took place at the Mannheim Film Festival in West Germany, October 1985.*

Judith Doyle: Why did you choose to make a film about Turkish and Pakistani immigrants?

Ingrid Oustrup Jensen: Before I went to film school, I was travelling back home from Stockholm. I'd been researching theatre in the municipalities in Finland and Sweden. I was coming home on the train. At the time it was very dark; you couldn't see outside. I was travelling with a Turkish family in the same compartment. So, I was occupying myself with winding wool that I'd got in Finland. The woman was watching me, then she took it away from me and started doing it for me and showing me how to do it. She was extremely fast and very nice. Then, I took some of the wool, and we did it together, and we started communicating the way we could, which was very poorly, because we didn't know each other's languages.



I told my girlfriend about it when I came home. She is a social worker, she'd started working with Vietnamese boat refugees in the middle of the seventies when the first ones came - '76. Then, more and more, she went into teaching languages, teaching Danish to foreigners. Especially, she had groups of Turkish women. All the anecdotes - all the stories she told - made me very interested in the subject. Now, unemployment and the living situation are getting harder and harder. Almost all the time the immigrants have been here they've been made scapegoats, and all over Europe they have the same problem. Denmark in my eyes has always been a very safe country and I don't think its going to be like that anymore. There'll be more criminality and harassment of each other. It's like the violence developing in the Americas. People, the immigrants, now get violated by gangs. One of the women in my film, while I was editing the film was assaulted - she lived in the little house which looks like one in Turkey, with the small stove, very primitive, where she sits in the glow from the baking. It's a small house like the working people have outside the city. Normally they're not supposed to be lived in but there are too few colonies in the outskirts of Copenhagen close to the harbour where people are allowed to live. She enjoyed it very much. One night fifteen youngsters broke the windows and with iron bars they beat her and her husband up. He almost died from it and was in the hospital for a very long time with a skull fracture. She was in a horrible state. They smashed everything, not that they had much. But for instance, we gave them a transistor radio after doing the film, so it was very sad to see it smashed up along with everything else. They don't dare to live there any more so they have to sell this little place. The last time I saw her she told me she was living in public housing and it's really terrible.

JD: You mentioned that you had many conversations about yourself with the women, and they spoke with you comfortably. What kinds of things did you have in common or what was the basis for this exchange? Are you from a working class background yourself?

IOJ: Well, I don't come from a traditional family, you can't really call it working class. My mother worked in an office and my father studied for many years to become an engineer but he kept getting children and never finished his education. Then he had a little business. He found a bottle with a message from Scotland when he was fishing once which made him open this little agency where he sold this special brand of Scottish whiskey. He had holes in his leather shoes and went with countless bottles of whiskey on the back of his bike. That was his little dream of being his own man. I had a childhood which I think was very rich in human ways, where we had the electricity and

gas shut down and very little food, very primitive food, not very nutritious. We were a very poor family and that was not common in Denmark. Even after the war - I was born during the war - people were short of everything, but even so our family was quite poor then for Denmark, which is a wealthy country. I had to hide it from my comrades, it was very embarrassing for my friends. I always inherited my brother's clothes, with the buttons on the wrong side. But still my family was loving and understanding. When I met these women in the film, I had an interpreter and I talked about why I wanted to make the film, about my own background, about my own family. It was a very natural thing for me to start talking about myself, because making the film opened up things from my own childhood.

JD: Why didn't you have any women in the film who had rejected traditional Moslem values completely and had decided to marry a Danish man for example?

IOJ: That would have been a different film. It would have been a lot easier to find that other kind of women. With Turkish women for example, you could find educated women living in the cities, who have a completely different life. But most of the people who come to our country to work and to be with their families come from the rural areas and the villages, and they have the hardest time of it. They used to do everything together in the villages, especially the women. They come to Denmark, they move into a highrise block, they're extremely isolated, and they have the Koran, and look at the clock and pray when they have to. At home they had a structured day where they used the sun as a clock and did everything together. They come together to bake, to do their laundry in the river, bathe together and massage each others backs, and when any of them has a baby all the others come to help. They have such a different community which they enjoy very much. They have an actual working day which is not experienced as we experience our working day.

Sometimes there were difficulties in translation. The interpreter was not an authorised translator, that would have been much too expensive. She was just a bilingual woman. By the way, she was married to a Dane and she was more European looking in her clothing, but she was very aware of and loyal to the Turkish way of living.

JD: It seems that you propose the values of the immigrant community as being positive and having something to tell us.

IOJ: I think they are, and that was a surprise to me because I consider myself a feminist and I have roots in the women's movement. With others, I formed the



first women's theatre group in Denmark, which functioned for four years. I must admit that one of the thoughts I had with the film, before I actually started visiting the families, was that - I won't say that I thought I could emancipate these women in any way, but still I had the feeling that it was necessary to make the film because they were so suppressed as women and as immigrants, and as working class people. I learned so much during the research for the film. It enriched me and I had more humility towards the subjects. I learned that you can't compare their lives with ours. Their religion is integrated in their everyday life. About the children, after showing the film sometimes we have had discussions. Some people have been very annoyed with me and very aggressive when I talk about the difference in the way we have children, and they shout at me that Danish women love their children as much as the Turkish immigrants. I don't think that is true. I give them specific examples, such as our institutions, nurseries, kindergartens, and schools. At parents meetings, only about a fourth of the children are represented and when you ask why they don't come, they say they don't have time. I find that very typical.

JD: Do you think that in Denmark there should be a rethinking of the way that families are structured or the way that groups of people are structured so that they can share responsibilities for bringing up children, like Turkish women do?

IOJ: It's more a change of mentality I think, than a change in the structure of families because any structure is useful in a family. My ideology is that collectives would be the best thing, but I don't think we are ripe enough. We're not mature enough for collectives because we've all been brought up to be nuclear families with egotistical ways. I lived in a collective for four years and it was not a bed of roses. We need a change of mentality and that is also why I made the film - to inform people. That is one of the reasons why people are so narrow minded. We don't know enough.

JD: You mentioned that it was very important to you that your film was shot with an all woman crew. Why was that?

IOJ: It was crucial to the film being made, because you could not go into the families with a male crew and have the women talk. That would be impossible. They are not even used to talking when their own men are present. They are very separated. When they have big parties, men are in one room and women in another. During the shooting, whenever the men were present, I had to find a way to get rid of them,

because the women didn't say anything. I was standing there with a crew, every minute costing a lot of money, so I told the men that we were quite new in the field and quite shy, and when they were present we couldn't work so well. That they understood. Then they went to the bedroom or outside. One little episode... I was sitting in the kitchen with one of the women and I asked her if she had experienced anything which was humorous because of misunderstanding due to language. It was in an intermission, we weren't shooting, and she was telling me about an incident in her native land, and her husband came in because he didn't think we were working. He sat beside us, a little in the background, but very observational. Then when she laughed and told me this story, the husband muttered something and he immediately changed his whole attitude and became very stern. The interpreter told me later that he had said to his wife that she should DARE to even so much as smile in the picture.

JD: You wanted to give the impression in the film of many women speaking in one voice. Why do you favour that structure?

IOJ: I loathe manipulation, and you always manipulate when you interpret reality. It's never the same putting it into a square with two dimensions. I am usually as loyal as possible, and strangely enough it's out of loyalty that I've done it this way because these women have never been photographed before. What is unique about the film is that you can't photograph Moslem women. That is why I thank the men in the end because it was a great risk for them. It's a great step for them to take. Many said no and turned me down. I found out during the research that the men objected less if they knew the women would be together on the screen, that it wasn't their own woman who would be exposing herself. So you are very close to these women but you don't have the impression that they are exposed.

JD: You build a narrative of ideas through the film, covering all the important issues, how they live, how they feel about losing their culture, the violence of staying in Denmark, and the narrative keeps that sense of humility intact by moving through many voices.

IOJ: I tried to keep it like that and I think it succeeds quite well. I think it suffers a bit from being cut so close, it tends to lose the calm flow that the footage does have. That is also because State Film Central which financed the film wanted it cut to fit on one roll which had to be less than 45 minutes. The film is now 44 minutes and a bit. I took 7 minutes out after I had already edited it very carefully. That is really



difficult, really terrible.

JD: You've spoken of these decisions in relation to this specific subject matter. Do you feel a commitment to use that form or an all woman crew on other films?

IOJ: I have used women crews on my other films. I think in general, yes, it is easier to work with women. But I have also worked with men at the film school, when the women were occupied. I don't at all mind working with men.

JD: Is there a link between your concerns as a feminist or experience as a woman and your choice of immigrants as a subject? There has been some writing in Canada about an idea of the immigrant self, of the position of women in a country having something in common with the position of immigrants in a country, that both are deterritorialized, that both can't find their own voice in a society that has been structured by male order.

IOJ: I find that evident. I don't know whether I thought that at the beginning, but I keep coming back to it in discussions after the film, because I keep using ourselves as examples of the same thing, when we discuss the immigrant women's position. Not so long ago, our role was very much the same in the countryside. In certain parts of Denmark you may still find the same structure and the same position for women, who are very important and very strong and dignified, but completely separate. It is the man who makes the decisions outside the home, and for anything which is public in any way. Some of the responses I've had when showing the film, people say that it's not only a film about immigrants, but it makes us think about the life we live.

JD: What was the response to the film among the women who you filmed. Did they feel embarrassed, or did it give them a sense of consciousness or activism about themselves?

IOJ: To them it is completely revolutionary. It gave them a new sort of dignity toward talking where they had always been very isolated and nobody knew them. When I showed it the first time and there were three women from the film present, I was very scared to walk over and see how they received it. I saw them from the back at first and they were very quiet, and I thought my goodness they don't like it and they're very shocked. Then I came around and they were sitting like in a dream. When they saw me, they hugged me and kissed me, thanked me in Turkish and said it was beautiful. They were deeply moved. At the opening, when the rest of the women and the men

came along, I was very excited about what the men thought. They were really proud, but they were very surprised they were proud. I came up to one of the men after and said "Well what about your wife, wasn't she good?" and all he said was - "She loves herself a lot, she loves herself a lot" The way he said it was like he was so amazed and so impressed. I had been warned a lot during the making of the film, especially by the interpreter's husband, who would say "Do you know what you're doing, you really have to be careful". He was almost threatening me at times, and in a very bad mood when we came back. He would say "It can ruin Hussein's life, it can ruin her job, you must be very careful". The only fictional scene in the film is the trailer for the title sequence, with the choir singing the Danish national anthem. I like it when she says "I'm sorry I've given you a headache, and thank you for coming. I have to pray now." She has such dignity. It's a nice closing of the film - you go out of the environment once again, you know she's praying, while you see the children in the streets and the horse, and you hear the sound from the minaret calling for prayers.

## NORMA BAILEY

*Norma Bailey is a filmmaker working with the National Film Board in Winnipeg. She is renowned for her intimate, yet powerful documentaries which portray people outside the mainstream. Currently, she is working on "Daughters of the Country", a four-episode made for television dramatic series on Métis women at different points in history.*

Judith Doyle: Why did you decide to do the Métis women series?

Norma Bailey: The Film Board approached me to do it because the Manitoba Métis Association wanted something for their centenary. They asked me, and I said I was interested because of the period of history. But I only wanted to do drama. So, I developed the idea and they went for it. The Métis history was especially important to me, coming from here. It's a rich part of history that very few people know much about. It certainly isn't in the history books.

JD: What's your own personal background? Are you Métis yourself?

NB: Me? No.

JD: How did you get into doing film?

NB: I just started working in menial tasks because I



didn't have another job. This was in Montréal, where I used to live. I did fall into it, in the beginning. Then at one point, I decided that I wanted to make films. I started making a film called 'Rubber Gun' with Alan Moyle. At first it was just for the sake of doing it, as a craft. At first, I wasn't making films because I had anything to say. Then slowly, of course, you start making decisions about what films you're going to make. And that's when your voice starts to come out - what you want to do with film. It's through that process.

