

Joyce Pomeroy Schwartz

I grew up in Brooklyn. My father was an interior designer. My mother was a typical housewife of the forties, raising her children and caring for her home. A very dominant, domineering woman with lots of energy, which would have been better directed if she had worked. When you talked to her in her eighties, she talked mostly about the few years before she was married when she worked and managed a store, and how much responsibility she had. She never quite got over that early experience of being independent and being on her own. She got married and became a housewife because that was what you were supposed to do. People in those days did what they were supposed to do, and wanted others to know that. It was a different generation. I saw the energy that my mother had, and I realized that I had better use mine constructively instead of driving everybody crazy.

I have a brother who is a prominent architect here in New York. We are very close. He has been a big influence in terms of pointing me towards the architecture of context, which is what my work is about. I was interested in art and anthropology, and never wanted to be involved in interior design or architecture. I ran from it. Actually, I studied English Literature and History and Philosophy in college, but I painted.

I started off my education with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and American History from Hunter. I got my Masters in Art Education at New York University. By then I was working in the arts. I had always painted in school. I wanted to be an art major. My parents discouraged me because then the artist was the bohemian, living in Greenwich Village, never getting married and sleeping around. So I was a good little girl.

When I was in school it was the McCarthy era. There was tremendous repression. It was a terrible time in terms of people being fearful of speaking out. But if you are a student of American history, you realize that fundamentally the Constitution and the Bill of Rights gives us rights. And we must be on our guard against the people who don't really see it in depth, and would nick and cut away for immediate personal gain, or needs, or interests. I think it's a danger. So I was always politically involved.

I realize now that my great interest in public art, as opposed to easel art or studio art, is really because I think it is more satisfying to have art in a public context. I have a social orientation that is served by public art, which also serves my personal need for being involved with the artist. The artist as a creator, the artist as a person who is always thinking ahead and thinking of change. I admire the way artists think. They tend to question, because they want to move. And people who don't question and are self-satisfied with their lives get stuck. Maybe that is okay for them, but I think they're missing a lot.

I was not a good artist, by the way. I never could get over the influence of other things I was seeing to make my own statement. As soon as I got married, which in a funny way was both a dependency situation and an independent situation, I could do something on my own. Then I really painted and got involved in the arts and did arts administration. Along with several women, I started a music and arts council.

I was twenty when I got married. I had three children by the time I was twenty-six, which is sort of ridiculous. I became pregnant immediately. All of my sons are less than a year and a half apart. It was hard because you really can't do anything else except raising children. Those early years...you're working all the time and you're tired. The trouble is, if you knew that it was going to be over soon, you could take it. It just seems to overwhelm you. You can never see the end of it and you say, "Am I going to get through it?" Well, you do get through it. Then you go to the next stage, which may be worse or better, but it's different. I think I had those feelings because I was so young. It was too young to have children. I was very sensitive about advice, and I was insecure. I didn't feel like a mother until my second child came. The first child, I was uptight and petrified just having a child. Yet, having children was very important to me. They expanded my interests. It's something I'm happy about now, although as a young woman I felt it was holding me back. You use every experience you get, is what I'm trying to say.

I was an artist. I worked at it and was serious about it. But at some point, I began to look around and feel that I could never achieve greatness. I realized that I could not be a good mother and be an artist because it was so involving a profession. Intermediately I was making a choice. I said I could only be a great artist if I gave up my family. I was unwilling to. And maybe in the back of my mind, I felt that I really wasn't going to be good enough.

I have become close to many wonderful women artists who are in the forefront of public and environmental art today. Few of them are able to have both a home, raise children, and be focused on their art. They are compulsive, obsessive people, and I think you must be to be an artist. You can't have other things pulling against you. Some of the women who do get away with it are unique, and they usually have some support from their husbands.

I know of one artist who gave up a child. She had a baby and realized that she would never be able to raise it. Her mother-in-law took it, and she never saw that baby until quite recently. The baby is now a grown man and has children. She admits that no one ever knew that she had a child. She never talked about it. She was a very prominent artist. So I think that's a very interesting story.

My biggest obstacle was probably my mother who said, "You have to think about your family your children, and your husband." She felt that women should have this attitude – take care of the husband. And I do feel that that's true. But it has

worked well because my husband also takes care of me. He has been supportive of everything I do, even though he doesn't quite agree or understand it. He doesn't stand in my way. He encourages me to develop myself, and I have done that with him.

