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**THE POLITICAL STATUS OF THE DECENTRED SUBJECT
AND THE WORK OF DOROTHY CROSS**

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"Everything is dangerous - and every new context demands that we reassess the main danger".

Foucault.

"It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be presented and what cannot that the post modernist operation is being staged - not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting, or invalidating others. Among those prohibited from Western representation, whose representations are denied all legitimacy, are women".

"The Discourse of Others".

Craig Owens.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will look at the political deployment of theory in the area of feminist visual art. It will not necessarily lead us to attempt to evaluate all the implications of such a deployment. Instead we can witness a critique of the very foundations of a dominant aesthetic institution.

For the purposes of this thesis the term dominant aesthetic institution will be used to describe the constricting patriarchal embrace that has been an integral part of the politics of visual art. The roots of critical and cultural theory are in many cases masculinist and Eurocentric. As for the theory that surrounds visual art, the exclusion of women to all intents and purposes has been total.

It is from this premise that we must view a critique of the patriarchal thought process that has become subjected to a radical contestation of its foundations. This critique is fraught with opposition and is sometimes seen as a feminist ideological position that borders on the fanatical.

Some critics like to draw the distinction between prophetic feminism, which they see as a model for the changes men are beginning to experience, and on the other hand, what they describe as ideological feminism which is seen as having nothing more to offer than a reversal of a pattern of general

enmity and scapegoating that men have traditionally practised against women.

From another perspective we see a feminist criticism which sets out to charge feminist concerns with the comprehension and total change of patriarchy. In doing so the logical male with all his attire of common held beliefs is exposed: for example, the concept of natural masculinity and common sense gives us a patriarchal perspective that would ultimately lead us to believe in women's limitations. The strait jacket that has been an integral part of this thinking has led us to look beyond these structures. As a result the concept of universal humanism has been unmasked, presenting itself as quite selective in its manner of relating to those who not only belong to a different gender but also those who belong to different racial, social and cultural groups.

Certain questions emerge from this analysis: is theory distinct from politics? Can that same theory be derived from politics? Will a politics emerge from such a theory?

What will be important to bear in mind is the fact that some people (and among them feminists) consider theory as a politics that lacks any form of moral fibre. So if feminism is to move from the area of patriarchal constraint, be it in the area of theory or otherwise, no stone can be left unturned.

Within High Theory post-structuralism offers a set of ideas

and positions which are allied to the concerns of feminism that are manifesting themselves in the areas of subjectivity, signifying practices and sexuality. In turn this fusion can be harnessed in the area of a feminist visual art to understand how signification is positioned within the process of power. The linkage of practice and theory can and has been made, allowing in turn a feminist visual art the opportunity to render an image that belongs to the world of visual art that may possibly have moved beyond patriarchal structures.

We will also see feminism emerging as the assailer of cherished beliefs and more importantly the breaker of the stereotypical image. This critique is based on the observation that traditional images categorised the feminine into the object to be worshipped, irrationally revered, or alternately to be located as the object of sexual desire. From this analysis we will see how feminist visual art, frustrates attempts at containment and definition as one particular type of production.

We will subsequently begin to look at the political fallout from the interaction between a feminist critique of patriarchy and the post-modern critique of representation. In examining these issues it will become clear why feminism is at the centre of the debate on post-modernism, and that these issues have a political edge.

In considering how feminism through post-modernism is

confronting specific questions and challenges posed to it, we will be importantly brought to look at the political status of the decentred subject and how feminists as visual artists have taken up that challenge. The political status of the decentred subject can best be understood by viewing women's strategic position and their governing within the wider arena of patriarchy. Susan Rubin Suleiman describes the post-modern condition, "as one that can be read as a poststructuralist manifesto or manifesto of decentred subjects". (Jencks, P318. 1992).

The principle that guides poststructuralism will therefore be central in our attempt to theorize the individual consciousness that directs the work of Dorothy Cross.

CHAPTER 1

Through the work of Dorothy Cross we can see a woman whose work as an artist exhibits the elements of a post-modernism that may have a critical potential. In examining her work, we will witness the act of opposition, critique and resistance to dominant ideologies, and see the mutual opportunism that allows for the joining of feminism and post-modernism.

The alliance that we speak of has come about because of, as Foucault called it, "a certain fragility that has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence", (Weedon P108. 1987). But along with this sense of instability, we also discover something that perhaps was not initially foreseen, something we might describe as precisely the inhibiting effect of global and totalising theories.

The old dictum of stable categories such as the rational subject have become subject to a philosophical critique that has been particularly productive. Poststructuralism has initiated a critique of the rational subject which has echoed the feminist critique of rationality as constituting a masculine construct. Poststructuralism has identified the construction of subjectivity through the model and use of language. As a result there emerges a recognition of open-ended cultural practices that are multi-layered language contests. The effect of this has been to create a sort of anarchic cultural arena. This is not meant to infer a

negative conclusion to the current feminist cultural politics; quite the opposite is the case, despite the reservations of some feminists.

We have reached a point where the feminist critique of patriarchy has allowed for an alliance with the post-modern critique of representation. Some feminists consider this more of a collapse than an alliance. What they fail to realise is the starting point for this alliance is not meant to see feminism incorporated as a tool or subject of post-modernism. The recognition that political idealism is but a memory in the midst of modernism has seen to it that all contracts are now temporary.

What is of importance is the recognition that feminist art's explicit disruption of modernist configurations of sexual difference can encounter as Craig Owens describes it, "the tyranny of the signifier". (Jencks P333. 1992).

This leads us to look at the deconstructive impulse to undermine the so called universalist male aesthetic. There is a recognition inherent in feminist discourse that a complex network of social interest exists.

The questions being asked about the source and presentation of images in our culture are not submitted to some sort of absorptive strategy within post-modernism. Instead as Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson describe it,

Post-modernists seek inter alia, to develop conception of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings.

(Fraser & Nicholson P21. 1990)

If then Philosophy with a capital P is no longer a viable or credible enterprise, one result of the tailoring that post-modern feminist theory has undertaken has been to recognise the necessity of a politics that advocates a pluralism on many fronts.

This has meant accommodating the non-universalist state now presenting itself. The strategy has importantly presented itself in mobile alliances that set out to tackle the politics of class, race, sexual orientation etc., recognising from the outset that the fragmentation of issues concerned do not suffer the pretence of unity.

This is the radical pluralism of post-modern feminism which finds its critics among feminists. Anne Philips questions this argument and suggests that it blurs the lines of equality that has been the catch call of feminist politics. She decries the non-universalists epoch that makes it impossible to treat people the same given the complex nature of their being,

We cannot do without some notion of what human beings have in common, we can and must do without the unitary

standard against which they are all judged.