JD: You've been making films on Indian and Métis subjects for a long time. How come you chose that?

NB: No I haven't. I've just made a couple. My problem is, I don't want to give an impression that natives are a cause for me, because they certainly aren't. I'm not trying to fight their battles for them.

JD: Can you tell me something about working on developing the ideas for the script for the Métis Women films? It seemed to me from reading about it that the structure isn't totally documentary, or traditional narrative.

NB: Well, it isn't documentary at all. It's pure drama. I developed the ideas from reading the history. The stories came from that reading. I said, OK, I'll make these fictitious people and this is what they're going to do. I did very little research with people. It was secondary to reading all the books that are around. There were four women who wrote the scripts for me, and I developed the material with them - Wendy Lill, Sandra Birdshill, Anne Cameron, and Sharon Reis. I chose them for various reasons. Wendy's just done a successful play that dealt with history, and Anne Cameron is very well known. Sharon Reis, I knew her work and I wanted to work with her. And Sandra Birdshill, I knew her fiction and she's in Winnipeg, and I thought she might be interested in doing drama. I approached them and I told them about the series. They wanted to do it because of what I wanted to do, which is focus on women.

JD: What is the structure?

NB: It focusses on women. They're all separate. It's not generational. There's no family relationship between the four episodes. It's being made for television. They'll each be fifty-six minutes long.

JD: How have you found the performers and crew?

NB: Well, for the performers, I'm just scouring reserves, everywhere, looking for Indians who can act. The whites for the film I get through regular

agencies - go to Toronto and do a casting. That's pretty straightforward. But the Indians, you've just got to hunt around, in Calgary, Manitoba, Alberta, and some from Ontario. The crew I've got from Manitoba are all freelance. The Film Board doesn't have a staff crew in the regions.

JD: Is the relationship of being an outsider an important one for you. One of the things that's strong for me in your film is they don't have a bourgeois social-worker flavour to them. Instead of saying, isn't this sad, isn't this pathetic, we'll have to do something so these people can live exactly like we do, it's more the other way around.

NB: Well, it's because mainstream is mainstream and it's not very interesting. Most people are mainstream, and most people shut everyone else out, quite simply shut them out. In a small town, if you're an eccentric or crazy, you're rejected by everyone. So, people like mainstream and they don't like anyone who's not mainstream. And obviously, there's a lot we can learn from people who aren't.

JD: Is that why you're choosing it, so people can learn, or is it more confrontational than that?

NB: No, I think it's more confrontational. I'm not trying to pretend to teach. I find those people more interesting. There's nothing interesting about the mainstream. I don't want to make documentaries about people's relationships - middle-class relationships. It doesn't interest me.

JD: I wanted to know exactly which periods of time the four different episodes take place in, and why you chose these times?

NB: In 1760, the second one's in 1840, the third one's in 1928 and the last one's in 1985. 1760 was when the first union... when whites and Indians first came together, before there were Métis. So, that one was simple. The second one is also simple - it's the time of the rebellion. The third one is also, to me, obvious - it was the backlash after the rebellion, when they were basically landless and wanted their land. The present day is the present day.

JD: As I recall from your outline, in the last episode, the woman joins a group of women. I'm not sure if it's a group of Métis women, or mixed, in Vancouver. Can you tell me why you chose that as the 'happy ending' of the series?

NB: It's not like that at all anymore. That doesn't happen. It's not particularly positive at this point. I decided to change it because I didn't believe it. I don't



believe that most Métis people - though there are a lot of Métis people who are - are coming to terms with their power. The mainstream are still struggling. I just didn't want to make it look like all the Métis were successful and joining self-help groups. Most of them aren't. Their struggles are daily struggles - trying to get money and trying to keep their families together.

JD: How has your own experience effected the choices you've made - how you got started in film, how you started working for the Film Board...

NB: I don't know how all those things fit together. It's not a conscious process. I just do what interests me. I think about these, and make a film about them. I'm interested in all kinds of things. It's not just the subjects that are socially relevant that I want to comment on. I'd like to make a comedy.

JD: Why did you choose drama for this series?

NB: I think drama is a better vehicle for doing those kind of things. It reaches more people and it effects people in a different way. That's why I didn't choose documentary. That's why I refused to do a documentary on the subject, because people are tired of films about the problems that Indians have in a documentary format.

JD: Why is that?

NB: First off, they don't care. And if they do care, it's in a trendy way, like people are dumping money into Ethiopia right now. Next year they'll be dumping their love and concern into something else. The same thing happened with Indians. Liberals were into Indians for awhile. These people might not want to watch this film either. But that's certainly why I did drama, and consciously didn't get too involved with the history itself. I wanted to make very intimate portraits of people - to interest people in the period and the people, rather than trying to teach them. I don't think they're interested in anything educational. They come for entertainment. Then people will want to know more, hopefully.

JD: How come you chose to focus on Métis women specifically?

NB: Oh, because I'm a woman. I wanted to redress some of the imbalance. That should be obvious. There's nothing about women in the history books.

**There's nothing in the history books about women.**

## JAMELIE HASSAN

*Jamelie Hassan is an artist who lives and works in London, Ontario. She has travelled extensively in Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. She was awarded the Canada Council studio in Paris in 1984, and has exhibited widely in Canada. In this conversation, she talks about her Middle Eastern family background, her childhood in London Ontario, and about her piece 'The Oblivion Seekers' which she is exhibiting in the series at YYY Gallery. It is based on a performance by the same name, with Lillian Allen reading from the texts of Umm Kalthoum and Isabelle Eberhardt, and with a musical score by Gerry Collins. It was staged at the Music Gallery in Toronto.*

Jamelie Hassan: I began 'The Oblivion Seekers' with a memory from when I was about five or six years old. For the first time, the North American Islamic communities came together and held a convention in London, Ontario. I had this memory of dancing at it.

JD: Is there any particular reason it was held in London?

JH: London had become sort of a hub for immigrants coming from the Middle East to North America. At that point my family was fairly central to that activity because my Dad had been here since the early nineteen hundreds. He was one of the first to settle in London and so our home became a place people would move in and out of. That's apparant in the home movies I use in the piece. You have people coming in and out of doorways, and you see this whole process of sociability. There were always relatives and people who were displaced entering into an environment where there was a certain amount of familiarity because Arabic was spoken. They always brought messages. It was almost like a caravan in a way because at the time they could bring foodstuffs on the plane or ship. Immediately these foodstuffs would be cooked and consumed and the music would begin, and there would be dancing. We'd put up a lot of people and my father would find jobs for them. There wasn't a meeting hall or a club or church or mosque where people would meet. The homes were the circumstance for that encounter, and our home in particular because it was one of the first, and because there was a certain amount of financial stability in our family. My Father was an old-timer in Canada, in terms of how newcomers would view him. He had the means to make Canada more accessible to people coming in.

JD: Did he have a lot of expertise in dealing with immigration laws and procedures?



JH: Not really, he was an illiterate. He left Lebanon while it was under Turkish rule and came to Canada because he wanted to avoid the draft. He was sixteen at the time. It was around the beginning of the First World War. It's not that normal for most people to have a Father that age, more like a Grandfather, but I'm talking about my Father. There are those generational gaps in our family. It was highly distinctive to have this large extended family, this layering of age and experience. It would not be educational in the way we think of it traditionally in the West, but in the East education and experience are gained through that aging process. In the fifties there was a wave of Lebanese people coming to Canada, particularly to Southern Ontario. That's what I'm trying to record in the piece - my response to it. I had this really strong connection with Arabic culture while I was in the middle of a white Anglo-Saxon community. I was very conscious of that difference.

JD: Your images of that period sound very joyous, but it must have been difficult too.

JH: I think I'm looking for what I felt so strongly attached to, for what was so potent about what my parents were able to give me, that made me able in some way to pass it on and want to continue it. In fact, I ended up having a very strong affinity with Arabic ways, including to a certain extent Islamic ways. That's why I wanted to research the notion of women within the Islamic tradition. That was something of my own heritage, my background. Of course, it represented a lot of difficulties for me, coming out of that background into Western educational structures, systems and stereotypes in relation to the East. So I was really curious about why I wasn't a rejectionist, why I wanted to delve into that. I realised that my parents, without any form of dogmatism or exclusivity or elitism or racism, had managed to imbue this desire in me to investigate and research my own past. I had a recurring memory of dancing, of moving through music, and of a relationship to the landscape they were so strongly connected to - the landscape in Lebanon. We really didn't have a lot of visual devices around the house, it was more symbolic and metaphorical. I started the research by going back into the microfilm at the London library. I knew I had danced and I knew that it had been recorded, therefore I knew that there was some record of my memory in the public domain. I very methodically began going through the microfilm and the clippings of that period, the summer of 1955. On the black and white videotape for this piece, I have recorded that search, and my puzzlement with the technology. I noticed bizarre coincidences and overlayings of information. If I pressed this button or turned it manually I would come up to comics; the next time I

would come up to a headline where it said "Travel between Planets Predicted in Fifty Years". I was interested in travels and the device of movement of peoples, ideas and cultures, and showing this on the screen. I didn't know how to operate the device, so I found myself making it do screwy things like flipping and running fast or slow or going off the screen as if pages were being torn. We developed the footage of the microfilm and decided to print it in a loop cycle. It seemed to show a repetition of trauma, of disaster or a crisis. It didn't really matter that these things were happening in the fifties. It could just as easily be 1985 or 1922. On the second video for the piece, there are home movies. These cover five years of our family, spliced together to about fifteen minutes. This goes with the Gerry Collins soundtrack that I commissioned for the piece, based on an original track of Umm Kalthoum's music. There are two videos; one is a sort of a verbal articulation of the essence of the performance itself, and the other is the music and the flow of my own history.

JD: I wanted to ask more about the absence of visual representation around your house. Given that absence, how did you come to decide to be a visual artist?

JH: It wasn't in revolt or an act of protest. It was a natural occurrence and there was support for it in my family. My father actually posed for a portrait I did when I was a student. Later on when I was travelling in the Middle East, I found that if I did little portraits of people and gave them to them, it was an immediate form of contact. Within Islam, it is the literal representation of a Godhead, or the adoration of a material object, which is resisted in terms of the faith. Certain sects are very extreme in reference to that. I have always had a tendency to work within the Islamic framework. I use floral or geometric embellishment a lot, or calligraphy, whether in drawing or painting. Also, the textual references are really common in my work, and in the Islamic tradition in manuscript illustration or embellishment. I feel words are paramount, and language has always been THE communicating device within Arabic culture. It is such a potent force; if anything is revered it's the power to communicate, whether it's oral or written communication or decorative Arabic script.

JD: In terms of what you're saying, multidisciplinary work seems particularly appropriate. Your work includes so many different elements.

JH: It's definitely part of a strategy. In the case of "The Oblivion Seekers", it really wasn't possible to make the piece without film footage, without music, without the written word, and then my own way of bringing all these elements together and creating a



keying device for unlocking their meanings. I actually do include objects that were handed to me by my family - a record from Cairo that my mother had given me years ago, a photograph of the Souk of Damascus, a postcard that I had sent to my parents in the late sixties when I was a student in Beirut. My mother gave me back my letters while I was doing my research. This postcard came back, with a message I had written to them twenty years ago. There was a constant recurrence of material without my really having to search for it. The most searching that I did was in the Microfilm Department.

I also remembered the film that my uncle had taken of his return to Lebanon to marry. I recalled sitting watching that film, though I hadn't seen it for thirty years. It had been passed from one relative to another, and when I finally got my hands on it and I projected it, the actual viewing of it felt the same. There was no time difference. I was really struck by that fact. I wanted to deal with what it was when I was a child that had that potential for strengthening me, as opposed to being fracturing or confusing. I knew that people would say, 'Well, why this with that?', but for me it all made pure and total logic. I felt a need to say, 'that's there because I was there, and this is there because Dad was there or Mom was there'. The things linked me back to that reality. 'The Oblivion Seekers' is a piece that represents extremely positive values for me. It was really important for me to pull in all the things that I felt. When you're watching a country that's in a state of war, and Lebanon has been in a state of war for as long as my son is old, you begin to think, 'I don't want to think about it anymore, I don't want to talk about it

close to, like Lillian Allen's, Gerry Collins' and Wyn Geleynse's film work. To bring these three people in was important to me too. I gave Gerry Umm Kalthoum's tape, and asked, as a Western musician, how do you respond to it? I wanted to see what he would do without my interference, if there was a potential there for him to create, and there was.