I wanted to live in a world of art. It's sort of an old saw that if you can't do it, you teach or whatever. So I thought of becoming an art teacher, and somehow got diverted. Things happen by accident. In 1967, a friend of mine said, "We have a space, and we would like to open a little art gallery." I had gone to school with a lot of people who were working in photography, and I was excited about it. So we opened a gallery specializing in fine art photography called The Photographer's Gallery. Because there was no other one in the city at that time, we could get any artist I wanted. We represented Andre Kertesz, Brassai, and Weston.

Part of the problem was we funded the gallery ourselves. My partner furnished the space, I did all the work, and we shared the profits. They had the real estate and I had the time. We started small. The first show I had, which was a big show of all the artists, was an introductory show. For the second show, I liked the idea of putting two people together that would inform the work. Showing two different artists tells you something more about each of the artists. The juxtaposition raises questions and issues.

So I would have two person shows. The first was Ray Metzker and Paul Caponigro. Ray Metzker was an urban artist, who at the time was photographing the subways and streets of Chicago. Paul Caponigro was a follower of Minor White and Ansel Adams, and did nature photography. They loved the idea. They were of equal stature and age, having different directions. It was a superior show.

I had a great deal of support. There was a man, Jacob Deshin, who wrote the photography column in *The New York Times*. It was a how-to column for the amateur. In several of his articles he lamented the fact that there wasn't a good gallery that would show photography properly, as he felt photography was an art. So the first show I had, he came, reviewed it, and said, "I'm thrilled with what you are doing!" I got calls from all over the world from people who wanted to buy photography and never knew where to get it. I felt the medium was going to be moving on rapidly, as it has. I became involved with using photography as a technique, as well as a form to show reality; as another medium for art – which it has become.

The gallery closed in 1971. It needed expansion, and I was unwilling to put the money into it. But also my children needed me. My youngest son was having trouble in school. So I stopped for a year to take care of family.

Then in 1972, I read this book by Doris Lessing. It was the summer, and I had gone up to the country. I was reading...and found myself lying in bed, feeling

very sorry for myself. I was having a time of life change, or something. I was really tearful about my life. For a year I had been helping my husband in his dental office, and doing odd things. But I felt like I had stopped myself and would never be able to get back into things. Finally my husband, who considers himself a very old-fashioned man, said to me, "Go out and get a job. Get a job anywhere, but stop moping and crying. Even if you have to work in Bloomingdale's!" So what happened was I decided I wanted to work in a gallery.

I applied to the three places I wanted to go to. I had a friend who knew the director at Pace. I went to Ruder & Finn. They had an arts public relations program, but I was turned down. The Museum of Modern Art was the other place, in the Corporate Collection. Pace was interested, so I held out for it. I guess it was very naïve of me. Now if you asked me, I would say, "Go to thirty places." But I waited for them because they gave me enough encouragement.

And Pace interviewed me constantly! Actually, it was over a six-month period, but they never would tell me and I was getting very frustrated. I was being interviewed by Richard Solomon, who is the President and founder of Pace Graphics. Now they have a photography gallery, which he didn't want when I first went there. The time was too soon. At any rate, I did get a job at Bloomingdale's. I had a wonderful time. I found out I was a salesperson. I was there six months until Pace finally said, "Okay, come and work with me."

I think I was hired for a specific purpose. There were two businesses in Pace Editions, which was the print business, and the gallery that handled the original work of the artists – sculpture, paintings, and drawings. They have two separate businesses, although they are esthetically and financially allied, and they wanted someone to bridge the gap. They felt they were not getting print collectors moving over to become collectors of paintings and sculpture. They also wanted to develop more of a corporate business. They felt I knew architecture, because my brother was an architect.

The first thing Pace said was, "Take three months and look at all the records." So I went through the files. They said, "Let's develop a program and a plan." So we developed a plan to reach architects and corporations. There was quite a bit of corporate collecting then, and we did try to develop that market. You see, at the time it was just Arne Glimcher in the gallery and one other person. So I became a third person. I ended up being there, so my role began to expand.

It was 1973 then. I went to Arne Glimcher and I said, "You know, I feel that public art is really becoming a major phenomenon in the art world, and a serious one. And we have so many artists who are qualified to do this, that we really should make an effort to go after this kind of business, and work in this area." So he said, "Great. Do it." And that's how I became Director of Commissions. We focused on that, and it became my special thing. I also handled clients in the gallery and did my corporate work, but more and more I got involved with seeking commissions for the artists.