(Philips. P20. 1992)

This brings us to look at liberty and equality and their representations in the new age that is upon us. What presents itself in the dilemmas of this age does not make for comfortable politically correct positions.

Faced with a real opportunity with post-modernism, feminist politics has begun to address the question of equality and those who ground them in difference.

(Philips P19. 1992).

On the other hand Foucault has identified specificity as a means to lift the veil from power and knowledge in society, and as a result exposing patriarchy's part in the maintenance of power and its relations. The force relations that Foucault speaks of adapt to the particular and are found in specific forms depending on the society they operate within. This can be evidenced in the relations of gender, religion, class age and importantly in social institutions. Foucault's recognition of the network of power associations within institutions such as modern science has given way to what is known as the process of hysterization. In other words the female body is suffused with sex whose job it is to ensure the continuum of family life. As a result the sexuality of the individual acts as a means of social control.

In the work of Dorothy Cross we will see how centres of power extend way beyond the traditional (as in the State) to areas like medicine, science, religion and sex. As for the concept of resistance in the work of Cross we will not witness a formal protest in the form of a political flag waving. Anna Maria Alonso says;

the voice of protest will be articulated by deploying discourse rich in bodily symbols, who's forms of resistance will focus on the constitution of subjectives, disputing and redefining the ways in which power is invested in social identities so called pre-political discourses of resistance, long dismissed. As "lacking an ideology", that can be interpreted in a new way once we recognise that rule is not simply effected through the formal apparatus of government and that voices of protest need not be articulated in a "rational" post enlightenment idiom to be political.

(Butler-Scott P405. 1992).

But before we look at the gender based art of Dorothy Cross, the theories of sexuality that have given impetus to her work must first be looked at.

The framework of poststructuralism and postmodernism offers the work of Cross a means of interrogating power and where it resides. Through the medium of a feminist visual art Cross examines how we have become sexed and gendered. If then we

bring together the concept of power and gender the theories of Foucault and Freud offer as a guide to political action in the work of Cross.

Freud on the one hand offers a model of psychosexual development as a means to consider woman and how she is represented in the world of visual art. As a result psychoanalysis is useful in making the break with biological determinism. And it is at this point we can see how psychic development is grounded in social organisation.

Foucault, however, demands that historical specificity is critical in order to reveal how power and knowledge belong to specific governing bodies in society. From this base Cross has considered the representations of women positioned within a specific set of social relations. But it will be important to consider as Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that there no longer exists a philosophy capable of fulfilling the foundation for a social and political critique. As a result there emerges paradoxically a mobility that allows for change where the grand narratives no longer hold sway. The fathers of philosophy from Hegel to Kant and Marx have each offered truth and justice packaged within the framework of patriarchy. The worn out single fuel engine of philosophy is being replaced with a thinking that starts at a point that is plural, local and imminent.

It is when we come to view the work of Dorothy Cross that we

begin to see a thinking that is multifaceted or, as John Hutchinson describes it, as a revision of sexuality as a psychic construction rather than a form of immutable physiological difference. (Cat: Power House, Trinity College, 1993).

The signs of sexuality that are an inherent part of Cross' work are very much part of her concern for the status of the decentred subject. To come to some understanding of the political status of the decentred subject we need to consider the concept of the rational, self reflective subject. Because it is when we see how Enlightenment ideas have been all pervasive in establishing the rationalist model. It is then we can see how the whole notion of women has been displaced in the grand order of things. As a consequence the centre ground of western thought has been dominated by rationality, spirituality and objectivity which are in essence linchpins of patriarchal power. Subsequently the political status of the decentred subject is central to the critique Cross undertakes the rationalist model. The politics of engagement that we will find in the work of Cross sets out to activate the notion of the subject in its decentred orbit. The resulting trajectory confronts the structure of male dominance and sets in play a practice that fosters a post patriarchal visibility. The subject becomes malleable and open to change and is no longer trapped in the snake skins of our minds. The political enabling that results subsequently destabilizes the traditional given sense of the subject. We will as a result

see a move from the organic metaphor and the pre-given textual notion of the self.

What we have here then is a female artist sourcing the male essence that has been constructed in the psyche of the viewer prior to his encounter with the work. Her subversion of this ultimately exposes our own visual prejudices . The images are, as we will see, part and parcel of what we have already described as a feminist critique of and resistance to dominant forms that are ultimately male. The deliberate undermining of male authority that is an integral concern in the work of Cross invites a consideration of the post-structuralist theories of discourse, power and resistance.

the force behind this contract (between feminism and post-modernism) is that which aims at writing or inscribing limits discursively, epistemically and strategically. The outcome projected is some sort of alliance and recognition of reciprocal indebtedness, that can be represented and practised systematically for its exponents and the audiences their work addresses.

(Butler-Scott P465. 1992).

Poststructuralism conveys how philosophy and theory are always involved in power. Poststructuralism gives us an insight into how patriarchy produces and reproduces forms of power. The employment of power can be witnessed within discourses in the ways in which it appoints and rules individual subjects. Power

is integral to our understanding of the male and masculinity. But to come to some understanding of how that same power is sourced demands we consider a theoretical investigation into the many and varied social hegemonies that exist. Through the work of Foucault, theories of power directed at the issue of gender relations have paid detailed attention to the way power is exercised. The strangle hold that male power has had on the status of women needs an analysis that reaches into its, "infinitesimal mechanisms". (Foucault P98.). However, feminist artists like Cross have seen to it that their practice needs a re-theorization to clear a pathway that avoids the old power blocks. The resulting historical heterogeneity that is the focus of the work of Cross initiates a destabilising of the binary opposition between men and women.

The old order of philosophy has not been shifted or identified the significant patriarchal anchor. Chris Weedon goes further and cites liberal humanism, as still being the dominant discourse in western societies which includes the island of Ireland which is important to the historical specificity in the work of Dorothy Cross,

this dominant discourse has assumed the unitary nature of The subject conscious subjectivity. It insists on establishing the appearance of unity from moments of subjectivity which are often contradictory. To be inconsistent in our society is to be unstable. Yet the appearance of a unitary subject, based as it is on



PIETA

RECEIVED 10/10/94

primary structure of misrecognition of the self as authorial source of meaning is precarious, easily disrupted and open to change.

(Weedon P112. 1987).

The change that Weedon speaks of has clearly identified that a post-modern philosophy provides for a feminist discourse, and it is from this opening that a plural network can accommodate a new and radical feminist voice.