JD: It sounds like the role of mediator is very important to you. I wanted to ask about your feelings about women as mediators, since the first two examples that you cited, Umm Kalthoum and Isabelle Eberhardt, are women. You seem to identify with them.

JH: That's right and they are for me the *raison d'être* for the piece, along with my own history. I tried to position myself as a woman within my own age with these two women within their own periods of time.

JD: Tell me about some of the elements that you identified with and some of the features that you felt were important about this kind of mediation.

JH: Well, Umm Kalthoum was an Egyptian singer. She emerged out of Cairo in the twenties and actually created a position for women musicians within the Arab world. She's considered the mother of Middle Eastern music. Her device for drawing the audience into renditions of her music was improvisation, and there has been a long tradition of improvisation in Arabic music. But what she did was phenomenal and different from what men were doing, so she became almost worshipped within the Arabic music scene.

**It's important that as a woman of my background - Arabic, Islamic - that I in some way contribute to people understanding this great big gaping other over there.**

anymore, I don't want to work with it in any way'. It's very tempting to turn your back on it. I know a lot of people who are capable of doing that, but I just can't. It's important that as a woman of my background - Arabic, Islamic - that I in some way contribute to people understanding this great big gaping other over there. It's important that in the piece there are references to other people who have worked on that, like Isabelle Eberhardt, and Umm Kalthoum. I also make reference to Edward Said and his work in 'Orientalism'. I feel a sense of linkage with them, and with other artists whose work I am

When she died the Koran was recited on the radio for her, which was usually done only for heads of state. Also, she emerged at a time when Egypt was leaving British colonialism and she was part of that whole momentum for change, of Arab nationalism and Nasser. As a child, we would tune our radio to Cairo and the whole family would sit around and listen to Nasser's speeches, and before Nasser's speeches, Umm Kalthoum would sing. So, I can remember listening to and being influenced by her.

Isabelle Eberhardt rejected her own European culture



and went to North Africa. She took on Islam as a philosophy, with whatever flaws it has. She was willing to divest herself of her European background and walk into this, with a lot of trouble. She wrote about it. As a creative individual, she was able to broaden our understanding of the way that women moved at the turn of the century in North Africa. She dressed as a man, and she had a big influence within her region of movement. I was curious about the fact that these two women, each in her own way and without knowing each other, took on different apparel and used this as a strategy to do what they wanted.

JD: Isabelle dressed as a man.

JH: And Umm Kalthoum dressed as a European woman, in Parisian clothes, a French beret and that sort of thing. In some ways they had actually exchanged identities. I was curious to find out how my own identity could slip in between the two of them, if I could do that without actually photographing myself stuck in there. I did it through this whole process of exploring what my culture and family and history were about, and through the two devices with the film. In a way, I saw the film as a device to mediate. Films, by nature, are elusive and temporal, whereas photographs as static devices are quite different. They're stills and they represent a certain lockage.

JD: After you had your son, did you feel that in some way you were mediating between generations?

JH: I would say yes. Mediation is really important and I try to do that with my son. Actually, I think he's a really good mediator too, he's able to bring me back down when I'm getting disturbed about something. He can bring me back to my reality with him. I guess that's what this piece is about, wanting to give out in that tradition. I knew that the work was something for my family, although I also know that many of them may never see it or experience it as I was creating it. They would see it from a different perspective. What my uncle felt was garbage film, I thought was beautiful. He thought so because he couldn't handle the camera, because he didn't know what technology was and had flipped the camera this way and that, while looking for someone. The fact that he was innocent of the technology was beautiful for me. I wanted to bring that out, to say to him that the fact he even wanted to record this was important, is important. The record of it is something I would give back to him in some way. In the end they were all really pleased that I was doing what I was doing.

JD: And it is an extended family, a big family.

JH: Yes and that's in the film, the extended family and the whole idea that you're responsible. There are others that are going to be affected by your actions. As a creative individual, as an artist, as a person in the world, we are all responsible for our actions. In a way what I was doing was very un-arabic, to bring my family into this open forum.

JD: Do you feel using personal elements operates as a critique within the art world?

JH: Yes, it allows people to share in that kind of intimacy but at the same time it's not exclusive. Within all national groups, there's the problem of an overly protective stance. If we want to talk about mediation, about the possibility of finding a ground somewhere for the mainstream culture to be exposed to it, it is a question of taking away the stereotyping. You can't, say, refer to one ethnic group as being responsible for terrorist acts within the Arab world, if you're looking at a family that embraces and has children. You see them within their own daily activity. I'm using material that was done with technical innocence, in that it's not highly sophisticated. I break it down. You have the drawings, the objects, the live performers, the film and the music, all in one situation, one work. This is very different from having it locked within the film itself.

## PREMIKA RATNAM

*Premika Ratnam left India for Canada recently to study Film at York University in Toronto. She is here on a student visa. Since arriving in Canada, she has produced two 16mm documentary films, and is working on a third while participating in a training program with Studio D of the National Film Board in Montréal. 'Burning Bridges', her first film, tells the stories of two Indian women whose marriages fell apart after emigrating to Canada. This interview was written up from notes, rather than transcribed from tape as were the others.*

Judith Doyle: The women in 'Burning Bridges' seem to have a political understanding of their situation in Canada and their marriages.

Premika Ratnam: But the two women in 'Burning Bridges' are very traditional. They tried to be as traditional as they could. It was their circumstances which caused them to change, not personal choice. The mental change did not come first, then the decisions later. The two took place simultaneously.



They are not the type who would say, 'Now, I'm a liberated woman'. They're neither here nor there.

JD: How would you describe that situation of being 'neither here nor there'?

PR: You can leave the country, but the country never leaves you. This is a phenomenon for any immigrant. With women specifically, they lose their traditional family circle, their friends and networks. Each of them leaves home with the image of a land where things work well, where the streets are paved with gold. But when they get here, they're at the bottom of the social ladder, completely unfamiliar even with the streets, and without any friends. The biggest problem is isolation.

JD: How did you come to make the film 'Burning Bridges'?

PR: I came to Canada from India two years ago. Back in India, I had been doing research on the dowry. The dowry is a marriage system which goes back hundreds of years, from the time when women didn't work and needed some form of financial security to bring to a marriage. This was in the form of jewellery or money. Over time, the dowry system became a burden. Even though a woman worked, she would have to bring something in economic terms with her when she married. Planning marriages came down to monetary interests. It's a question of show - of having two cars or two fridges. In India now, this situation for women is at the crisis stage. There is no other way but to change. The society is in the last stages of trying to hide under a blanket.

The girl becomes a potential source of exploitation for her husband's house. In childhood, a Mother stays at home with her family. She spoils her son, because she doesn't want him to throw her out in her later years. The Mother is nicer to the son than the daughter. When he marries, she sees the wife as a potential enemy. Often, the situation will not allow for a strong relationship between the husband and wife. The question arises, who has the authority - Mother or wife? There is a great deal of marital stress, with battering of women, and even death.

This makes the idea of marriage to someone abroad in Canada or the U.S. attractive. Women think that here, they'll lead 'the good life'. So, women come here to marry strangers. I know of situations where men had really cheated on women who came in this way. I wanted to determine what the extent of this problem is, the problem of the planned deception of women.

JD: Has there been other work done on the subject?

PR: There was a radio program called 'All This and Death Too'. There have been other programs, and many sensationalize the whole thing. They take a Western perspective, looking at it as alien, and focussing on the deaths, on 'bride burning'.

JD: What are some of the things that take place?

PR: One thing which happens is that the wife becomes an endless source of gifts for the house, through her parents. The parents co-operate, partly because society thinks that girls should get married. Finally, they run out of money, or for whatever reason, put a stop to it. When the wife ceases to be a source of money, she is severely mistreated.

JD: What was the response to 'Burning Bridges' when you screened it at the United Nations International Women's Congress in Nairobi?

PR: The Indian women in Nairobi liked the film. Some came up to me afterward and whispered that they knew of cases much more extreme than are discussed in the film. The Government response was mixed. They asked, 'Is this a positive representation of Indian women? Should we be discussing this problem in the West?'

JD: What was the response in Canada?

PR: Well, 'Burning Bridges' is not a man's film. Most men dislike it. One Indian man who is politically quite radical surprised me. He thinks the film is not balanced. He said it needs a man's point of view, as if there is a man's point of view on this subject!

It was screened at York University, where I am studying film, for the course the film was produced for. This whole ethnic thing makes people uncomfortable. People from rich, urban cultures tend to think immigrants should take this stuff and go home.

JD: I thought the same thing when this series was turned down for funding by two different Canada Council juries.

PR: You should talk about that in the first paragraph of the catalogue. For the government, multiculturalism is food and clothing. Anything more political than that they do not touch.

After the screenings, family members would whisper, 'Between you and me - this goes on in our families as well'.

JD: Who were some of the audiences for the film?



PR: It's been rented a lot, particularly by women's groups, but also by school boards to be screened for teachers, and by hospitals. The strongest reaction is from women twenty-five and older. It gets better as it gets older.

JD: What have you been working on since finishing 'Burning Bridges'?

PR: I've just completed a film called 'I Hope Not' on children's attitudes toward nuclear war. I asked each child three questions, based on questions by the Psychologist Susan Goldberg. All the kids said they thought that, yes, there would be a nuclear war.

Now, I'm preparing to work on a film about teenagers from war-torn countries, including Central America, the Middle East and Ireland.

JD: Do you plan on staying in Canada?

PR: Given the chance, I would like to spend two years in many different countries - Africa, India again. I dislike nationalism and feel I'm not proud just to be Indian. India, after all, is a country with sixteen different languages and a thousand dialects, each with different script. I feel equally responsible to Canada, or anyplace else in the world. I feel my work is in balancing the information flow. Usually, it's the B.B.C. or the N.F.B. making films in Africa or India, organizing the concepts of those countries for everyone else. This is very damaging and dangerous. It misses the mark. By depicting the Third World in terms of 'anthropological species', it misses giving the complexity and understanding. I want to make films from my own point of view, which will be different, because of my background.

People in India or Africa don't know about each other. I feel it is more possible for me to organize this work from Canada. There is more money here, so it's possible from this position to work on creating a better information flow. The rooting patterns have to be reorganized. The tragedy is having to do it from Canada. However, at this time in India, we have problems with foreign exchanges and the importation of film. Right now, there is censorship, but it is arbitrary.

JD: Do you share the ideas of a 'New World Information Order'?

PR: Yes. The inequities between First and Third World are both economic and in terms of information. When I see '60 Minutes' representing the Third World, it really makes me angry.

## ANNA GRONAU

*Anna Gronau is a filmmaker living and working in Toronto; she was born in Montreal in 1951. Between 1980 and 1982, she was Director/Programmer of the The Funnel. She has written and lectured on experimental film and, as a founding member of the Film and Video Against Censorship group, she has been a powerful adversary to the Ontario Film Review Board in its bid to cut and ban films. Presently, she is working on a new 16mm film. The interview begins with ideas of 'the sublime' in art from recent critical theory.*

Anna Gronau: It sounds like, from what you describe (of Lyotard's essay on postmodernism) that he thinks the sublime is to be found in a realm of the unrepresentable which artists should constantly strive towards. I would say more that the sublime is those moments when the unrepresentable is revealed to you, despite the fact that it falls between the cracks of representation. It's not something that you're necessarily striving towards, but something that comes out of the process of making a work of art. On a very crass level, there are changes in taste all the time. Fashion is this need for things to change, to give us this sense of ourselves or of movement, or whatever it makes us feel. It's almost a matter of taste, where you find the sublime. I don't think that educated people are more likely to experience the sublime. They just maybe have more trouble finding it. It may be less readily available to them.