Pace was very exciting. They have artists who are established, who have a track record. They have a fabulous roster. It's their philosophy of dealership. We represented artists like Jean Dubuffet, Ernie Trova, and Jack Youngerman... artists who wanted to do large-scale works of art.

One of the artists I worked with was Louise Nevelson. She was a dynamo and a wonderful woman. At the time I met her she was in her seventies. She was probably born around the turn of the century. She never knew her exact dates. Nevelson considered herself an intuitive architect, and there is such a thing. It's being able to visualize three-dimensional space. The artists who do public art must have this ability, otherwise their work falls short of where it should be. And Louise certainly was an architectural artist. From the very beginning she made pieces, but she always saw them as an installation.

There were two things about Louise that for me were very exciting. One was the fact that she understood the architectural context. She would do a show, and then people would buy pieces. But in her mind it was the whole show that was the work of art. Her standing walls are her most famous and important works. So she is the quintessential public artist, and she taught me what makes a public artist and a public work of art.

We would do a show in the gallery and she would come in and everybody would want to praise her. She always installed her own shows. When I say installed it, I don't mean physically. She was there to see how things hung. She had it in her head where she wanted things to be. She would do a whole black show, a whole white show, a whole gold show. She would come up and I remember saying to her, "Louise, this is the best work you have ever done. This is the most exciting show." And she said, "Darling, *wait* until the next one. I'm already thinking about it." Once she had done something...it was done, finished, it was not her concern. She always looked ahead. She lived until eighty-seven or eighty-eight, worked productively, traveled until the very end, did major public art projects, and always had this energy.

Some people thought that her black pieces reflected death. And she said, "No, they are really about night. Night is when you go out and you go dancing, and have a good time." And of course she was being a little facetious because they also did reflect a dark side, the bad side of things. Light and shadows. There are shadows in everyone's lives. She had some in her own, as well as many conflicts.

We would go to visit sites, and would spend hours talking. We always took a limousine. We talked about everything, including family. She had one son. We talked about her early life. But she was definitely a total artist. In fact, she gave up her son. Her parents raised her son because she left her husband and went off to become an artist, one of the first women to do that. So she was *absolutely*

dedicated and focused and *had* to make art. It was a compulsion. I see that in the artists who I think are superior and make art that touches us.

The other thing was the fact that as old as she was, she was always looking ahead and dealing with the future. She was productive into her eighties. As long as your mind works, you can continue thinking and doing and making things. I have a new idea for my work and a direction to take, and I find it very stimulating. It was Louise who made me realize that that is the way to function in life. Not to live in the past, not to think that when you reach a certain age that you are a senior citizen, so you have to do nothing with yourself. Retirement is something artists never do. She was the one who cued me into that. As a young woman I was concerned because I had children and I thought, they're holding me back, I can't do anything! I felt you couldn't go back once you gave up.

In the beginning, I never told anybody that I had children. I didn't talk about my family, as I'm doing now. I just never thought of talking about it. It was not a subject. I think it was an unwillingness to be considered a mother. I wanted to be considered a professional. I finally got over it when I had grandchildren! I'm a much better grandmother than I was a mother. As a mother I was distracted. because I was concerned with my own career and what I would do, fearful that I would vegetate. It was a concern. But then all of a sudden you're a grandmother and it really doesn't matter.

In 1981, I left Pace Gallery. The reason I left was simply because I was limited to the artists represented there, and I began to go places and think about other artists I would like to recommend. I still work with their artists and we have a relationship. When I think back upon my years there, it was a learning experience. But it was time. I had been there for eight years. The situation changed, people changed, so you move on.

I finally decided that I liked public art and I wanted to stay with it. I had found my niche. It is much more satisfying being able to think about any artist. I'm not bound by having to focus on the artists of a gallery, so I'm not limited. I'm a free agent, and that's the definition of a consultant.

In general, I'm very proud of the fact that I have been able to make a business out of being uncompromising in the selection of artists. I haven't given in to the marketplace. I probably haven't made as much money. But ultimately, life is not about how much money you have in the bank, it's how well you live it. I realize I've never been that interested in money, so that's why I don't make it. It's nice to have, and I've been able to have enough. My husband has been helpful. That's one advantage of having a professional husband. So at least I live on a certain standard. I can afford to be cavalier about saying I don't need much money, because I've never had to make a living. He has financed my business, until it got started, by letting me live very nicely without a struggle.