When we hear Dorothy Cross describe how her work attempts "to make people consider the socialised determined nature of the sexes", (Ecu Ecu, R.T.E. 1993) we are led in turn to ask, is this the voice of the "other" (Nicholson P163. 1990), or as Griselda Pollock would argue, the case of a gender hierarchy rooted in what she calls social systems and ideological schemata. Pollock describes the sexes as firmly rooted in a gendered world resulting in a constructed difference that is not inborn. The learning process of the female and male are manufactured through socialisation.

The power relations depicted in the work of Cross deserve a close analysis because we do not find the female image subordinated to what has been the norm in patriarchal imagery. A case in point is Cross' sculpture of a *Pieta* reproduction. The piece is no more than 8" high; on examination we find a slightly burnished nipple on the head of the virgin. This sophisticated camouflage of images that demands a closer

reading both in a physical and temporal sense opens onto a vista that need no longer take account of established meanings grounded in reason. Through the subversion of the *Pieta*, Cross recognises the cultural images of the mother as idealised nurturer. The fantasy of the perfect mother is questioned for its "relational capacities and experiences instead of the insatiable, insistent drives". (Chodorow P96. 1989). The linkage of motherhood, violence and death is not simply alluded to in Cross' *Pieta*. The institution of the family as a natural rather than a social phenomenon sees many violences perpetuated on the body of women.

In these accounts, this isolation, in which mother and child live in a unique and potent relationship, explains and even justifies the effects of mothering. It explains why mother's (even in their oppression by patriarchy) are so all powerful in relation to their children, and why the mother and child relation is likely to be so bound up with powerful feelings.

(Chodorow P88. 1989).

In Cross' *Pieta* we are presented with a body that does not acquiesce to the natural order of things. The traditional female role and the rationale by which it is defined through a masculinist perspective undergoes a radical contestation. The concept of what is known as a feminist loss of faith in patriarchal structures is ironic in Cross' appropriation of a traditional iconography that shows a mother with the Son of

God in her arms. This, however, underlines Cross' astute recognition of the Pieta as a sign that is clearly open to a feminist intervention. By the placing of a nipple on the head of a virgin mother, the irrational nature of the feminine is celebrated, or for that matter the reduction of women to the status of nipple becoming synonymous with her biological role. That we find a thirty three year old male dying in the arms of his mother who may only confirm the body of women as Moira Gates describes it as:

confined to the role of wife/mother/domestic worker,
for example, is invested with particular desires,
capacities and forms that have little in common with
the body of female.

(Barrett & Phillips P30. 1992).

This struggle against entrapment that Cross undertakes in her subversion of the Pieta takes apart an icon of a masculinist art history that presents a patriarchal concept of motherhood.

Michaelangelo's representation of a dying Christ in the arms of his mother, is one of a mother who would and should remain duty bound right to the end. It was this form of reasoning that left the male free to dominate the political arena that ironically legislates for all.

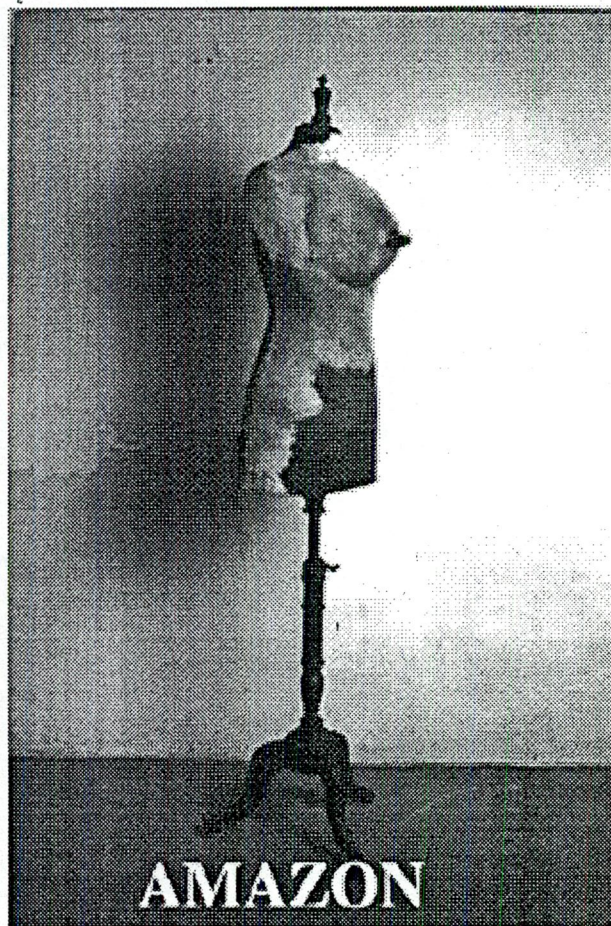
In her Pieta, Cross has identified the presentation of women as the mother reproducing the family. This allied to its place among the cultural icons of a male dominated visual

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• culture, shows female sexuality is a critical revisionary of this form of displacement of cultural icons, and is indicative of a point where postmodernism has reached a political landscape that has lain fallow since the concept of origin was first waylaid by patriarchy. Feminist visual artists have taken the plough of femininity and turned it into a sword to cut through the masculine acquiescent. Foucault talks of the society we find ourselves within and how that society with a sexuality has seen sex become central in the exercise of power. This he believed, was brought about through the discursive constitution of the body through which sex has become inextricably linked to subjective identity. Foucault contests the privilege of repression in the production of a history of sexuality. Dorothy Cross, on the other hand, as a visual artist actively contests that same repression through the images of our visual culture.

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• This I believe to be at the core of the argument so far, and we are forced to reconsider what has passed in what Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson call the, "mainstream of necessary, universal and historical truths". (Nicholson P26, 1990).

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• What is clear from this and of debate is that there is no single solution in the challenge that feminist work has to offer. Women do not fall into neat and homogenous groups that can be accommodated by the old order of a patriarchal theorizing. Feminism recognises that the plurality of all views must be embraced. As Susan Bordo describes it, "this

requires a hyper and pessimistic activism", (Nicholson P27. 1990), not an alliance with one true theory. For no theory - not even one which measures its adequacy in terms of justice to heterogeneity, locality and complexity, can place itself beyond the provisional.



Chapter 2

Gender relations are differentiated and (so far) asymmetric divisions and attributions of human traits and capacities. Through gender relations two types of persons are created: Man and Woman. Man and woman are posited as exclusionary categories. One can be only one gender, never the other or both.

(Nicholson P45. 1990).

The lines of demarcation that masculinity has directed for femininity has instilled a sense of gender norms in society. It is these so called norms that have been actively contested by feminism. The ways in which gender is constructed and presented in the context of a visual art practice has seen a rejection by feminist artists of received opinions about the nature of sexuality.