Judith Doyle: What do you think the structure of matrilineage means in the project you're working on, or in the earlier films. You've often included your Grandmother, or Amber, a child who represents another, younger generation.

AG: I'm beginning to wonder how much it is actually is matrilineal in the sense of echoing a patrilineal model. I don't think it's really connected with blood ties so strongly. It has to do with nurturing and traditions and a kind of love that I experience only from other women. It's really precious.

JD: Perhaps, then, it's the different generations of women.

AG: I guess, for me, the reason that the generations are kind of important has to do with something I'm personally going through, trying to rediscover some kind of pride in the things that are important to me - to not denigrate the things that give me pleasure, even though they may be very simple things like making a pretty cover for a pillow. Something that silly. All this sounds very '70's Judy Chicago or



something like that, and I don't really mean it to be. I think it goes beyond the silly things like who taught you to make a pie. It has to do with this exchange of feeling which is something that I was taught, all through my schooling, to try to rise above. Now I'm finding that the more I feel comfortable with this sort of homey, goofy part of myself, the more comfortable I feel with the whole world.

JD: I think that I do feel quite torn though about doing those things when I should be doing my work.

AG: It's exactly that kind of tearing that means we have to feel guilty about the things that give us pleasure. I keep thinking about what you were saying about the sublime, this 'pleasure and pain' thing. I don't think that my experience is exactly the same as my Mother's or my Grandmother's or any of the women I remember from my childhood who influenced me. They had different things they had to deal with. Somehow, I can see some kind of progress in what's happened for women, but I don't see progress as a line. There's still human life and emotion and suffering and joy and all those kinds of things. You can say all you want about, 'you can't analyse them so they don't exist' but if I feel it, then it has some kind of existence for me. If I feel a strong feeling toward another person, than that has a reality for me. It's therefore worth talking about.

JD: Some people in the series talk about inheritance very positively, well others do with a lot of criticism or dread.

AG: Something else about the inheritance thing that's connected to the work I'm doing now is the whole idea of history and of going backward, to try and find out where you are now. It's obviously a tactic that's used in psychoanalysis and it's also a tactic that's sometimes used in various kinds of religious disciplines. It's a very common idea that unless you can somehow go back to the source, you will keep on repeating the same errors. It's karma will keep happening until you've gone back to the source, whatever that is. It's not even that the source is the place where an answer is to be found; it's rather, in retracing those steps, you achieve a certain kind of freedom. I think there's some of that too. Maybe it isn't very critical. Maybe it's uncritical because it has to do with the particular rather than the general.

JD: Can you talk about that process of retracing steps in your work? For example, the presence of your Grandmother in 'Regards'....

AG: But, the fact that she's my Grandmother isn't stated in the film. I always feel there's a whole level

of very personal significance to the films that I make that I don't really expect to be part of the public presence of the work. It may be kind of a fault on my part to separate them so much. I'm working on this one level and hoping that some of the sense of that will filter through, if not the actual particular.

JD: Can you talk then in terms of the structure of the film?

AG: I think 'Aradia' was almost a toss-off. It was a film that I made in a couple of days, and it was meant to be fun, enjoyable - dressing up. It dabbles in some of the most dangerous essentialism, dealing with Goddesses and so on. But I think it has a really scary, exciting sense to it, so it does provoke a response which is maybe not the standard response that you get looking at the image of a woman. It has a lot to do with the image of woman, and the power of that image as an image. 'Regards' - every time I talk about it it's kind of different. 'Regards' seems to kind of be about convention, about structures and table manners and all those different kinds of formal constructions that you hang a piece of art on, or any kind of communication. I think that the fact that there are women at three different periods of age - very young, childbearing age and then elderly - is another structuring that is imposed in the work.

JD: What do you think it has to do with?

AG: Well, I think that that's a kind of patriarchal splitting of the idea of a woman.

JD: Like the 'White Goddess' or something?

AG: Yeah. The same is the case in 'Aradia', except it's kind of vibrating more, on a danger level, so that it has more emotion. I guess the other thing that I was trying to do by having all the structures was to set them up so that they show their weak spots. The edges start to wear a little thin. There are all these tasks being done throughout the film. I think the new piece I'm working on has more to do with a woman's story. I still have a lot of problems with things like narrative and characterization and so on, but I'm finding that this film is requiring that I employ some of those things.

I've got this newspaper clipping - part of the article reads: "Look at me. I'm standing here in a three-piece blue suit talking an alien language" said (Silluck), a former land claims negotiator from tiny Eskimo Point on the western shore of James Bay. 'I've been forced to adopt the ways of the dominant society in every sense of the word,' he said. 'I've battled my fellow Inuit for the right to speak for them



and in so doing I alienated many of them.' (Silluck) said he fears that all native people, Indian, Inuit and Metis (mixed blood) may be making a grave mistake by altering their traditional societies for the sake of fighting for aboriginal rights in the competitive world of southern Canadian politics. 'I'm trying to give a warning that we're just getting sick and tired of having to adopt a second face.' said (Silluck) in an interview."

JD: What does that make you think of?

**It was like I was passing through this territory where I was a particularly valuable piece of commodity - I was carrying all this foreign money, but only other people could spend it.**

AG: I guess it's like, in the film I'm working on now, feeling that even though I don't want to, I have to speak a foreign language to talk about this other thing.

JD: Languages of narrative and characterization?

AG: Yeah. I feel like some of the avant-garde ideas I may have been using in 'Regards' that had to do with dismantling structures and so on... I grew up with that kind of stuff. I learned 'avant-garde' in art school. I don't know how to write a script. I'm just learning now. So, there seems to be a falsity to my pretending I'm overthrowing anything. This seems more scary, because I'm dealing with things that are personal. There's a large part of autobiography in this film. I'm finding that I can't simply adopt standard narrative structures. It just doesn't work. But, I have to deal with material that's inevitably easily put into story form. So, I have to say, what is the best way to do it, what's the meaning behind all this, how do I fit into it? I just think that my own conscience or whatever is telling me that I have to deal with these structures, I have to confront them, a lot more directly than I have in the past. Like I said, there's a whole tradition of avant-gardism, and so many mannerisms - the shaky camera, the flare at the end of the roll of film - all that kind of stuff. It still has certain meanings. I really enjoy that kind of work, but I'm not sure it's what I can continue to do.

JD: A lot of women feel there is a problematic gap between the process of making a work and the context of its interpretation. Maybe that's got something to do with why people are using autobiography in their work - as a means of subverting criticism centered on the context of

reception, rather than production.

AG: It seems like there are a couple of strategies that can make sparks fly, and one of them is taking people at their word, as you're doing, and creating this novel-like catalogue, where you don't really know what's going to happen next. It's a type of experimentation. The other thing which I'd really like to see you explore more is to look at feminism, or the place of women, in relation to the immigrant. To me, that has other really interesting possibilities.

I'm not sure what I think about it.

JD: Women in the series have talked about their own ethnicity, and the people who they have represented in their films or artworks, for example, their relatives emigrating from wherever to here. The artists have talked a lot about their problems in the art world. People have brought up their feelings of otherness - of being not here but not there. Premika Ratnam said, 'You can leave your country but your country can't leave you'. One transforms in this absence; it's a double displacement.

AG: Women's place only exists in a representation that has been created elsewhere.

JD: So a 'woman's place' doesn't exist really.

AG: One thing that keeps going through my mind is I'm sure a very obvious parallel to draw. The issue of territory for women is of their bodies; their bodies as signs of home and replenishment and all that kind of stuff for men. But it is undeniable that one has a body, despite all that. It's a conflict - what place are you really in? Lately, I've looking back on my late teens and early twenties when I was a pretty young girl. It was like I was passing through this territory where I was a particularly valuable piece of commodity - I was carrying all this foreign money, but only other people could spend it. I kept expecting that there ought to be some return on this. Boys would respond positively, as though they were pleased, but I would never get any of that back, now that I look at it from this vantage point. Maybe that's why there is this thinking about Mothers and Grandmothers and other women... they share that



same experience of a body. It's probably much the same for all women. Some of us perhaps have more or less foreign money on us at one time in our lives, but essentially we all end up broke.

JD: With women and visible minorities, you are in your body - there is no way can change that. And I think it is similar for people who speak another language as their first language - I don't think you can ever stop having an accent.

AG: Or stop having a woman's voice, even - a high, squeaky voice.

JD: Or ever stop dreaming in your own language. I think, now that women and racial minorities have stopped being trendy issues, it's as if a lot of writers and businessmen are treating the whole problem as rhetorical only. As if there never was a body. But when you live within these bodies, you know perfectly well it is not just another issue - you will always be there. It's not just an attitude or a political orientation.

AG: I guess the thing that's interesting to me is that what you're doing is questioning this whole idea that there's such a thing as 'a woman'. You're saying that this idea of 'a woman' is circumscribed, it's cultural, it involves the same kind of categorizing techniques as calling somebody an immigrant. It's based on boundaries and somewhat arbitrary definitions. Yes, we all have bodies and those things that you've listed - the language that we dream in. But these are used to place you in the category of 'woman'. It makes more sense to me to bring those issues into a series than to exclude them and use 'woman' as a category without qualifying that at all, as though there should automatically be something about these works - just because they're women who made them. It like works by people with blue eyes.

JD: Another common theme in the series is of leaving a place, becoming another, then returning to the place that you left behind and reviewing it.

AG: I read something like that by Teresa de Lauretis. She calls it the analogy to the male's Oedipal journey, but she says that the female's part in that is that she's the one who has to wait around for him to come back. She says the Oedipal situation of the female is two-fold. The boy retains his original love object, while the girl's required to throw it over in favour of the Father. He gets to strive to be like his Father and desire his Mother. She probably wants to be like her Father too, because he's got all the power. She's supposed to seduce him, but that's not possible. There's no phallus available for her.

JD: Can you talk about female lineage?

AG: I was talking with Midi about our films. I realized, in tracing a matrilineal line, that my Great-Grandmother died about five days after giving birth to my Grandmother. This had always seemed like a mystery to me. Midi was talking about how her Grandmother left Japan and came over here, and in a sense severed the connection with her Mother. So, Midi's Great-Grandmother is also an enigma to her. Obviously, the Mother-Daughter relationship isn't something that ends in childhood. It continues on and continues to be very important to people. We're all adult women and we're getting very concerned about our Mothers and Grandmothers. I still wonder about what kind of woman my Great-Grandmother was, but I did know my Grandmother's Stepmother. For me, she was always my Great-Grandmother. I now realize, it's the relationship which counts. This emotion or culture that's passed on transcends blood lines.

JD: I think a lot of us won't have families, we won't continue the blood family.

AG: The thing that's really wonderful is that us having those kinds of relationships doesn't depend on it.

JD: You were saying that you've been rethinking your idea of place?

AG: Yes, because I feel like you need a place. Even if it's only rhetorical, a place is inescapable. I don't think you can remove it from thinking or identity. One thing I found interesting in the book 'God is Red' is the attitude of Native Indians to place. Obviously, it is a very different culture than ours. From what I understand, it's their philosophy that the place, the land, that creates the people. Things that have happened there are considered to be contained in it, so that sacred mountains or whatever are incredibly important to the self-knowledge and mental health of those people. That's a very different idea about space than we have. In Canada, everybody's always talking about national identity, but I hardly ever read any kind of history of Canada that talks about the history of the native people. They are two different sets of books; they don't overlap very much. One of the quotes in the book 'God is Red' is from an Indian chief of a hundred years ago, talking about how the white man is like a stranger in this land, and doesn't feel at home. The planet is being destroyed. Unless people start caring about the place and considering it important, we'd better find a new place to move to.

JD: The issues of colonization and depletion are also



part of immigration, and our history here.

