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## The Heretics, from Prince Street to Galisteo

Written by [Ellen Berkovitch](#) // December 7, 2009 // [Art](#), [Film](#), [Santa Fe](#) // [2 Comments](#)



Pat Steir

Pat Steir was one. So were Ida Applebroog, Harmony Hammond, May Stevens, Carolee Schneeman, Cecilia Vicuna, Emma Amos, Joyce Kozloff, Mary Beth Edelson, Joan Braderman (who made the new documentary, [The Heretics](#)), Lucy Lippard, Elizabeth Murray. See for yourself. In a scene in the movie [The Heretics](#) (2009), painter Miriam Schapiro leans in to read aloud a block of Adrienne Rich text on one of her works, and opines that she might cry. But it wasn't the verse that Schapiro read, but this Rich line — *a wild patience has taken me this far* — that cries to be remembered in connection to the new Joan Braderman documentary film about the women who formed, created and recreated the journal *Heresies* (1977-92/New York City). They strove as they did so to perfect and redefine the relationship of words and images to experience, all of it distilled and communicated through women's work.

*Heresies* was a printed journal that coalesced at the point of a movement whose only organizing force was the non-hierarchical female in self-discovery as an artist, writer, critic, and unabashed feminist. That these women had a lot to say goes without saying. They wished in their art their performance their writing and their graphics to cover sex, gender, politics, class, ornament, crime — and didn't fear to take the heat for hosting conflicting politics that invited strong caller response when the journal came out. (After every issue, the editors of that issue invited the “public” to come in and comment. Whoa baby. )



### Covers of the Heresies Publication

For the lesbian issue, no non-gay women were permitted to participate editorially. It sounds like it took an 18-hour meeting, maybe over as many weeks, to name Heresies (thank you to Susan Sontag, for the line of prosody that led to eureka). Every woman had been asked to contribute possibilities. Messy democracy in action. The list of cross-outs in the journals shows festivity, fractiousness. How long those meetings lasted! goes the periodic quip about the woman whose loft it was, just wishing she could go to bed.

The cast has a strong Galisteo, New Mexico corpus, in writer and critic Lucy Lippard, painters Harmony Hammond and May Stevens - real life pals still working their art lives in New Mexico. The filmmaker Joan Braderman was a heretic, as were New York artists Ida Applebroog, Pat Steir, Mary Miss, Carolee Schneeman, Miriam Schapiro, Joyce Kozloff, the whole pattern-and-decoration movement. Throw in studio visits to Emma Amos and Cecilia Vicuna, and tours of the brilliant architecture of a Spanish architect who built on a rock, and youve got a whos who of then New York women recalled as trying to avoid electrocution on the AC current, while electrifying the culture by ripping womens perspective out of wraps.



Lucy Lippard

This was a New York movement and don't you forget it (right up to today. Janet Froehlich, the creative director of the New York Times magazine, was a heretic). The movement did of course get legs, in a big way, as the women of this movie are wont to remind, but were not looking here at Chicago or Minneapolis or San Francisco. So as part of the text of the story told in *Heresies*, read between the lines to the old city of New York, with lofts gone vacant and cheap to rent. Even so, okay, the women's movement is international and Picasso did not “invent” collage.



Ida Applebroog (Photo: Gideon Horowitz )

So, without trying to sum up the disparate lives captured in the film, this movie is in one sense a beacon — look how well these artists did! — and in another sense it is a caution that is only partially expressed. The caution involves how feminists of record seized a moment that endured 15 years, but have lived to lament seeing feminism become a dirty word.

There is little mention of the ensuing Women's Action Coalition of Elizabeth Murray's studio (and other places) in the early 90s. The inside baseball of the show, however, is kept somewhat to a minimum in favor of telling a

non-hierarchical story about women of exhilarating brilliance, who weren't afraid to inhabit their brilliance together as partially a coming-of-age. In toto now they justifiably seem sorry that to call yourself a feminist has become so discredited culturally. Heresies is a history that if I were still teaching college contemporary art I would make required viewing of undergraduates.

As an art critic I could go on to some extent about what the movie did not cover — the traveling show, WACK!, curated by Connie Butler; which delivered back to front pages the work of these artists. The movie indeed goes to some lengths, perhaps too far, to be subtle. For instance, when it tracks Joyce Kozloff getting off the vaporetto in Venice to go install her relief maps of spots the US government has bombed, assembled as elaborate fabricated seeds cum walk-in grenades, it doesn't make explicit what a big thing that is. I thought to myself her works (snap!) had the Lego mechanics of a woman who might have lobbied hard for childcare back when. But these connections between work and what work was meant to say, as well as how it evolved, were eschewed by the film, partly perhaps for fear of veering into didacticism. I'm going to allow myself to sing a few names of the fallen, like my good friend Diane Buckler, an LA artist who taught at UCLA and passed away in 2008; Hannah Wilke; Elizabeth Murray; Ana Mendieta; Jeanne-Claude.

But mostly, my want-to-cry moment hit me when what flashed on the screen were new blocks of words about what we thought we had accomplished, then, and how things look now.

Abortion getting eliminated from the health reform bill hadn't happened by this movie's final cut, but is just the latest and most egregious example of what has become of women's rights. Still, I like to remind myself that we, women, warriors, powerful fields of cultural practice, helped Obama win the election. And goddess preserve us from the alternative.

Top Photo: Pat Steir applying a soap ground, San Francisco 1993.

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### About the Author



Ellen Berkovitch founded AdobeAirstream in 2009 as the West's first contemporary art and culture online magazine. Her 25-year journalism career includes having been editor in chief of Trend magazine (Santa Fe), American Jewelry magazine (New York). She has written for Artforum, ArtUS, Art&Auction, The New York Times, Metalsmith, New Art Examiner, Saatchi Online Magazine, and more.

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