That Dorothy Cross as a feminist and visual artist has rejected the patriarchal transparency of images along with the harmony and fixity of consciousness that produced them is self evident in her most work.

In *Amazon* Cross pursues a deconstruction of our concepts of biology/sex/gender/nature and as a result highlights the significance the world of patriarchy has had in the construction of those same concepts. *Amazon* consists of a

dressmakers mannequin and is covered with a cowhide. A singular swollen mammary with a suggestion of a male appendage substituting for the nipple stands proud of the chest of the mannequin. By the nature of the mannequin the anonymity of the person is preserved. The torso form presents an area of the body that is the preserve of the reproductive organs. The cowhide indicates a female presence and at the same time Cross undertakes the process of deconstruction of our notion of female identity. We do not as a result find a female figure that is part of what Griselda Pollock describes as,

the sexual economy circulated through paintings and photographs of the man artist in his studies with his woman model.

(Barrett & Phillips P135. 1992).

The Amazon is not the woman model whose swollen breast indicates a state of pregnancy. Cross has set out to fracture and disrupt the appreciation of beauty that is the easy option of patriarchal culture.

The Amazon not only questions gender but at the same time probes one of the central concerns of the human species in the sense that reproduction gives important social meaning to existence.

How then, we are asked, is this anatomical conundrum in the form of an Amazon Warrior going to reproduce its own kind.

This sense of multiple fronts that the **Amazon's** sexuality can be read on sees a deconstruction of gender and its important associations with domination.

No longer will the male testosterone dominate the existence of the **Amazon** name. This confusion that the **Amazon** sets in train clearly places the work in the debate about gender relations. The ambiguous nature of the **Amazon** suggest a body that is not at the beck and call of masculine demands.

In the **Amazon** sexuality is not understood through its connections with genitals. The materials that make up the **Amazon** are suffused with our pre-existing ideas of the role the cow plays as provider of nourishment and mothering to her calf. Cross here understands how sexuality is a representation and how this identity of women is symbolised within a particular body.

Feminists claim that men actively set out to control women's bodies and the **Amazon** as a gender warrior confronts those same restrictions that patriarchy has set for women.

That Dorothy Cross is a practising artist living in Ireland plays no small part in the concerns that occupy her work. There now exists a comprehensive conservatism here that threatens the work of feminist activists who have struggled to secure economic and legal justice for women in Irish society. It seeks like all fundamentalisms to revive and extend

authoritarianism. Recent court decisions have raised alarm bells that have seen basic rights such as the freedom to travel for women curtailed by judgements from the courts.

For some people in Irish society the concept of class, creed, sex have no relevance in a small homogenous society. Feminism is merely seen to be animated by a spirit of resentment where the tactic of blame and triumph over man is the sole objective.

It is therefore important when placing the work of Dorothy Cross in a specific historical context that we recognise political economy has never been a matter for debate in Ireland. As a result the competing philosophies by which other peoples and cultures have organized their lives have not been afforded much consideration. These debates, these ideas have been kept from us. The people of Ireland in the past had to be kept away from strange ideas, from unorthodox thinkers. It is important to consider that this is the area that Dorothy Cross brings the concerns of her work to bear on a landscape devoid of any form of debate concerning gender relations.

In identifying the importance of gender as a social relation Cross has used a work like *Amazon* to explore the areas of social relations that have been suppressed in a country such as Ireland. It was ironic to say the least that a society whose restrictive laws on contraception, sterilization and abortion had the *Amazon* as its representative at the (1993)

Venice Biennale.

The critique that Cross undertakes of the institutional and discursive oppression of the patriarchal state of Ireland, is echoed by Foucault when he describes a sexuality that was controlled but not repressed. Dorothy Cross as a feminist visual artist has intervened in the spaces of representation that have reflected how feminine bodies have transferred sexuality into a discourse that is both psychoanalytic and confessional. This leads me to the work of Foucault and the themes that inform it which in turn leads partly to the theories that surround the work of Dorothy Cross.

Foucault sees the body as central in understanding the oppression of women. This however does not see Foucault's theories take the retrogrative step towards essentialism or biologism. The regulation of the human body is as a cursory glance at the *Amazon* confirmed. In that, we are not witness to the norm that circumscribes the sexual body. Here is a body as Foucault would have described it, "as a profusion of entangled events". (Foucault 1984:89).

The final meaning of the *Amazon* is not constituted in the presentation of a cowhide on a mannequin. The inviolable identity of women for Foucault is produced through different power blocks. These power blocks are contested by Cross in the *Amazon*. Just as Louis McNay describes the task of the historian,

is to uncover the contingent and violent emergence of these regimes in order to shatter the aura of legitimacy.

(McNay P14. 1992).

Dorothy Cross as a feminist visual artist shatters the aura of the rational subject which is also central to the work of Michel Foucault. Cross has recognised how post-structuralist thought, has encountered classical thought. This encounter has been bridged by the discursive use of the body and the **Amazon** is a front line warrior in this war that structures social relations. Foucault sees humanity as not progressing from one combat to the other until it comes to a universal give and take where people come to their senses and replace warfare with law and order. Instead Foucault sees humanity as instilling its many violences into a structure of systems and rules which results in a domino effect that leads from one domination to the other.

The importance of the **Amazon** on a fundamental level could well be aligned to Foucault's theory of the body and the way of imagining the body not as a solid remarkable object; without omitting that from which it is made, with its set of biological prediscursive indispensable qualities.

It is in the discursive constitution of the body that feminist artists like Cross have drawn their inspiration. This is crucial to work produced in Ireland where the structures of

dominance and subordination are deeply embedded in the patriarchal psyche of the nation.

Let us therefore consider the **Amazon** as a warrior or as Cross has told us one who has removed a breast so that the ability to fire arrows at its aggressor would be greater and more accurate. For if these arrows are to fall on target it will be important to understand where they are directed in the first place.

The classical tailors dummy covered with a cowhide is not part of classical thought process of the sculptured torso and its representation of the archetypal rational subject. The rational subject that has displaced the "other" has had its Enlightenment ideas shot through with arrows from the **Amazon**. The deconstructive impulse of feminist discourse see power as not simply confronted by objective truth and reason which ostensibly belong to a patriarchal lineage that is traced back to the Enlightenment. If the purpose of feminist theory is to analyze how we think about gender, then the work of Dorothy Cross through works like **Amazon** certainly make us think about the complex nature of gender.

When we hear Dorothy Cross talk of the male appendage at the tip of the breast of the **Amazon**, the concept of gender based identity is at a remove from the rational concept of male and female.