AG: A lot of Indian land was surrendered in treaties. From what I understand now, a lot of Indian people consider it not a surrender but a gift. The thing about colonies is that the whole idea of a colony presupposes a particular attitude towards land. It's an ownable commodity, not simply the support for human beings, for human life. Some people can take it away from other people, own it more and have more right to it than someone else. I guess what I keep thinking is that the 'immigrant self' for you and me maybe is an image of our ambivalence. The place that we occupy is so contradictory in so many ways.

## MICHAELLE McLEAN

*Michaelle McLean is an artist and filmmaker. She was born in Toronto in 1953, studied at the Ontario College of Art and has worked as the Director/Programmer of the Funnel. In her film and artworks, she has applied geometric structures to organize intimate, transitory information. The interview traces her current interests in 'very real magic', the power of the filmmaker to access a place by making a work, and the importance of a local community of women filmmakers.*

Michaelle McLean: Film is about time and movement, which sounds really corny, but that's basically what film is. I was in Banff for a year. I was doing a lot of sequence drawings and was interested in positive-negative shapes. It was Spring of 1978, and one of those kinds of fortuitous crashings of fate, because when I came back Anna Gronau was quite involved with the Funnel and I was living in the studio next to her. We had known each other for a long time, so we were very close, and she said, 'You should come to one of these meetings. This place is going through a political thing right now and it may or may not survive, and I really believe in it.' So I became involved in this organization because I believed in the heart of these people. They had cameras and equipment and there were people who could tell you stuff about film, so I started playing around with Super 8.

JD: What was your first film?

MM: I think I destroyed it. (laughter). Thank God. Well the first one was very simple. I wanted to see what would happen in editing. I had a whole lot of different candles, set them up in my studio and just shot them and intercut them back and forth, on and off, up and down. Behind this I had big ideas about how things exist for a tremendous amount of time but when you

perceive them, you perceive only a very small part of their existence.

JD: The films that you made are very spare, minimal and graphic, yet this time in the new film there's more narrative elements. How you feel about the change?

MM: I know from talking with certain people that they feel quite compromised and feel a lot of anxiety about using narrative. But I don't feel that anxiety at all. One of the reasons I don't feel that is because the word narrative is huge. When I talk about the narrative element in my work what I mean is that my ideas are clearer. I don't mean that I'm interested in a story because it goes A,B,C. You put ideas together when you see images come up in front of you. You build something as a viewer. That's what I call narrative, even if you're looking at "Empire" - 24 hours of the Empire State Building - that kind of process that happens in the viewer. I'm finding when I put my own work together it's just the way I'm thinking, my thought process, the connections I'm making, the way I edit my films together. I also think about other people I know, because in a sense, I feel that there's a community that also understands now the way I think, and I call that a narrative.

JD: Could you talk more about your sense of community now.

MM: Since 1978, when I started working with film, I've been dealing with a community that is specifically interested in what has been called experimental. I loathe the word. It's a very local community and it's often women. It's yourself, Anna, Midi, and occasionally I'll see another woman's film that I don't know, from another part of Canada, another part of the world. But it's become more specific that way.

JD: It's interesting to me that, having found this community, you feel more inclined toward narrativity. It seems that it would be more the opposite - 'I know my community now, I don't have to use narration anymore'.

MM: That goes back to what you mean by narrativity. I think the way people use the word is changing and it refers to different things. I feel that the definition for the term is changing.

JD: I find there are narrative elements, although very minimal ones, in the film of yours in the series, 'Untitled (1984)'. Can you talk about it?

MM: There are three body parts and the first is



hands but they're male hands. The man is in control, he's playing cards, dealing from the deck, and he always throws up the ace of spades. Then there's a very obvious cut in the film, so you know the filmmaker's in control. It's been edited so that he's always going to turn up the ace of spades. But hands are very powerful and they're in control. Then you cut to a woman who repeats a movement and it's very staged. She sits with her back to you and she gets up and turns toward you, but you never see her face, so she's just this body on parade. And the last one is again just a body part, a head, and he's the only person that gets to look out at the audience and gaze back at them. It's about a series of movements that continually repeat and it's about my emotional response to a woman's place in society.

JD: In fact, the image of dealing cards is quoted from other films using narrative. So these elements evoke the sense of narrative film, narratives that we're very familiar with. Again this kind of cowboy image, this man is dealing the deck with fate, taking the risk of acting, gambling and cheating, but the filmmaker is cheating too. Can you talk about the structure of the piece you're making for YYY Gallery. What's its relationship to your film?

MM: 'The Subject of Magic' is less a piece of wall art than it is a frame blow-up from my new film. It will be very obvious that you're looking at film stills. You'll get an idea from the two pieces of text of the kinds of juxtapositions I'm trying to play with in this film: the idea of magic, the idea of loss of place, the idea of word play like, 'Here... here. This is her voice.' Because it's a still image you don't have a voice but it's implied that there's a voice here. Then you have the 'here' being either the person who's reading it, or the image in the photograph of the garden. So, you get a sense of the ideas I'm playing with in the film, and it's obviously a section from something else.

JD: Do you think there's a link between magic and loss of place? Magic often has to do with displacing things, or making them reappear in other places.

MM: I'll tell you about how some of the ideas came to me, and how magic and place tie together. I was interested in the whole idea of invisibility, and invisibility being something that, because of fairy tales and stories, is a magic state, a power that somebody is given. Yet it's also something that you do to people that is very cruel. We make people invisible, we make the bag ladies invisible, we've made women invisible, and all kinds of minority people invisible. It's a horrible, cruel thing to do. In developing this idea in the film, I wanted to play with

that dual idea, of there being power in invisibility and there being power in magic. It's not a power that's recognized; people say, 'It's just magic tricks'. In the film, there's the idea of a place somewhere, that is accessed through something called magic. But, as the film develops, you see that this magic is very real. It gives the people in the film a sense of place and a sense of the power.

JD: What's the very real magic?

MM: By the end of the film, there are two female voices that come to dominate. You begin to realize that they control the image, so it comes back onto the film medium, in that they're controlling how it's edited. It becomes obvious that these strange edits are controlled by these women, by their voices. And they start to just play with it. The problem of trying to define a place for myself through film - and for me it's always about my own experience - is very difficult, because I don't have a place. We could talk about power, we could talk about history, but we don't have it. So by making a film, you can give it a concrete, tangible place, even though it's only fleeting. So, it's making an idea concrete.

JD: The image of the place, the house, of what women's place is, comes up in a lot of the works in the series. The metaphor of the ghetto is used for places which are within places, yet outside them. Clubhouses, ethnic bars or restaurants, or the 'extended families' are conventional examples of the sites of such ghettos. But the art community is also seen as a ghetto, as are feminist groups. You seem to suggest that the film itself is such a 'magical' place, which your community of local women filmmakers share access to.

MM: Over the last few months, when Anna and Mimi and I have sat down and talked together about our films, it sounds like we're all talking about the same film. The ideas that we're talking about and the things that we're struggling with, image stuff, or how we're going to cut stuff, or develop stuff.

JD: What are some of the things that overlap?

MM: It's not specific to certain images, but rather saying "I want to be able to put myself into this film, and it's really about finding an identity for myself. What I'm doing is going into a past that may not be mine, but is one that I identify with." Like, Anna and her Grandmother and Great-Grandmother, and Mimi and her Mother and Grandmother, and me - I'm trying to locate it through dreams. It's towards a past, all about trying to find an identity. The thing that we're struggling with is whether it's appropriate, and



whether we're even able to finish the films. How do we end the films? Do we, as we're struggling through this, as women right now, and as filmmakers, are we trying to use these films to answer everything? Or, can we make films that leave things open-ended, unresolved?

In my film, there are references made to a woman who disappears who apparently has magic powers. But, you're never really sure. There are questions asked about where she goes, and there are references made to the fact that now she's gone into the gap, she finds transgressions and she disappears into those. It's not specifically a history. It's not a named place or a family line, but there are some images of wild animals, with text over them, that talks about a distant past and a history, and feeling comfortable with a group of people, and there being marvellous things that happen in the dark, and I can only find them when I'm on the edge of sleep. There are references made to some kind of wild, primitive thing through the use of animals and people.

JD: Is it a tribal society?

MM: To me, it's not making reference so much to tribal society as to there being a history that one feels connection to. It's never actually suggested that an event that someone's referring to that seems to come from the distant past is of a tribe, though you can infer that if you want, and it's one of the inferences I would like.

JD: The second photo-text piece has the image of a shadowy figure surrounded by ritual spears. Your text almost screams out loud at the viewers, saying 'This one's for you!'.

MM: That's the piece that came up when we were talking about being BAD. (Laughter). I thought, OK, I'm not going to worry about anything, I'm just going to spit this out. That piece, for me is just so emotional, so direct, with no consideration of who the audience is. It's not mediated in any way - well, obviously it is, it's a photograph - but it's not like "Here is a path, for you." It's just like, "Boom." It makes reference to family, not specifically to Mother. It's to everybody. It happened when I split up with someone. The image came because of terrible feelings of betrayal. When a relationship ends, when you come of an age when you start to see how the family structure works, all its wonderful parts and its terrible parts. All the horrible social rituals are reinforced and become a trap, even though they are supposedly about bonds, very strong familial or social bonds. They're a trap. So, this is a very gut response to that feeling. It's to the family, and it's to my friends and it's to my

lovers, and it's to everybody - that feeling of being the target, being betrayed. Actually, what I was thinking I might do is, instead of the ritual spears, to use flowers, with darts on them. (Laughter). There's a section in my film where I talk about naming things. It says, "Don't name it! Don't name it, it will be owned if you name it!" So, the place is never named, the power is never named.

I think that when you speak in a personal language, it connects with many more people. It's not just a rarified art language or a rarified business language or whatever. I think you cross more boundaries that way than otherwise. The other thing is that, in terms of the progression of my own work over the last seven or eight years, and in particular this one photograph piece that I'm going to do, I feel that my work has always been very personal but I have been conscious, either retroactively or at the time, of how much I'm inclined to veil the personal, because somehow I feel that it's too vague. More and more, I feel like, "Fuck it." Not only do I not feel it's too vague, but I feel there is a community there that understands the way I think. The personal is in fact not that arcane. With the piece with the daggers, I think probably many more people will understand that than the other piece I'm doing. It's very clear.

JD: Carolyn was talking about anxiety, and how the male-dominated art world had influenced her behavior as an artist. She found a lot of anxiety in 'male' work; it was really tight. She talked in terms of walking around and around her work, looking to see if there was a bolt loose. This circling could result in an anxiety in the work. Do you have feelings of having internalized the anxiety of a male-dominated art world in your work?

MM: Yes, definitely. I look at it and I wonder, why was that? I guess, getting older, you divest yourself of certain of what you used to feel were social obligations. Thank God. That's one good part to getting old. The other change is working more for a community that I feel stronger bonds with as I know them - you and Anna and Midi and a couple other people.

JD: While many art critics seem finished with their need to talk about feminism....

MM: You know, maybe I'm jumping a little ahead of you, but part of the reason I keep referring to women, and one of the things I've thought about with this film a lot, is that for the most part, these bonds have been with women. I don't want to be gender-specific; there are some men that I have a similar bond with, but the specific girlfriend bond - when I



talk to women about my work and their work, the ones I have really good discussions with talk about their work with a lot of questioning, a lot of doubt. Other people I talk to - I always feel they're representing their work to me. They're not talking about their work. That ties in with, in my earlier stuff, my working hard to veil my heart. I felt that was part of what a work of art had to be. It had to be about representing itself, and through a system of representation that I didn't feel comfortable with. It was about distancing yourself from your work. I no longer feel that. In the end, I've gained strength from my friends in terms of talking about doubt in their work, about questioning. I think that 'The Subject of Magic' is about that a lot. I think the film is about doubt, about the power of doubt, which is like doubt/invisible/whatever. The dark side of questioning is called doubt in this culture, and it's not approved of. It's not considered a strength.

