

Feminism, Politics and Social Commentary

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(Originally included this quote: "For us feminist thought represents a transformation of consciousness, social forms and models of action." *Feminist Studies*, slogan for a feminist journal published by the University of Maryland.

The majority of works on display in "Feminism, Politics, and Social Commentary," suggest only the most superficial commitment to either art or feminism. The very title of the show suggest that feminism, social commentary, and politics are separate entities, when in fact they are inseparable.

Among the stronger works are those by Mel Watkins. Scale, simplicity, and a psychological edge give her large pencil drawings a conviction lacking in most of the other work. Another visually strong piece is Nancy Meyer's *In/visible Structure*, which suggests through photocollages and poetry arranged in a vertebrae-like format, the injustices of poverty. While the writing is awkward, the syncopated rhythm of the imagery is formally sophisticated.

Other works with potential are Eileen Cave's monoprint collages on social issues, such as *Motherless Children* and Menuchas' graphite drawing *Mask III*. The latter displays a soft handling and makes a clear, if oversimplified, statement on the muffling of women. Both of these works suggest artists with social concerns and some artistic facility.

The rest of the exhibition divides between stylistic squalor in the form of weak abstraction and cliched references to pop culture. The inclusion of a male artist on the subject of rape has a questionable relevance for a "feminist" exhibition.

But the main question is: why can't the New Art Center put together a serious show of tough work? Clearly the Center is equivocating about its commitment to a strong space for art by feminist women – that is obvious from its recent name change from Washington Women's Art Center to New Art Center. But does it have to equivocate about the kind of art that it is showing as well?

Through its weaknesses this show is anti-feminist. Rather than take a stand, the gallery has settled for safe art that is almost shallow enough for a suburban shopping mall. What is D.C.'s problem with women and art? First the National Museum of Women and Art declares itself for the Junior League and "not feminist." Now this small center, a one time focus for radical art by women has been diluted into a backwater of provinciality.