The Foucauldian body and the feminist visual art critique that is the work of Dororthy Cross are seen here to intersect where sex is treated as a cultural construct. The male appendage at the tip of the **Amazon's** breast is not there to put in place structures of social regulation and the control of the sexuality of the **Amazon**. Instead just as Foucault's theory of the body is the principle instrument and effect of modern disciplinary power; it is the antagonism between mind and body which has become defined as critical to the deconstructive impulse in the work of Cross.

What is it then that Cross is dealing with in a piece such as the **Amazon**? Certainly the exclusionary divisions of man and woman are actively contested. Could it be that the absence of a head on the mannequin is replaced by the phallic tip on the enlarged mammary which questions the very thought processes we apply to biological differences aligned to what is perceived as natural? The concepts we are dealing with must be recognised to be firmly grounded in social relations. It is these social relations that the **Amazon** actively contest's in Cross's attempt to understand reality and how it is structured.

Dorothy Cross as a feminist visual artist recognises the imposition of social relations on our ability to come to terms with gender specificity of the **Amazon**. As a result the structures of relativity that allot gender its male-female role are actively deconstructed in the work.

It would certainly be remiss if we did not return to a point that I believe is central to the presentation of the question of gender in a work like *Amazon*. This has to do with the absence of the classical head whether by omission or otherwise, because when we hear Cross speak of the play of duality that takes place in the piece, the dualism that is critical to classical thought is the Cartesian antagonism between mind and thought.

One way or the other the absence of a head begs the question of the anatomical relationship between the mind and body. The traditional use of torso and the licence that sculpture uses has seen Dorothy Cross appropriate the same licence to draw attention of the viewer to the aesthetic specificity of the body. It maybe as Griselda Pollock has pointed out that looking at women is extremely difficult for men because the body of women has become the sign of danger to themselves. Maybe the *Amazon* offers some insight into that danger that the critical interrogation of exclusionary operations by which positions are established and sees patriarchy well and truly pierced by the arrows of a feminist critique.

I don't say you can't have your fantasies. But at whose cost. That's what most women feel: we are not in this culture, we are objects of it.

(Tylar - Financial Times. Feb 6/7 1993).

The object in this case is the *Amazon* and the question being

asked is: What differences do anatomical specificity make to the fundamental principles of our social interactions?



CHAPTER 3

I want to turn now to the present day revival of the multiple personality diagnosis. For without realising it, don't current medical theories of multiple personality tend simply to replicate Prince's theory of the subject by positing a dichotomy between the already constituted subject and the external trauma? And doesn't that dichotomy serve to rule out of court - to make unthinkable the mimetic dynamic. I've been analyzing here, what are the political implications of my account of history of multiple - personality concept for feminism today?

(Butler Scott. P196. 1992).

This chapter will attempt what Leys describes as unthinkable and bring together the constituted subject and the external trauma that makes for a mimetic dynamic in the work of Dorothy Cross. The *Shark Lady in a Ballgown* (1989) will provide the subject and Freud's theories can assist in that analysis.

The organization and reproduction of sex and gender are actively contested by the use of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in the work of Dorothy Cross. It is evident from the work that Freud's understanding of sexuality plays a significant role in the theoretical basis of the work.

That is not to say that a cosy arrangement exists between

Freud's theories and the practice of Cross. We will see on one level how Freud's theories integrate with the work and on the other how a postmodernist critique frustrates that objective.

To put this in context one needs to look at a specific work by Cross where this contention is exemplified. When we come to look at a work such as **Shark Lady in a Ballgown** we see a piece that is ambivalent and contradictory, a work that is doubly encoded, that constitutes not a break but a challenge to culture from within. In this case Cross provides the challenge from within Freudian theory.

The challenge that occurs in the work (be it either a conscious or unconscious decision by Cross to actively contest the misogynist in Freud) is played out in a piece like the **Shark Lady in a Ballgown**.

In the sculptures of Dorothy Cross a recurring feature of the work tends to question gender personality and sexual orientation. The **Shark Lady** that wears a woven bronze dress not only questions gender but in a direct way questions Freud's theories that surround that debate.

For example when Freud is accused of misogyny the example that is sometimes cited is his declaration regarding women's contribution to culture. In that Freud relegates women's contribution to an area like the invention of (weaving).

The significance of a ballgown in woven bronze could well refer in its process to the misogynist in Freud's theories and as such is a pertinent reminder of that fact. Dorothy Cross is aware that Freud has drawn open the curtains of the unconscious which allows us a view of the interior landscape of the psyche, just as the chain mail weave of a metal gown as opposed to the malleable weave of a natural silk says something of the person who wears it. The conclusion we come to about that person who draws woven metal about its self begs a question of the viewer. Is it that, the **Shark Lady** not only wishes to cover her body with a uniform reserved for princesses, but also to conceal another landscape of the psyche, that of personal identity? From this analysis we will see the **Shark Lady** as Foucault might have described her as an individual circulating "among the threads of power", (Nicholson P169. 1990).

The inclination of the **Shark Lady** could well be that of someone who dresses to kill. The homeland of the psyche that produced the **Shark Lady** may have its cinderellas and ugly sisters, but in this fairytale we could well be looking at the magical transformation of gender.

In attempting to identify the **Shark Lady** we are in effect considering the construction of sexual identity and sexual difference. We can look to the psyche of the society that the **Shark Lady** has emerged from, which may give us some idea as to how the Lady became sexed and gendered. But in this case my

thesis must contend that it is Freud who can best direct us to some knowledge of the **Shark Lady in a Ballgown**.

Freud's contention that there is no set piece development for human sexuality is developed in the work of Dorothy Cross. Just as when we discussed the sculpture of the **Amazon**, its as if in the work of Cross we somehow encounter a libido that has not taken up a final position. The **Shark Lady** exemplifies this position in that we do not find some kind of innate femininity or masculinity under the veil of a bronze ballgown.

What we do find however is a multiple personality or as Ruth Leys describes it as a disassociation of consciousness that is the multiple personality.

which the multiple personality concept functions as a switch point between two competing models - the first mimetic and the second antimimetic.

(Butler Scott. P174. 1992)

Leys goes on to argue that out of this duality comes personal identity and gender formation. This in turn is what gives the **Shark Lady** her originality and historical specificity.

If then the **Shark Lady** is given to imitation and mimicry which is an integral part of her personal identity personified by its appurtenances in the form of a ballgown etc. This, then is the fabricated lady or woman Freud speaks of who is made

and not born. That we have a phallic body cum head in the form of a shark with either testicles or breasts serves further the continuum of gender confusion. **Shark Lady in a Ballgown** must surely personify Freud's contention that there is nothing bound to happen in the evolution of the sexual subject.