JD: The sense of being a 'real' artist is one of presenting a doubt-free, airtight, very polished set of surfaces, that don't make references to things that can't be looked up in books.

MM: Named.

## MIDI ONODERA

*Midi Onodera lives in Toronto; she graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1983. Her work has combined first-person narrative with minimal, evocative imagery; the recent 'Ten Cents A Dance : Parallax' touches on issues of contemporary sexuality. In this conversation, she talks about her work as a publisher of the fanzine Dr. Smith, Equipment Manager at The Funnel, and producer/director of her current 16mm film project, based on the experiences of three generations of Japanese Canadian women - herself, her Mother and Grandmother.*

Judith Doyle: Can you tell me about your work on the fanzine 'Dr. Smith'.

Midi Onodera: It's a vehicle for saying 'OK, over here, 'real art' says this and this and this...well, sorry, I don't believe that. I think you've totally missed the point.' Dr. Smith for me is a vehicle to say to people, critics, 'Well, no. I think you're totally wrong,' and why, and sign my name, and publish it. Then they'll hate me even more, but what the hell? I've said what I had to say.

JD: Who do you think Dr. Smith's audience is? What's its relationship to 'real artland'?

MO: 'Real artland'... I'm not sure it affects the real artland. Dr. Smith has gotten more response in the gay community than it has in the art community. The editors are two women. It's interesting because it's become...what did 'The Body Politic' say... "It's THE Toronto gay punk fanzine".

JD: What kind of things go in Dr. Smith, and who are the audience?

MO: People who are involved in the hard-core scene, music, people who have made some films or are painters or sculptors or whatever. They've probably never received Canada Council or Ontario Arts Council grants, or had a show at YYZ or the Funnel. They like entertainment, and I think they like to have fun. I think that they've had enough of other people like the arts councils and the critics telling them what to do and how to do it. They still continue on and will do what they believe in, such as doing a xerox poster and plastering it all over the city and then calling it art. There's a lot of street art in Toronto. It never gets recognized, it never gets criticized, it never gets funding, but it's still there. I think that really speaks to the public, other than something in an art gallery with a glossy catalogue and that kind of thing. Dr. Smith is very unusual in that we concern ourselves with art and politics and feminist attitudes and things like that.

JD: On the one hand, you're working on Dr. Smith, and on the other hand you're working on a film with a large budget and employees, that will be seen and recognized within the more mainstream places you were talking about. How do you feel about those two things?

MO: I feel really schizophrenic. I go home and feel torn between doing my cash flow and writing a thing for Dr. Smith about how angry I am. I know cash flow will always win out. In terms of my film right now... my mind feels like it's been bounced off this wall and that wall, on the ceiling and everywhere. During the day, I'm supposed to be working in an artist-run centre where I'm dealing with people who might not know anything about film, explaining to them, 'regular 8 is different than Super 8', and this kind of thing. In between, I make all these phone calls to my employees and say 'Get on this film certification thing', 'OK, I've got an appointment with my auditor on this day', and 'ah yes, we've got that job development programme through Immigration and Manpower' and 'blah blah blah'. Because of all this, and all the conflicts at work, I'm divorcing myself further and further from the art.

JD: Why aren't you just making a Super 8 film? Why



are you taking it that extra step and making a feature-length 16mm broadcast-quality film, which requires all the extra business and funding?

MO: The reason I decided to make it a 16mm, possibly feature-length, possibly broadcast-quality film was because, in my own work, I felt I'd reached the endpoint of something. It was because of the number of people seeing my work over and over again, and getting anything out of it compared to the number of people NOT seeing it. I knew they would get something out of it, if only I pushed it further, if only I made it more accessible in terms of format and distribution.

JD: Who do you think will see your film in 16mm, who wouldn't in Super 8.

MO: Schools, universities, community groups, women's groups, people like that. That's the main reason that I've decided to do this film in 16mm. The reason why I want it, hopefully, to be feature-length, is because it will get an even wider distribution.

JD: Tell me more about the form you've chosen.

MO: This is all very fresh, because I just got some Super 8 footage back.

JD: What's the footage?

MO: It's really bizarre. It's me rolling sushi, me sitting in a train, me watching TV. At the very beginning, it's a black and white television - that's the only light in the frame. You can see this shadow crossing over and changing channels, then the figure goes into the kitchen and turns on the lights. Then you can make out the surroundings. The sound is going to be very important.

JD: In the series, you and Carolyn White are making Super 8 sketches for the 16mm films you're working on. Also, Michaela McLean is making a still work based in her upcoming 16mm film. It's good because people get so frustrated not having cameras in their hands.

MO: The camera is so expensive and the film stock is so expensive. I've got some money in the bank. I can make a 60-minute 16mm film, but I don't want to, not yet, because I'm so afraid of the cost involved. I don't want to run off a thousand feet in 16mm and say 'Oh God, this is a piece of shit.' I'd rather work in Super 8 where I can work the camera myself, I can be in it myself, I can feel it. I can get the tone of the film. I can figure out what I want to say visually and sound-wise. I could write all I want but writing is not film. To me, the Super 8 format is personal. It was conceived for the home movie market from the very

beginning, for people to take home movies, not to edit them, not to put on glossy soundtracks, but rather to find tones, to find human beings, real emotion.

Whereas, with 16mm, you will possibly have to have a camera person, a camera assistant, a sound person, sound assistant. Suddenly, when you have four people or even two people on set with you, it becomes a question of whether you have it together enough or not.

I find myself totally isolated. Doing this film has made it very clear to me that there's about one other Japanese Canadian woman filmmaker out there in Canada. She is also third generation. So, in a way I feel isolated in terms of what I can say with this film.

JD: What are the main issues that you want to address?

MO: Cultural links between women, between the first generation who emigrated from Japan and my generation. So, it's a personal film in a way because it's between my Mother, my Grandmother and myself.

JD: What are some of the links?

MO: Strength, endurance, commitment. I don't remember the saying, but it's something that the Japanese Canadians said all the way through the war when they had to uproot in a matter of forty-eight hours and decide what possessions they were going to take, and they couldn't weigh over forty-two pounds. The saying means: "You just can't help it. It's going to be done."

JD: You're third generation. What were some of the setbacks for your parents, the second generation?

MO: They had to be Canadian. They had to learn the language, for one. Their Mothers and Fathers didn't know the language. My Grandmother to this day, and she's ninety-five, doesn't quite know how to speak English and can't write it. When I talk to her I have to speak in broken English, in very very simple terms. My parents' generation fought against the Japanese identity, because during the war and before that, they felt this pressure on them saying, 'you nip'. They didn't have the right to vote, and in B.C. they weren't allowed into certain professions. So, they wanted to be white, just like any teenager wants to be like everyone else in that group that they hang around with. My parents went through that but in a more extreme way because they couldn't physically mask what they looked like. So they went to the extreme and denied that they were Japanese, even though it was very apparent to the eye that they



were Japanese. When I was about fourteen, my parents went to Hawaii for the first time. My mother came back, and I asked, "How did you like your trip?" She said, "Hawaii is very nice, but there are too many Japanese people there. I didn't like that. I didn't feel like I fit in." I looked at her and was so shocked. I thought, 'You're Japanese Canadian!'

I grew up in Forest Hill. When I grew up, it was completely Jewish. At one point in my teen years, I felt a certain solidarity between being Jewish and being Japanese because of what happened during the war. I thought the Jews had it more severely than we did. But that was over there, and this happened in

MO: The first generation had to go through a hell of a lot of bull. Language, customs, culture, absolutely everything. It's like stepping into the Twilight Zone and hearing, "Hey, you're here for life." Her family is from a small village, and my Grandmother was the black sheep. She left the village for Tokyo, became a switchboard operator in a Department Store, which appalled my Great-Grandparents to no end. I guess she got bored and thought, 'Well, I want to go to Canada.' The only way at the time was to marry some guy over here. She had met this man once before through the family, and their families arranged a marriage. So, she came across. And I think as soon as you step off the boat, you get

**My parents' generation fought against the Japanese identity because during the war and before they felt this pressure on them... they couldn't physically mask what they looked like... they went to the extreme and denied they were Japanese.**

Canada. So, in a way it balanced itself out. However the people I knew had no cultural or political links with their past, no awareness, nothing. So again, I was separated from them for economic and cultural reasons, and reasons of physical make-up. It was very difficult.

JD: What is it that you want to show in this film? What's the tone?

MO: I don't know what tone I want to bring to this film, because I'm so mixed in terms of feeling bitter, feeling anger, feeling left out, feeling like I'm a little kid and everyone else is basketball players. I've always felt like an outsider. But I think there are parts of being a minority that are very positive; things become very real, human and emotional. I've thought 'I don't want to be emotional in this film'. I don't want to have people crying on the screen, to use people like that. I want to move them inside. I don't want to move them to tears or to laugh, but I want to move them inside. An emotional connection was my prime motivation to do this film in the beginning. It was my Grandmother, growing up with such a strong figure, a power figure. She laughed, she cried, she fought, she lost - she did everything, and that made her a strong, emotional character. But I don't want to do a sappy portrait of her.

JD: Can you talk more about the differences between first, second and third generation?

married. Women who came over as picture brides had photographs of the men that they were going to marry, and the man would have a photograph of the woman he was to marry. They stood there, looking at each other.

Since my Grandmother is so old, I've been trying for about the last six years to get information from her, and it's really difficult. She's going senile. But what I've always gotten from her is the strength - the 'I don't care what this man is really like. I just want to get over to Canada, because I think it's kind of interesting.' Everytime she talks about that, her face just lights up, incredibly. I just sit there. The first time we talked about it was in Vancouver. It must have been ten years ago. She just said something like, "Yeah, yeah, sure. I didn't know this guy. But I wanted to go to Canada." Then, to put up with the language difficulties, the isolation, the total separation from your family, and not knowing this man that you're married to... He wants his dinner at this time, and you're not accustomed to that. The everyday marital things that happen. Not being able to go back to your Mother, and bringing up kids and housework. The last child she had was a son. All the rest were girls. Then her husband died. I never met my Grandfather.

JD: Do you think she felt remorse about having been assigned a husband as opposed to having chosen one? The mail-order bride thing still happens, as a means of emigrating.



MO: Yes, especially in the gay community. You see ads all the time in 'The Body Politic' saying "Marry my woman and I'll marry your man", to get United States citizenship or whatever. Or, "I want to stay in this country. Marry me. I'm gay", that kind of thing. But my Grandmother stuck it out. She didn't divorce this guy. I'm sure she grew to love him too, but all that shit they had to put up with - on top of being an immigrant, being interned. The last time I interviewed my Grandmother was not last summer but two summers ago. I asked her, through my aunt, how she felt about the war and if she had any regrets and if she felt any bitterness. She said no, she didn't have any regrets, any bitterness, and it was alright. It was done. That is the attitude of the first-generation Japanese Canadians that I've found - that it's over, it's past. That's a problem in trying to get redress now. So many of them are so old that they just say it's over. Now it's the third generation that's saying, no, the government has to recognize the wrongdoing.

JD: What was your Grandmother's experience in the camp?

MO: My aunt was one of the first public health nurses of Japanese descent in the system. She was allowed to go through one of the camps and get a house and set up my Grandmother and her sister and brother. So, they were better off than the usual, because they needed public health nurses who were Japanese and could act as translators. My Father, on the other hand, went to P.O.W. camp, because he rebelled against the families being separated. He ended up in Petawawa. He's very reluctant to talk about it. I know he had an extreme amount of bitterness. It's strange, every time I bring the subject up, my parents always argue. My Dad says the whole thing was wrong, and my Mother says there was nothing else to be done.

JD: Do you think there's any relation between being gay and this work you're doing? Are you thinking of trying to work it in in any way?