I am from a different place and time period, and it spills over into my feelings about the arts. This great pressure to expand the role of minority and women artists...I really approve of that. I think it should happen, and you have to make an effort to have it happen. But you don't lower your standards. For example, it came up in a project I did in Pittsburgh. They were clear that they wanted a black artist, and they didn't care which one, as long as they were black. All the artists we had picked were major, well-known established artists. We did have some black artists in our presentation, and we were able to find one that fit the bill. What you want to do is always have someone who can measure up, and that isn't said. You don't want people saying, "Well, that's not a good project, but it has black artists." I think it is something that has to be thought about in depth, and not glibly paid lip service to.

The issue is everybody wants the best that they can possibly get, and it's our role as professionals to see that they get it. Not to play a game of tokenism. The people who are in a position of power, who are giving out the projects, have to do their homework to make sure they fulfill many criteria. Not just one criteria, not just having a minority artist and feeling that their job is done.

I don't know it all. I use committees, and I listen to artists whom I respect. You learn more from them than you do from critics or other art professionals. They *are* the ultimate art professionals. But finally, if I am hired as a consultant, the responsibility is mine. Controversy is a plus in public art, not a minus. It gets people thinking, and they form opinions. And your opinion is as good as someone else's opinion. What you don't want is no reaction, because that means it's not doing anything.

In 1979, I was involved in founding a group called ArtTable. I was working at Pace, and I had gotten an interview for Louise Nevelson with a woman name Lila Harnett, who was an art critic for *Cue Magazine*. That's how we became friendly. Her husband, who was in politics, had a group of men that would have lunch together. They would talk about professional issues. And she thought, wouldn't it be a good idea for the art world to do this. Women who were interested in the same thing, but in different disciplines, should talk together. Each of us invited a few friends, and that's how it started.

It involved about seven or eight women. The idea was to keep it that, a close-knit group of networking women. Then it became twenty or thirty, and we were meeting in houses. It's not what I would call a feminist organization. It's a networking organization. It was trying to give women who were professional a basis for meeting and speaking to each other.

It is now so large that it has lost its intimacy, which was one of its strong points. It has over seven hundred women across the country, with several branches. It became a little more political when Jesse Helms started to pick away at the National Endowment for the Arts. They have started to give awards, and recently

gave one to Agnes Gund. I was on the first board, but now I am more of a participant.

As far as women in the art world structure, traditionally they have opened galleries. It's been one area that somehow has been okay for them to do. There are people like Virginia Zabriskie, Grace Borgenicht, Betty Parsons, Martha Jackson, and of course years ago Edith Halpert – who had Grand Central Galleries. They were women who started galleries and were a force for contemporary art. They have had an outstanding role in developing the whole art system here in America. And I think that has not been pointed out enough. But one of the things that occurred to me, and I did have a little argument with Virginia Zabriskie about it, is that the major galleries, the big business galleries – Pace, Marlborough, Knoedler – are still male dominated. The women have not taken their galleries to the ultimate business level. And maybe that suits their personality, or maybe it suits the fact that they haven't been able to get enough money. In order to take a gallery into the next level of business, you have to have backing. Now I know that Arne Glimcher, who was not a rich man, did get backing from people. He was very charismatic, he convinced them he could do well, and he got people to give him money to move to the next step.

Again, I think it's the issue of do people take women dealers seriously enough to finance them and have them build their galleries. Or maybe women don't want to be part of a great big business organization. Maybe they don't want to make it more of a business and lose control. Maybe they go into the gallery business because it's not viewed as a big business opportunity. I'm not sure. I don't quite know what the answer to that is. I wonder if it's something in the woman or something in society that won't allow the woman to become this great businessperson. But there seems to be less women who view art as a business, rather than as a profession that they like.

I think life is a growth experience, and I try to leave myself open. There is no question about the fact that I'm still evolving. One of the wonderful things about being in the art business is that there are many aspects to it. So if you are open, you can move into new areas. There is changeability, and I enjoy change. It's part of my personality. Public art was drying up for a year or two because projects were not happening. Corporations were in trouble. So I moved into curating. I curate shows of large-scale works of art. So it's still about public art, but it's a slightly different aspect.

I would like to do more lecturing, and preparing my archives. Eventually, I have developed what I think is an incredible public archive. Most registries are democratic, therefore everything is in it. It's hard to deal with it on a qualitative level. But I feel that there is a need for a focus on outstanding public art, of the past and the future. To set standards for the field, that's really my goal. You always have to set standards for what you are doing, and then keep to them. I guess that's my philosophy of life.