The polymorphous nature of the piece has a sense of making and weaving of ideas in the ballgown that could well reflect Freud's understanding of the way gender personality and sexual orientation are woven in the pre-oedipal mother - daughter relationship. It is at this point we see how Freud describes the interweaving of psychological and social forms of gender oppression. The Phallic Mother is how Freud describes the mother who is viewed by the child as being the supreme power. Cross could well have constructed a series of visual signals in the **Shark Lady** that maybe read and understood by memories in the unconscious of our own childhood. The **Shark Lady** may be all knowing and all omnipotent and Cross knows that we may only receive this on a subliminal level. The **Shark Lady** as a result inspires a combination of security and admiration mixed with reverential fear.

The Mother by Freud's reckoning is phallic prior to the child entering the oedipal stage. Certainly the attention the **Shark Lady** demands from a psychoanalytic perspective places her in the running for the Phallic - Powerful Mother. The **Shark Lady** Cross presents us with has in its acquisition of psychic

femininity been able to avoid the form of repression that is associated with bi-sexuality. Consequently the Lady is now on her way to "Paths that open to further development". (Chodorow P169. 1989).

In explaining the development of the girl Freud argues that the penis of the father becomes a symbol of refuge from the mother but not as a barrier to their relationship. In the pre-oedipal period that formed the development of the **Shark Lady** she seems to have literally taken some of the identity of the Phallus and suffused it into her own identity.

The **Shark Lady** as a result has avoided the label of castrated mother. Therefore this is no penisless creature that the male can feel contempt for: Freud describes the castrated mother as recognised by the child to be different to the father. The awareness of the child has reached a level that he (sic) discerns the absence of a penis in the mother. The material body of the mother is a poor imitation of the father's in that she has been denied the phallus. The child perceives the mother's punishment as that of castration which in turn instils a feeling of fear and anxiety in the child.

Cross is here taking one of the central planks of radical feminism and instilling it into the **Shark Lady**. To explain this we need to think of the **Shark Lady** as a mother who will not instill the fear and anxiety into her own offspring. Freud's label of Castrated Mother does not apply to the **Shark**

Lady. The question of what it is, to be a woman, and how that femininity and sexuality are defined by patriarchy are met head on in the **Shark Lady**. Cross is here attempting to contribute to the debate on how women can begin to redefine these same questions for themselves.

This is one of the reasons that any possible male prodigy of the **Shark Lady** will not be confused with his mother as a love object because he will find at one and the same time a mother who can render the penis status to another history, there will be no need for disassociation from the world of the female. The strength and power of male society will have its foundations dissolved.

This reconstruction that woman undergoes in the guise of the **Shark Lady** is not a passive piece of plastic surgery. The passivity that Freud speaks of, regarding the girl's journey to heterosexuality, may well be contested by Cross in her suggestions of a lady as a shark rather than the passive debutante. The reading of a shark in this context leaves little room for ambiguity (the notion of a passive basking shark does not apply!).

Dorothy Cross has used the **Shark Lady** to bring an imagination to bear on a female subject, who, if we are to believe Freud, identifies with her place in society as female who fails to fulfil her desire or expectation. This sense of disillusionment sees the female assume her appointed place in

society which means curtailing "masculine traits" and employing feminine traits such as passivity.

In Freudian theory the immediate response to the sight of a woman brings strong instinctive feelings that are incompatible (pleasure/awe) (phallic mother) and fear/anxiety and aversion (castrated mother). These are the outward aspects when we view women from Freud's perspective. This division of women into two arousers of contradictory emotions such as fear/pleasure is brought to bear on aspects that are connected with the Shark Lady in a Ballgown.

The pleasure and fear we experience from the Shark Lady does not position her between absolute aggression and absolute victim. The dichotomy that Cross has constructed in the form of the Shark Lady is not meant to be read as a victim of personal trauma. Cross has in creating the Shark Lady produced a symbol for all women who, like Ruth Leys has described it, have experienced,

The traumatic event that cannot be remembered indeed why it is relived in the transferential relationship not in the norm of recounting of a past event but of a mimetic identification with another (who is no other) in the present - in the timelessness of the unconscious - that is characterised by a profound amnesia or absence from the self.

(Butler Scott P201. 1992).

In Ley's critique of the analysis of Miss Beauchamp the former diagnosis may apply. But in the case of the **Shark Lady in a Ballgown** clear memories of the social relations that have subordinated the interests of women are not characterised by "a profound amnesia or absence from the self". (Butler Scott P201. 1992).

What we can discern from this analysis is that the ancestry of the **Shark Lady** has long since removed itself from the oedipal triangle. Therefore the acting out of the **Shark Lady** has clearly been at the behest of the artist. The most intimate interiority of the personality of the **Shark Lady** must therefore be constituted in the unconscious of Cross. This is evidenced by Cross' use of a fish in the form of a Shark which acts as a metaphor for the foetal form that may once have emerged out of the primeval midstein without a socialised gendered nature. But in this case the fish is also emerging out of the feelings Cross has for water and the ultimate freedom it provides by not being connected to anything.

The **Shark Lady** in turn is not connected to some patriarchal lineage in the distant tides of history. Cross sees how everything flows in the unconscious and how that same flow is disrupted in the conscious of the feminist artist. The structures the **Shark Lady** encounters in the world of the conscious may as Cross describes them, become,

Walls to get over and gates to open and close. Its about

the lack of freedom and yet the possibility of change.

(Dorothy Cross EBB. P10)

In a particular way Cross revokes the work of Freud that concerns itself with masculinity rather than femininity, whose distinctness is associated with loss, the giving up of togetherness that is the link to the Mother. However, if we are to consider what Freud describes as the oedipal transition, where the girl is allowed to continue an affectionate relationship with the mother, this attachment becomes significant in the girl's development because the rupture that the boy undergoes is not experienced by her. This allows the mature woman the ability to merge her own identity and this is the same concept which makes for the merging that takes place in the *Shark Lady in a Ballgown*.

The specific nature of the male is organised through separation and later in life men unconsciously feel their identity threatened when they develop close ties with other people.

However, we see women's self esteem is preserved in the case of the *Shark Lady*. The loss of esteem in this case is at the gate of masculinity that does not open to paths for further development. If for that matter the ball the *Shark Lady* is about to attend is masked, the mimicry the *Shark Lady* is accustomed to will make her feel right at home, and if Freud is correct many of the Lords will feel distinctly

uneasy.

This analysis of the Shark Lady in a Ballgown I have undertaken may in the end be another story about women's resistance against patriarchy, but as Linda Singer describes it,

This is complicated by our own multiple investments in forms of knowledge and fictions, in the forms of writing designed for legislation, that finds itself confronted with forms of power immune to legislation. But as makers and readers of stories, we also recognise the possibilities of contradictory interpretation, multiple readings and effects. So, if the fiction of some conspirational connection between feminists and post-modernists engenders anxiety in the hearts and heads of the hegemonically powerful and institutionally entrenched - this might be a story worth repeating - at least until such time as such stories are no longer necessary.

