

by Marcia G. Yerman

It is my pleasure to be associated with Edge Magazine, as the contributing columnist for Art on the Edge. I come to this endeavor as a writer, curator, and an artist.

In 1990, I stepped out of my role as a painter to curate my first exhibition entitled *Visions of Life – Art Inspired by Personal History and Psychological Events*. It was an exhibit that took place in conjunction with the Women's Caucus for Art National Conference. Tired of feeling unempowered by the traditional artworld structure, I decided to mount a show featuring women artists who also used gender and identity issues as a basis for their imagery. The response to a call for entries was enormous. Slides were often accompanied by letters describing the struggles of producing work that galleries were not interested in exhibiting or promoting. *Visions of Life* had a specific multicultural point of view. What was revealed was how much these individual artists had in common. The more personal a work is...the greater its universality.

Originally, I had submitted the proposal as "The Legacy of Frida Kahlo." The title was rejected as too obscure, but the concept was embraced. For many years Frida Kahlo has been an inspiration to women artists. Kahlo said, "I paint my own reality." Andre Breton, the French poet and leader of the surrealist movement, described her paintings as "a ribbon around a bomb." Her commitment to portraying her interior life continues to resonate

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and set an example. The story of Frida Kahlo entered mainstream culture in 2002, when Salma Hayek portrayed the artist in the role that earned her an Oscar nomination for Best Actress.

My efforts to empower women in the art field next found expression in the cable presentation *Women In Art*. The segments featured interviews and presentations of women working to create a niche in the artworld. In no way would it be inappropriate to call them "women entrepreneurs".

The progression from independent curator, and creator of projects tailored to bring attention to under-recognized women artists, has paved the way to this opportunity at Edge Magazine. I want to take Edge readers on a journey that will address a wide range of topics. In addition to profiles of women in the visual arts who have pioneered and made major contributions, there will be reviews of noteworthy exhibits.

I plan to discuss how you, as an individual, can bring art into your life. Too many women have been intimidated about becoming owners of original artwork. Fear and insecurity about making a purchase in an area they may be unfamiliar with (unlike clothes or jewelry!), have often held them back. My goal is to introduce you to a new point of view, and to encourage you to take a leap of faith into previously uncharted territory. I invite you to send me e-mails with comments or questions. It is all about accessibility.

Most of all, I look forward to sharing my experiences and love of art with you. Living with art is a wonderful way to enrich our lives, and soothe our souls...no small feat in these tumultuous times.

**Marcia G. Yerman** is based in New York City. As an artist she has exhibited widely. She was commissioned by Absolut Vodka to be one of their "Artists of the 90's". Her work is narrative and symbolic, and chronicles her universe through personal iconography (<http://www.marciagyerman.com>). She was previously the consulting curator at the Locus Media Gallery in Soho, and continues to organize independent exhibitions. Recently, she founded Sybil Berg Contemporary Art, an art consultancy that focuses on contemporary women artists ([www.sybilbergca.com](http://www.sybilbergca.com)). In addition to articles on art, she has also written profiles and features.

# THE 3RD ANNUAL AAF CONTEMPORARY ART FAIR

The 3rd Annual AAF Contemporary Art Fair was held at Pier 92 in Manhattan from October 28 – October 31. Launched under the banner name The Affordable Art Fair in 1999, the event was founded by Will Ramsey, a London gallerist. Three years prior, Ramsey had opened a space called Will's Art Warehouse. His goal was to specialize in a range of affordable contemporary art by under-recognized artists, making the work accessible to a variety of potential collectors. His success motivated him to transplant the concept to a grand-scale venue. Having definitively achieved this in London, the fair has since expanded to six cities around the world. The newest addition will be San Francisco, in June 2005.

The opening night preview was an evening to benefit the Agnes Martin Fellowship Fund of Columbia University's School of the Arts. Agnes Martin, the renowned Abstract Expressionist painter, attended Teachers College at Columbia University in the 1940's. The fund provides fellowship support to the school's graduate visual artists, whose work was featured in an exhibition in the lobby.