MO: That's really interesting because the only official research assistant that I've hired is my cousin Karen, who lives in Canmore, Alberta. She's a writer, and she's always gotten turned down for Canada Council grants. She's about twelve years older than I am. The last time that I actually met her was about ten years ago. Then I thought, well, she's out there, I'll get her to do some research for me. So we started corresponding after not seeing each other for those years. I sent her all the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council applications. One of the questions she asked when she wrote back was, "What does your sexual identity have to do with this film?", because

I'd put something about sexual orientation in the original proposal. After a long period of thinking, I decided to tell her I was gay, that this is a part of me and I acknowledge it, and I've received negative feedback because of it. So, it had to be clear and defensive at the same time, and not condescending. I thought when I sent off the letter that she would probably never write to me again, because it's so rare in such a repressed society as the Japanese - you don't find people coming out. You don't find Japanese Canadian lesbians all over the map, in the way that you'd find black lesbians or white lesbians. You find a lot of Chinese lesbians. But, I've only met one other Japanese-Canadian lesbian, and that was seven years ago in Montreal, at women's dance. We had a lot in common. (Laughter). She was an artist. But I really thought my cousin would probably never write to me again.

So, Karen wrote me back and said basically that it really didn't matter what my sexual orientation was. I'm still unsure about how to include being gay in the film. When I go to see my cousin, I'll definitely talk with her about it. It will be difficult, but interesting.

JD: What's your relationship to your Mother in the film?

MO: Oh well, all she has to say about it is, "You'd better get your facts straight, because you're representing the whole Japanese community, and you don't want to offend anyone." I'll probably offend a lot of people. I'll probably offend her. (Laughter). She's always been very supportive with my work. She helped finance 'Ten Cents a Dance' without really knowing what it was about. I said it was about communications between people. (Laughter). I mean, it is. But when she saw it at the Festival of Festivals, my God, she was in shock! Now I think she's almost used to it, although she certainly won't invite her friends to a screening.

## JEAN YOUNG

*Jean Young is an artist and filmmaker living in Toronto; between 1973-75 she studied at the New School of art, concentrating on painting. Over the next ten years, she continued to work largely on pictorial art; her most recent work is "iconoclastic, using the ambiguity/dichotomy of the fetish figure as a source." She began to make films a year ago; 'Colonnade' will be her second film to screen at the Funnel.*

Judith Doyle: I don't think that women discussing their families implies a return to the family unit the



way one experienced it as a child.

Jean Young: No, it's more of an examination of what went on. It's certainly part of the process for people who are gay as well, because you're not going to live in the same kind of situation as your parents did, obviously. It's a different type of relationship that has different standards. You go through the same process of re-examination of what goes on and what went wrong. It doesn't necessarily mean a vindication of the family unit at all.

JD: An important part of your film 'Colonnade' is the process of remembering. I'd like to ask about your own family background, and why you chose a structure of remembrances in the film.

JY: Well, my Mother killed herself about a year ago. Since that time, I found out by going to a therapist and talking to her that I had purposely forgotten a lot of my childhood. There are large, large blanks. But, by talking to her and talking to other people, I've started to remember bits and pieces. So, I started trying to find people that I could verify my memories with. It's a process that's expanding. I'm trying to sort out what all these memories mean, and how memory works. There's also the fact that, the people you experience things with - what they take away from the experience will be different from you in the first place. Memory just adds another layer to that.

JG: In your experience, what are some of the things that have triggered your memory, and what are some of the resistances that you've encountered in yourself, and in trying to match your experience against other people's?

JY: I guess what has triggered my memory most has been visual things. Returning to a place will start a whole series of memories, or looking at a photograph, or coming across a book that I'd read when I was a child. When I was doing a film on a suburban bus ride, it triggered a whole lot of memories about my childhood because for awhile I'd lived in suburbia. All of a sudden, I started remembering going to school and the friends I'd had then, which I don't have now. My life has totally severed, at several points. I have no friends that overlap from my past at all.

JD: In the voice-over of your film, one voice says that your family had been Communists in the past. The other voice says that she didn't feel comfortable at your home because the family always talked politics and drank wine at dinner. What was that experience like?

JY: My family was very political. Part of it was

cultural difference. My Father was a WASP and my Mother was Jewish. For her, there was a cultural link there, in that both of her parents had been socialists in Poland before they emigrated to Canada. So, she had a sort of ancestral link to socialism. My Father came from a very normal, middle-class WASP family, but he was gay. That made for another variation. I didn't know it when I was growing up. I didn't know until later, when I was about twenty-five, long after I had come out to my parents. I can see, looking back, that our family was very different from the families living around us. When my parents first came back from England they were very poor, because my Father had to start again at the bottom of the heap. By the time I was seven or eight, they started having money again, middle-class type money. So, it was wine with dinner and there were a lot of cocktail parties. I was taught about food and drinking. It was a big event when you started to drink cognac. But, none of my friends' families were like that. For them, it was overdone rump roasts and gravy and milk. There was a difference in lifestyle and a difference in ideology. Although my parents were no longer practicing Communists, they still considered themselves to be socialists. The younger of my two older brothers is a Trotskyist. He started to be committed to Trotskyism when he was about fifteen years old.

JD: What was the family environment like? You said there were a lot of cocktail parties. Was it a meeting place for like-minded spirits, or was it more the suburban social set, neighbours and so on?

JY: No, most of my parent's friends had a socialist background, though there weren't any friends that were left over from the period when my parents were in the Communist party, except maybe for a few who had been in the Communist party then left. When my parents severed their ties with the Communist party, they severed them completely and felt a strong disgust for anyone who stayed in the party. That was the direct result of their experience in Czechoslovakia. This was all before I was born. I guess it would be in the early '50's. My parents moved to England, and I believe they stayed there very briefly, then they moved on to Czechoslovakia to help the revolution. My Father worked for Pravda, something like that, and my Mother worked as an English teacher. While they were there, they began to realize that this was not the socialism that they were looking for. They said that one of their friends disappeared, and that's when they decided to go back to Canada.

There was a lot of political discussion. Daily events in the paper and such obviously were discussed, but there was a lot of nostalgia for when they'd been



young and more adventurous. There was another element. My Mother was scarred from having had been very poor when she was young, during the depression. For her, there was always the great fear of not having enough money. A sort of acquisitiveness grew up in her; she wanted more and more objects, and higher and higher salaries. Whereas, my Father was more concerned with the quality of his life.

thought. She said the readership of Dr. Smith is made up of people who are artists but aren't working in the established gallery scene, and were fed up and didn't want to take it anymore. What's your opinion of the readership of Dr. Smith?

JY: I think that's pretty accurate. It's definitely broader than that too. There are out-and-out punks

**My family was very political... my Mother was Jewish and both her parents had been socialists in Poland before they emigrated. So, she had a sort of ancestral link to socialism. My father came from a very normal, middle-class WASP family... he was gay.**

JD: How did you decide to become an artist?

JY: I was encouraged - my Father was an artist and had gone to Ontario College of Art. There was this need in me to create statements, I guess. I started painting as soon as I could hold a brush and never stopped. But I've never shown any of my painting. I don't know whether I ever will, because it's very personal.

JD: Along with painting, you've just started to make films. Have you worked in any other forms than that?

JY: I've done a lot of sculpture, mostly environmental constructions on a very small scale. Some were built as scale models for larger pieces, but since I never had any money to build them, they were made just as models.

JD: And you work on 'Dr. Smith'. Can you tell me about that?

JY: It's a fanzine. It grew up out of frustration with 'Pink Ink' which was a gay publication. I was one of the co-publishers, and we had an editorial board. It seemed that every step that we took in any direction, we were always stopped by the editorial board, so it was one long frustration. We were thinking, it would be nice to do something where nobody could tell us what to do or what to think or this is politically incorrect, or there are too many pictures this time - that kind of nonsense. So we decided to start a fanzine.

JD: Midi said that, in 'Dr. Smith', she could be critical of the art scene and just say what she

that like to read Dr. Smith as well, but that audience is there. I've written pieces of criticism for Dr. Smith that I would never publish someplace else. They're terribly politically incorrect. Not that I have a very good reputation with the gay and lesbian community anyway, but I think some of the things I've written have been the last straws. (Laughter). I know one piece I'd written was sent on to the appropriate person at the Body Politic, and brought to their attention.

JD: What kinds of things did you say?

JY: If I remember correctly, it had to do with an evening of women's video. I thought it was god-awful self-masturbation of the worst kind, very self-indulgent. I wrote that, but I didn't write it in nice analytical terms. Instead, I was rather nasty about the people. I was very blunt. It was street talk. So, I use it as a venue for my political outpourings.

JD: Do you feel your sexual orientation has been an important influence in your artwork?

JY: Well, I think it definitely has given me a different perspective. I mean, my whole life seems to have been shaped by that. I knew I was gay when I was quite young, and I came out to my parents when I was seventeen. I think it gives me an awareness sometimes of relationships, because gay relationships don't really have that much of a set form, especially now. I've never fit the stereotype of a lesbian. I wear make-up, I shave my legs, but I can fix things and look after things too. I'm somewhere in-between. I'm against relationships where one person is dominant over another. I think



all of this shows up in my work. It's a perspective but I don't do particularly gay art.

JD: In the series, I've been talking about the representation of women. Some critics believe it's not even possible to represent women in film. Some politically correct women won't even use the image of a woman in any of their work. They say all representations of women have been determined by men, and will be that way no matter what you do. That leads me to ask you about representations of women and especially gay women. Do you think there has to be a new language found? Have you thought about that making your work?

JY: Yes, I've thought about it. I don't know whether it's so much a new language... I mean, when women are dealing with women, one would hope that there would be a type of sensitivity there. I don't think it's true that all representations of women go through men's eyes, because certainly the way that I look at women does not go through men's eyes. I don't think one should abandon the representation of women for that kind of reason. I think that what one does is to try and change it. Anything that you put on the screen, obviously, comes loaded. There is no such thing as a bland, naive, innocent image. So what you do is take your representation and decide what you want to show to people, and you filter it through that kind of understanding. But, to not touch it gets you nowhere. You're just skirting around the issue and not changing anything.

JD: By refusing to represent women, maybe you're buying into a theory about women that was invented by men in the first place.

JY: You're making them invisible, too.

JD: That makes me think about the visuals in the film. Why did you choose to use images of a space undergoing architectural renovations?

JY: I think the image partly came about because it's a space that is undergoing transformation, which is very much the same process I find my memory is going through at this time. I'm continually changing my memories; it goes from one thing, to a blank period where I can't remember, to being another thing. The space is also doing that. It's not a space that's simply being torn down. It is somewhat apparent by the plastic sheets and so on that the space is being transformed. That was part of the reason. The other is that it is the space where a lot of these memories occurred. I shot the footage first, and I had an idea of what I wanted to do with it, what connection I wanted to make, but it took me awhile. It

took me three months before I was able to write the narrative.

JD: In the film relationships between girlfriends at that high school stage are discussed. Why did you choose that point in time?

JY: Again, that was partly anchored in the image. The event is real - we did go there. That's the last time I had the kind of buddy-buddy girlfriends relationship that I thought was a fairly normal part of growing up. It was very painful for me, because I had feelings that my friends didn't have. I did have crushes on them, then they were showing up with boyfriends and becoming more and more distant. Their perspectives on life and what they wanted for themselves were changing. They'd gone from being much freer to thinking about wanting a steady relationship or getting married. I found this really distressing because it was at a time when I was thinking more about committing myself to being an artist. I had long ago realized that I was never going to get married and would probably never have children. So our lives were growing further and further apart, but I didn't have another support system to take their place until recently. I think that's probably got something to do with the imagery too. It was a very bleak period when I realized that none of my friends really understood what was going on inside me, and that I couldn't really confide in them the way you expect to be able to confide in friends.

JD: What are some of the changes between the bonds you felt with women at that high school time, and the ones you feel now?

JY: My relationships now are also based on an expectation of my getting things back. There has to be that give and take. That includes my work, and it includes the emotional and the personal. The first thing I test with a potential friend is if they have any trouble with my sexuality. If they are gay I need to know they feel comfortable with their sexuality as well.

JD: What are some of the demands you feel you can make now, compared to when you were younger?