(Butler Scott. P475. 1992).

In conclusion the story of the Shark Lady in a Ballgown may find a more eloquent narrator elsewhere but the substance of the story will remain open to multiple interpretations as long as the exclusion and discrimination against women continues, or if, we are to believe Juliet Mitchell that,

Freud's theory is a myth, a story of a story - the

subjects narrative structuring of him or herself. It stops, it fails, it needs re-telling another way.

(Joan Fowler Cat: EBB 1988).



29

CHAPTER 4

The door of the cell is open. On a pile of straw on the floor is a pig embryo. There is a green light. On the wall is a calendar, on each page - each month - is an image of an adult pig photographed through the peephole of the same cell.

In a State. Dorothy Cross.

The site specific installation described above was shown in the east wing of Kilmainham Gaol during March/April 1991. The artists participating in the exhibition were asked to consider through their work the idea of national identity surrounding the jail and the concept of imprisonment. The concept of imprisonment did not have to specifically apply to Kilmainham or any other prison; but to deal in general with imprisonment.

A concern of this chapter will be to view how Dorothy Cross with this directive created the opportunity to enact a counter discourse against the hierarchial oppositions in the form of the patriarchal power of the State. The work *Caught in a State* is a good example of how feminist visual art intervention succeeds in pointing up the hegemony that has appointed itself caretaker or for that matter the jailer of the physical body of women.

An important consideration when attempting to formulate a critique of the State is recognising that power is not the

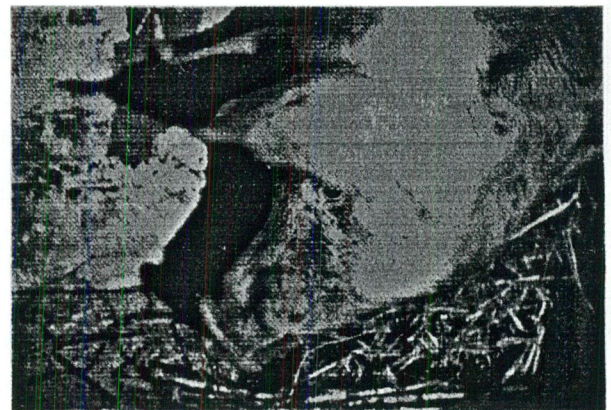
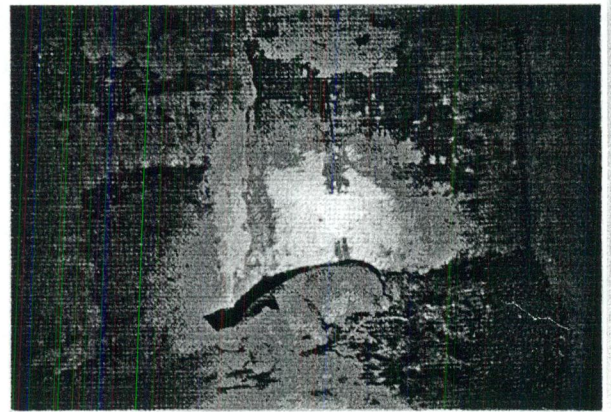
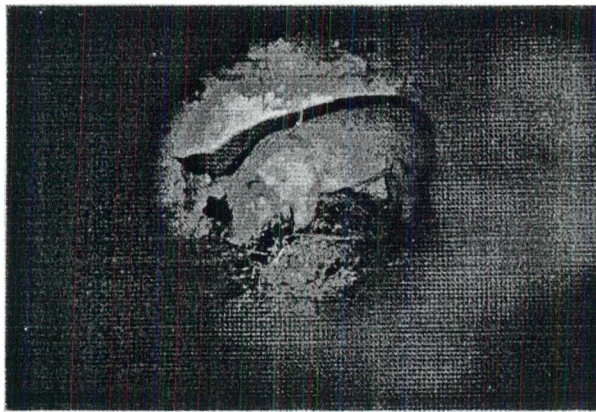
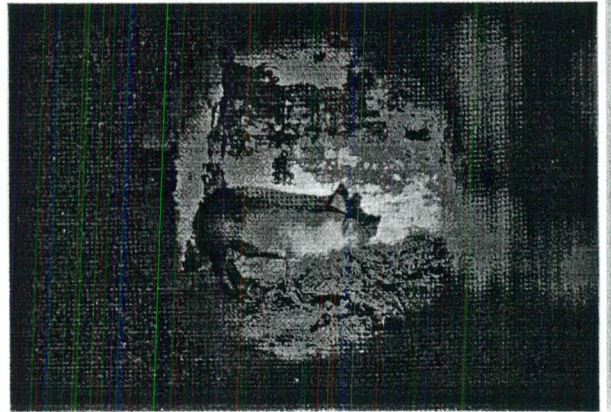
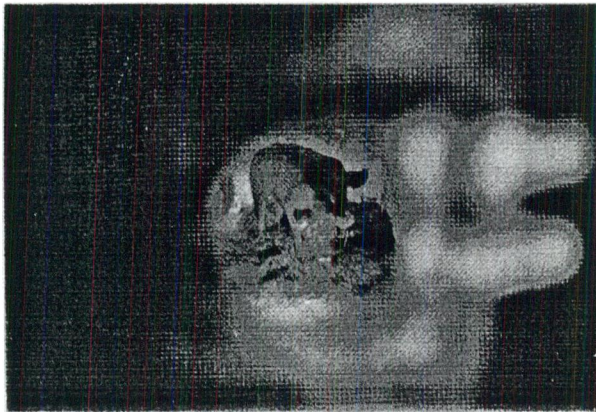
sole preserve of a social hierarchy. There is now a recognition among feminists that the concept of the state as presented by the old order of the left needs a radical overhaul.

This is very evident when women's politics are integrated with poststructuralist theories. Feminists have only to look to Marxist politics to confirm the lack of progress there has been in the emancipation of women. On the other hand Foucault has offered a critique of power as a relation that finds itself woven into the very fabric of society.

The power model could not be described in typical pyramid structure, where power emanates from the top. The old adage of the them and us situation that separates the rulers from the ruled cannot explain the multiplicity of centres of resistance to the innumerable relations of inequality and domination that manifest in the immediate world about us.

This, however, should not mean abandoning the state as a category that feminists need to concern themselves with. But instead it must be considered within the multiplicity of force relations that Foucault describes as

imminent in the sphere in which they operate and which they constitute their own organisations; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus



CAUGHT IN A STATE

forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.

