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Mark, Lisa Gabrielle., and Cornelia H. Butler. *Wack!: art and the feminist revolution*. Los Angeles, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007.

Chapter: Their Memory is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes Toward A Calligraphy of Rage

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution serves as the exhibition catalog for the international survey of feminist art of the 1960s-1980s curated by Cornelia Butler for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. *WACK!* documents and illustrates the impact of the feminist revolution on contemporary art practice, and features works by both notable and unfamiliar artists such as Carolee Schneeman, Louise Fishman, Louise Bourgeois, and Yoko Ono. The art examined in *WACK!* includes work by over 120 artists working in all media and is accompanied by written entries by leading critics, art historians, and scholars. The catalog offers new perspectives on the beginnings of feminist art practices in the West.

The section entitled, *Their Memory is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes Towards a Calligraphy of Rage* includes a number of essays designed to target areas that Catherine Lord refers to as a *counter-archive* (Cottingham 441). An archive is a set of historical constructs, knowledge, and memories that are collected, stored, and recovered; knowledge that is generally determined and housed by gender bias institutions. In the lesbian and feminist communities, counter-archives emerge from collaborative processes of collective feminist organizing and non-institutional performative approaches to safekeeping history. These counter archives are created to challenge pre-existing archival institutions that have historically overlooked their value, i.e. Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, SCUM, and Artists in Residence (Lord 442-443). Counter-archives are meant to disrupt conventional national or social narratives and work to create new perspectives, artifacts, and knowledge within the archive.

In her essay, Lord's counter-archive of lesbian liberation is anchored around Louise Fishman's little-known series of works from 1973 called the *Angry Paintings*. Lord examines Fishman's practice of representing individualized anger through painting (Hammond 444), which had been actively repressed in feminist art history, as deliberately fabricated artifacts of culture, created in a time when lesbian visibility was an ontological impossibility (Wittig 443). Since the public sphere was primarily configured to favor a masculine position (subjugating women at the opposite end of that spectrum), lesbians were neither masculine nor feminine, and thus an "impossibility." (Wittig 443). This ideology of impossibility

permeated the art scene for lesbian artists, and created a meaningless concept in a heterosexual economy, forcing the counter-archive to focus on the idea of being a lesbian instead of the body of a "lesbian" (Castle 443).

With their torn edges, overlays of color, embolden lines, muddied pigments and simple yet powerful messages, Fishman's *Angry Paintings* embody a sense of individualizing anger. The usage of names of influential feminist and lesbian artists such as Harmony Hammond, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Sarah Whitworth, and Gertrude Stein became a part of her language and a new counter-archive which chronicles the feminist revolution. Fishman's artwork created a living map of lesbian artists, activists, groups, and organizations all working towards a new perspective of lesbian liberation and feminist liberation. A liberation that fought the perspective that lesbians were freaks in the 1970s (Lord 447).

This map is by no means a cohesive representation of the feminist revolution. Instead, it reiterates the diversity within this history; not as truth, but as a constantly shifting shape. These paintings were less about the name(s) that were written and painted, but more about the ideas represented; abstractions about abstractions, and ideas about the woman's own ideas (Lord 457). Fishman's mark-making within this series is attributed to a practiced motion and to physical skills learned in basketball practices. Skills such as peripheral vision, spatial awareness, one's ability to sense and direct line change allowed Fishman to create abstraction through physical movement (Lord 457). It was this movement that connected mark-making to the counter-archive of lesbian liberation. In a sense, making the unseen, seen.

Today, Fishman would be described as an Abstract Expressionist and her earlier work favored a painting style that encouraged separation, code, and secrecy. Around 1970, Fishman began to meet with other women artists and stopped painting on stretched canvas; stating that painting was a "male activity" (Lord 445). Louise Fishman's insights into the gendered construction that misrepresented her artwork paved the way for a radical re-evaluation of her work that would help define feminist and lesbian languages of painting.

Works Cited

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