This year, the fair welcomed attendees with the new title AAF Contemporary Art Fair. The concept of making original artwork under \$5,000 accessible to both seasoned and first time buyers remained the same. A series of lectures, free with the price of admission, was offered to educate novice collectors. Topics included "For Love or Money: How to build a Collection" and "Setting the Aesthetic: Living and Designing with Art." The panels were comprised of curators, gallery owners, architects, editors, and art advisors. There were print-making demonstrations, which served to build an understanding of how prints are made. Saturday and Sunday had art-making activities for children, a bonus for couples that wanted to make the day a family affair. On view were the works of emerging as well as established artists. Drawing, painting, prints, photography, sculpture, and video were represented.

There was a multitude of art to see. Over 130 galleries were exhibiting, with about 25% from locations outside of the United States. Dealers from London, Mexico City, Toronto, and Venezuela shared the huge pier floor with New York City galleries such as Nancy Hoffman and Robert Steele. Also having a presence was Artists Space, which was founded in 1972 as one of the first alternative galleries. Thirty years later, they continue to provide exhibition opportunities for new art with the goal of fostering "an appreciation for the vital role that artists play in our community." Independent Curators International had staff members available at their booth to discuss their mission, which is to "enhance the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through traveling exhibitions."

Presiding over the event with a manner that was both friendly and efficient was the director, Helen Allen. Answering questions and troubleshooting any issues that are bound to come up in a show of this magnitude, Allen's calm demeanor is the result of years of experience in the artworld. Previously an art consultant for private and corporate clients, Allen has worked with Christie's in the contem-

porary art department in Rome and New York. Several weeks later she was able to tell me that approximately 13,000 people attended the 2004 fair, that one in four visitors to AAF bought a work of art, and that sales totaled three million dollars over the course of four days. Allen expressed her point of view succinctly by stating, "The most important thing to consider in buying a work of art is whether you love it." She continued, "If you can't get a work out of your mind, you have connected with it. In collecting contemporary – emerging artists – it is important to remember that artists fall in and out of favor all the time...but if you connect with a work of art on an emotional or intellectual level, you will get joy from it for years to come."

Among the many booths that I visited was the Koelsch Gallery from Houston, Texas. Franny Koelsch opened the doors to her gallery in 1994. Formerly, she had been involved in the world of fashion where she had come in contact with "numerous women who enjoyed visual stimulation, but who did not understand that their life could include art." One of the focal points of the gallery is to "exhibit classic women's work that has been taken to a fine art level." Bettie Ward's embroidery series falls right into that category. Using traditional stitches and execution, it juxtaposes the techniques of sewing with contemporary subjects.

Ellen Frances Tuchman was on-site discussing her mixed-media on Mylar works comprised of matchbook covers, colored pencil, paint, beads, and thread. She spoke of how her art dealt "with modern women" and "the untold hours of frequently under-appreciated efforts in doing ritual artwork." The pieces ranged in price from \$200 to \$1500. Another artist represented by Koelsch was Donna Rosenthal. Her sculptures hang from the wall and are constructed from the pages of vintage romance novels, text, and steel. They address issues of intimacy, insecurity, and expectations. Often presented in male and female pairs, they feature statements placed on the man's suit jacket and the woman's dress bodice. Each reflects individual quotes of longing such as *She Said She'd Always Hold My Hand...He Said He'd Always Hug Me*. These dual sculptures sell for \$2800.

Koelsch discussed her realization about "the power of living with art" and how "art touched my soul and enriched my existence." She has made it a goal to help people learn how to allow their lives to be influenced and enriched by art. She noted, "After ten very rewarding years in business, many of my early clients are now active collectors."

For those ready to take the plunge, wrapping stations were available to facilitate taking home new purchases. For individuals still acquainting themselves with the world of art, a visit to the D.A.P. Distributed Art Publishers book display was a must. Their extensive catalogue includes subjects ranging from African Art to Digital Arts. During the fair, they were taking orders on the first volume of "Andy Warhol's Interview: The Crystal Ball of Pop Culture." With books from top international publishers and museums, D.A.P.'s selection of titles ensured that no one had to go home empty handed.