(Foucault P92. 1981).

This gives us some idea as to the theoretical background against which Cross was situating intentionally her installation *Caught in a State*.

The fact that we find a pig embryo lying on a bed of straw in a now defunct prison cell begs the question as to what specific issue Cross is dealing with? The use of an embryo belonging to an animal whose only source of light is provided by a green light bulb. The calendar on the wall that accompanies the embryo show a series of photographs of a mature sow taken in the same cell, through the peephole that allows the only view of the cell once the door is closed.

We could surmise that the dead embryo of the pig belongs to the photographed sow. One of the colloquialisms widely used of the pig is its tendency to be obstinate. It may well indicate how Cross understands that if feminism is to make some headway against the subjugation of patriarchy. The obstinate nature of the sow may well need to be adopted if

women are to avoid being governed and regulated. Through the obstinate pig Cross also recognises how feminist discourses like a visual art practice can offer a medium where the individual can resist prevailing subject positions.

In effect Cross is resisting as Foucault calls it, "the threefold process where the feminine body analyzed - qualified and disqualified". (Foucault 1981. P104).

Foucault goes on to describe the body as having absorbed sexuality to a point where it has been combined with medical practices that would see to it that sexuality would be fruitful and serve the needs of family life. In other words the children would have a mother committed to their care through the totality of their development. The obligation that rested on the shoulders of women was assured by the particular moral excellence that their biological responsibility demanded.

Contributing to the emotionally disturbing effect of the dead embryo is its illumination by the green light, the national colour, the green light might well reflect the light emanating from our founding fathers. To explain this further we need only look to the first lines of the proclamation of 1916.

"In the name of God and the dead generations", (Proclamation 1916) encapsulates the psyche of the Irish nation and could well be a date on the calendar that not only registers the

development of the embryo, but in its own way dates the historical specificity that concerns the work of Cross.

The historical specificity we can attach to the installation *Caught in a State* can only be provisional but I do think it important that we do see the piece as very much identified through the time and place the specific installation was situated.

The visual signs are all too clear and it would be remiss not to see the work within the context of constitutional amendments that have inscribed laws that directly affect women in Ireland. The eighties and early nineties have seen a constant political struggle between those who want to confine women to the permanent status of mother and those who see a wider role as an opposition to traditional thinking. Artists, among others, have played their part in seeking to change assumptions about female nature. Dorothy Cross through works like *Caught in a State* sets out to resist those same laws that continue to embody the philosophy of the needs of the patriarchal state.

The implications of such a situation within the nation state has significant effects on women;

if the normative woman is a mother, then the mother nature is one of the linchpins of sexed identity and therefore, by the oppositional logic of gender, one

ground of the intelligible masculinity of men.

(Poovey P243. 1992)

Foucault argues that the body of women has been defined by its maternal duties and from this we can discern a critical effect of *Caught in a State*. The social practice of maternity supersedes any concern about reproduction and this is central to the issues surrounding *Caught in a State*. Cross has provided an opening if not an escape from this prison cell that of the maternal body. And as a consequence Cross has enabled a visual representation to critique what is considered natural in one's basic sexual rights.

The question we must now ask ourselves is, are we responding to the concepts of what Cross is presenting us in the installation *Caught in a State*? On viewing a pig embryo on straw recollections of another nativity comes to mind. It may not be a deconstruction of the traditional crib as is more obvious in Cross's *Pieta* piece. But it could well represent the death of another patriarchal body in the form of the traditional state. The dilemma that the calendar produces invites us to question the time issue of what constitutes the living being in a state of gestation in the womb. What are the circumstances of this gestation? We have arrived somehow after the event. Finally we are left with those who apportion blame on women as alone responsible for this embryo whose evanescence is inhibited by the green light of a nation. Just as we spoke in Chapter 3 of the court decision which

ostensibly denied a woman to leave the country to procure an abortion. There will be no need for the courts to sit and make a judgement about this embryo for this little pig who is surely **Caught in a State** or as Adrienne Rich describes it,

When I try to return to the body of the young woman of twenty six, pregnant for the first time, who fled from the physical knowledge of her pregnancy and at the same time from her intellectual vocation, I realise that I was effectively alienated from my real body and my real spirit of institution - not the facts of motherhood. The institution - the foundation of human society as we know it - allowed me only certain views, certain expectations whether embodied in the booklet in my obstetricians waiting room, the novels I have read, my mother-in-law's approval, my memories of my own mother, the Sistine Madonna or she of the Michelangelo Pieta, the floating notion of the woman pregnant is a woman in her fulfilment or, simply, a woman waiting.

Adrienne Rich.

The Power of the Mother.

The sow in **Caught in a State** is the same metaphor for the woman. But the days on the calendar signify much more than some distant expectation of parturition that never arrives.

CONCLUSION

It should be fairly apparent from the work we have considered that it belongs to an emergent political force of feminist art. As at the outset our objective was not to evaluate all the implications of this political force. Instead the critique we have witnessed has offered us an alternative way of seeing in relation to an inherited sense of a world dominated by patriarchal icons of which the traditional Pieta is a prime example.

The response that Cross has produced to the hegemony of male iconography has placed the issue of gender as integral to the idea base of her practice. This in turn has entailed a journey through a network of images that offers an opposing set to the currency of male / masculine representations.

Cross has been able to suffuse the work with a sense of what it is that constitutes gender role and identity, and at the same time deconstructs the relationship that subordinates the visual representations of women.

This has been achieved by a consciousness that is pro-active in recognizing the construction of symbols that endorse sexual difference predicted not on psychological or anatomical distinction but on an inequitable dispensation of power. The

work as a result has analyzed the framework within which the discursive practices of art have been maintained within a dominant aesthetic institution.

The new forms of subjectivity as in the **Amazon** and **Shark Lady in a Ballgown** have produced ways of thinking with regards to gender and the way it is presented and represented.

This transformation aligns the work of Cross to the broader challenge of feminist art against the patriarchal power that has presided over images, and importantly in the meanings that reside in those same images.

But what marks the work of Cross is the historical specificity with which it proposes its radical interrogation of identity. In Ireland as elsewhere there exists a complex cultural identity, and it is within this particular background that Cross focuses her critique as "a mode of explicitly criteriological inquiry". (McNay P126. 1992)

From this inquiry by Cross we have witnessed an effective engagement with what it is that constitutes power. And in turn this interaction with the current rupture and discontinuity that now affects the patriarchal nation of Ireland positions Cross' work to effectively interrogate such a state.

In conclusion we could well credit Cross with deploying an aesthetic and or politics of self-actualization as one means of social change in the realm of representation, remembering that identity itself is given precisely through systems of representation.



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