JY: I think, for criticism. It's very important to get that kind of feedback when you're working on something. For emotional support. I expect my friends to have the strength to help me through bad times, just as I expect to have the strength to help them through bad times. And time - I expect time from my friends as well. And fun. Drinking buddies. I think the bonds are much stronger that I feel now. The people that are close to me now - men or women - I feel that



I would not sever those relationships lightly. I would expect them to continue almost indefinitely, while undergoing changes.

JD: Do you feel you are able to make structures in your life now that are alternates to the traditional family?

JY: Very much so. My friends are my family now, because basically I don't really have a family anymore. I still have a Father and two brothers, but the brother who still lives in Toronto has absolutely nothing in common with me - he's ten years older than I am, and lives a completely different life. I'm an utter bewilderment to him. The other brother is in Montréal and thinks as little of the nuclear family as I do. And my Father lives on the West coast. I can't go home for family dinner or holidays or things like that, so instead I've got friends. They take the place of family. It's an improvement because it's the family that you choose for yourself. There's a lot more enjoyment, because it's not based on obligation. It's a lot more relaxed.

JD: Less manipulative?

JY: Very much so. My Mother especially was a very manipulative person - she was a manic depressive, and incredibly adept at making people do what she wanted them to do, which I did almost until the day that she killed herself. I've only begun to understand

the depth to which she manipulated my life.

JD: How come you think it's important to represent the process of remembering your family and friends in your work?

JY: It's important for me personally, but I think it's probably a process that everybody goes through at some point. I think it's very important for us to understand the way in which we do edit our own memories. I think, until you understand what you do and why you're doing it, then you don't really understand yourself very fully, which means that you don't have very great understanding of why other people do what they do.

JD: Do you think people repeat patterns over and over again?

JY: I do, definitely. I know that I myself repeated patterns again and again until I saw the pattern. Then I was able to step outside it. I didn't have to continue being like the little rat running around in the cage, running around in a circle.

JD: So knowing a situation is a way of regaining control that's been manipulated by other people.

JY: I also think that documenting something is a way of gaining control over it as well. It's a way of getting rid of it.

#### IN A DIFFERENT VOICE RECENT FILMS PERFORMANCE AND ARTWORKS BY WOMEN

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## FILM NOTES / In A Different Voice

FRIDAY JANUARY 31 8 PM :

**HAITI : QUÉBEC** by TAHANI RACHED, Montréal, Canada; 1985, 16mm, 57 minutes, French with English Subtitles. (Preview Screening). A National Film Board Production (Montréal).

This film documents the experiences of Haitian immigrants in Québec; it is structured to show contradictions and complexities. Through the use of letters read as voice-over, or on camera into a cassette recorder, a more personal relation with the viewer is suggested, and particularly subtle perceptions are described.

"Haiti : Québec" is a film of particular sensitivity to the despair of Haitian women, who are getting it from both sides. On the one hand, they share with the men the daily humiliations endured because of race; at the same time, though, they suffer the wrath of husbands and lovers who don't appreciate the relative freedoms enjoyed by North American women .... a letter home is dictated onto a tape recorder by a Creole-speaking cab driver. With moving brevity, he speaks of the anguish facing many of Rached's subjects, male and female: it's difficult to stay, but impossible to go home." Suzanne Pope, BROADSIDE, January 1986.

**ARADIA** by ANNA GRONAU, Toronto, Canada, 1982, Super 8, 2 1/2 minutes.

The reading of "The Charge of the Goddess" from Charles Leland's 'Aradia' forms the background for this lyrical, dynamic film which evokes images of female power through the archetypal portrayal of the tripartite feminine. With Amber Bush and Sound with Ross McLaren.

**TOTO** by ANNA GRONAU, Toronto, Canada, 1984, Super 8, 3 minutes.

Ruby slippers, a parting curtain and the line from 'The Wizard of Oz', 'There's no place like home!'. An ironic examination of Toronto as the local, as home.

**UNTITLED (1984)** by MICHAELLE McLEAN, Toronto, Canada, 1984, 16mm, B/W, 5 minutes.

A man deals the deck of cards; a woman is glimpsed, a torso in a tight dress, rising; a man faces the camera. Images based in narrative stereotypes are subverted by the filmmaker/editor, who determines the images and the order they present.

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 7 8 PM

**AUGUSTA** by ANNE WHEELER, Vancouver, Canada, 1976, 16mm, 16 minutes. A National Film Board Production (Vancouver).

This sensitive film knits together pieces of August Evan's life; daughter of a Shuswap chief, Augusta was separated from her parents at age four and sent to a Catholic mission school where only English was allowed. When she married a white man in 1903, she lost her status as an Indian. She has outlived every member of her family, except one son. When the film was made in 1976, at age 88, she lived alone in a log cabin without running water or electricity in the Cariboo country of B.C. "It's her home, and she wouldn't be anywhere else". She tells her own story in soft-spoken reminiscences.

**REGARDS** by ANNA GRONAU, Toronto, Canada, 1983, 16mm, 31 minutes.

In a series of episodes, separate but related, knowledge and perception are examined. Translation, orientation and cultural bias are questioned against the material presence of the words and images. Assumptions upon which judgements, categorization and communication are based are shown to be flexible or arbitrary. The human figures in the film (all female) are no more free of these contradictions than are real people, except that they become instruments in discrediting a few presumptions. This process is an attempt to penetrate to a deeper vision (regard), and the esteem (regard) that it implies. With Amber Bush, Jeanne Minihinnick. Sound, Music: Ross McLaren.

"... age marks a difference among the women, but also suggests connection among characters as distinct aspects of a common experience." Blaine Allen, AFTERIMAGE.

**I'M TALKING FROM MY TIME** by RHEA TREGEBOV, Toronto, Canada, Performance with Slides by Peter Higdon, Live and Recorded Voice, Premiere - 1983, approximately 35 minutes.

"Reva Rosenberg is my husband's grandmother. She was born Reva Gur-arieh in Charadetz, Russia, near the Polish border. We believe she was born sometime in January, 1888. Gur-arieh means 'like a lion'.

In August, 1912, when she was in her twenties, she followed her brothers and sisters to Winnipeg. The family translated their name to Bray. On March 9, 1919, Reva married Yossel Rosenberg. This is the first date I know for sure....

Reva's eldest grandson, Alan Tregobov recorded the conversations with her on January 28 and 29th, 1983 in her home in Winnipeg. I have transcribed and re-recorded portions of these conversations for this performance....

Reva died in the Misericordia Hospital September 9, 1983." - Rhea Tregobov.



**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 14 8 PM**

**BURNING BRIDGES** by PREMIKA RATNAM, Toronto, Canada / India, 1984, 16mm, 11 minutes.

"Raising issues which are applicable to many immigrant cultures, 'Burning Bridges' traces the story of two Indian women who have come to Canada, unaware of what migration might entail. Each has had to deal with a marriage which has failed due to unforeseen social and economic pressures, and each now finds herself having to cope with the problems of leading an independent life. Most immigrants may be faced with decisions of cultural identity, but it is often women who have the hardest time.... For an Indian woman who has chosen to separate from her husband, the abandonment of traditional values is not easy, and there is no way of turning back." Premika Ratnam.

**COLONNADE** by JEAN YOUNG, Toronto, Canada, 1986, Super 8, 10 minutes.

The film's images are of the interior of 'the colonnade', a small shopping complex stripped down to its architecture during the process of reconstruction. The voice-over, a dialogue between two women, traces their sometimes conflicting remembrances triggered by this place. A film about memory and its unreliability, and the differences in immediate perceptions.

**MOTHERS IN A FOREIGN FATHERLAND** by INGRID OUSTRUP JENSEN, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1984, 16mm, 44 minutes. Danish with English Subtitles. Produced by State Film Central, Denmark.

Wives of foreign workers from Turkey and Pakistan tell about their positions in Denmark. As women brought up according to very strict, very old traditional values, they experience the daily conflict between cultures in an especially harsh way. They are confronted with growing hate towards foreigners by the Danes. Despite the fact that each woman speaks for herself in this film, Ingrid Oustrup Jensen has tried to create a collective impression through montage, "as if many women spoke with one voice."

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 21 8 PM**

**LITTLE WOMEN** (Episode III of 'DAUGHTERS OF THE COUNTRY') by Norma Bailey, Winnipeg, Canada, 1986 (Preview of a Work in Progress), 16 mm, 55 minutes.

LITTLE WOMEN is the third episode in a four-part series being made for television. The series traces the experiences of four Métis women at four different points in time - 1760, 1860, 1930, and 1985.

"Maria Ladouceur, 40, is still nursing her last baby while overseeing the care of half a dozen toddling grandchildren.... Times are tough (it is the 30's) and the Métis, despite suspicions, are helping the white homesteaders, teaching them what they know about surviving in the bush. Maria and the white woman become friends. Everything seems possible. But when a large number of white homesteaders move into the region, the balance tips and racism does its inevitable ugly work. The Métis are forced off their land (again) and must disperse further west and north...."

**DISPLACED VIEWS** by MIDI ONODERA, Toronto, Canada, Super 8, 1986 (Preview of a work in progress).

This Super 8 film will operate as a sketch for a 16mm film which is in progress now. 'Displaced Views' deals with the experience of three generations of Japanese Canadians, through correspondences between the filmmaker and her Grandmother.

**JOURNAL INACHEVÉ** by MARILLOU MALLET, Montréal, Québec, 16mm, B/W, 1983, 50 minutes.

"The film evokes a feminine specificity. The exile of the filmmaker represents a multidimensional layering of exiles - as an immigrant, woman and artist. Each identity is a further marginalization, each struggling to liberate/translate the personal reflection into public representation, the struggle for the valorization of the personal as a mode of public discourse." Brenda Longfellow

**SCENE ONE TWO AND THREE** by CAROLYN WHITE, Toronto, Canada, Super 8, 1986, 10 minutes.

The film traces three turning points in a woman's life. These phases are indicated through three fables, with imagery structured on the one hand by dream and fantasy; and on the other, by the artist's experiences and recorded conversations with her Mother, who emigrated from Germany to Canada. 'Scene One Two And Three' touches on issues of generation, ethnicity and the possibility of a particularly feminine/feminist language.



# IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

## *EXHIBITION:*

JANICE GURNEY      JAMELIE HASSAN  
MICHAELLE McLEAN      CAROLYN WHITE

*Opening : Monday January 27 8 PM  
- to Saturday February 27*

YYZ / 116 Spadina Avenue Toronto Canada / 367-0601

## *FILM AND PERFORMANCE:*

### *Friday January 31 8 PM :*

HAITI : QUÉBEC by TAHANI RACHED, Montréal  
(French with English Subtitles)

TOTO by ANNA GRONAU, Toronto

UNTITLED 1983 by MICHAELLE McLEAN, Toronto

### *Friday February 7 8 PM :*

AUGUSTA by ANNE WHEELER, Manitoba

REGARDS by ANNA GRONAU, Toronto

I'M TALKING FROM MY TIME Performance by RHEA TREGEBOV,  
Winnipeg / Toronto

### *Friday, February 14 8 PM :*

BURNING BRIDGES by PREMIKA RATNAM, India / Toronto

COLONNADE by JEAN YOUNG, Toronto

MOTHERS IN A FOREIGN FATHERLAND by INGRID OSTRUP  
JENSEN, Turkey / Denmark (Danish with English Subtitles)

### *Friday February 21 8 PM :*

LITTLE WOMEN (From the METIS WOMEN series) by NORMA BAILEY,  
Manitoba / Preview

DISPLACED VIEWS by MIDI ONODERA, Toronto

JOURNAL INACHEVÉ by MARILU MALLET, Chile / Montréal  
(French with English Subtitles)

SCENE ONE TWO AND THREE by CAROLYN WHITE, Toronto

THE FUNNEL EXPERIMENTAL FILM CENTRE  
507 King Street East Toronto Canada / 364-7003

Admission to film screenings is \$4 / \$3 students and limited income.