Chapel is actually becoming the metaphor

for a larger spiritual renaissance, heralded

by the woman artist, who, like the prophet and visionary of old, is pointing

the way for the next, perhaps the most

revolutionary, transformation of wom-

en's lives. It is not only because the Sister

Chapel directly challenges the Sistine

Chapel for its patriarchal version of cre-

ation that the name "Sister Chapel" has

survived, but because it strikes a chord

that resonates deeply within women, one

which activates their long-denied desire to

give vision to the concept of creation and

to give form to the experience of tran-

If the Sistine Chapel has omitted

woman's relationship to God, the Sister

Chapel will give space to women to ex-

plore the meaning of that omission and of

its constant repetition throughout history.

It will give women a space in which to

affirm their own mythology and to invest

it with a new symbology and iconology.

Today's women artists are inventing a

new definition of the self as woman. They

are defining woman according to what she

might become. They are taking the

highest common denominator as a sign

of the mean, and looking to the future for

the manifestation of this new woman, one

who will emerge through the historical

In contrast to the ceiling of the Sistine

would obviously be interpreted as icono-

clastic. This hypothetical art historian

would have to turn to an incongruous

collage of the most traditional historical

records of image-making and the most

radical revision of philosophical inquiry

in order to interpret the motivation for

this unique example of chapel-making

In a revolutionary revalorization of

activity by women of the 20th century.

Beyond God

female. This space set apart, which is the sacred space of the Sister Chapel, cor-

responds to a new psychic space which

Daly feels is not "set apart" from reality,

but from the contrived nonreality of alienation. "Discovered in the deep con-

frontation between being and nonbeing, the space of liberation is sacred."(7) If

there is any unique contemporary innova-

work

process of female evolution.

scendence.

moment in time when enlightened feminists are universally denouncing the deleterious effects of a dominant patriarchal religion, a group of East Coast women artists are at work on the creation of a

philosophers and intellectuals, and at a

Sister Chapel, a traveling exhibition in celebration of the emergence of a new womanspirit in art. The chapel, as Ilise Greenstein originally conceived it, was to stand as a record of woman's contribution to civilization. It was designed to house a Hall of Fame, a Museum, a Library, and an Archive for women in the Arts, Sciences, Sports and Humanities. It was to be a space in which portraits of female heroines and archetypal figures would be displayed as a tribute to the reality of women's accomplishments throughout history and as an inspiration for the actualization of women's potential, power, and capacity for future achievement. It is intriguing to note that this apparently secular idea has never been entitled a Woman's Hall of Fame nor even a Woman's Pavilion. It is and remains the concept of the "chapel" as a sacred space of spiritual activity that continues to mobilize the creative energy of the 12 women artists involved in the project, who, coming from varying Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and Atheistic backgrounds, do not even necessarily admit to

Discussing the traditional styles of sacred art, he stressed that wherever they may be, these forms "refuse to imitate life, and require its metamorphosis, its transcendence. Imposing upon all that they depict an invincible legendary universe, they are to the arts that follow them what Prophets are to novelists."(2) In the sense in which the Sister Chapel imposes upon

the accepted reality of women another

aspect, one that catalyzes the metamor-

Chapel may be said to be a new form of

"sacred art," for, according to Malraux

"There is no religion, but there is a faith.

phosis and transcendence of highest forms of that life, the Sister

There is no 'sacred' but there is a negation of the impure world."(3) The Sister Chapel represents the negation of a world in which the female principle was relegated to an inferior position. In this light the portraits of women heroines that will be hung in the Sister Chapel are no longer merely portraits; they are icons. Yet, it is not surprising that many of the artists involved in this project are realists (June Blum, Ronni Bogaev, Martha Edelheit, Elsa Goldsmith, Shirley Gorelick, Betty Holliday, Alice Neel, Cynthia Mailman, Sylvia Sleigh, May Stevens, Sharon Wybrants), for even traditionally, it was through the realistic depiction of earthly forms that transcendent principles were evoked. Mother, Father, and Child-these, deformed as they were by patriarchy's interpretation of their roles (i.e. a virgin mother), are the forms through which the sacred has been most frequently rendered. It is also the realist who will give us the least distorted and truest picture of woman's authentic reality-one that will be both recognizable and convincing. Yet this stately and exalted mode of art must not be mistakenly apprehended as propaganda for feminism. It has, in fact, a completely different function. As op-posed to an art like Socialist Realism

which acts as mere illustration, creating the illusion of a heroic reality that does not exist, this art is rather a primary revelation, a first unveiling of a reality that has been suppressed and denied to women throughout the ages. This heroic art marks the uncovering of a truth that the patriarchy has long subverted and concealed. It is both the discovery and exploration of that reality, and a celebration of its hidden grandeur. In the way that classical art strives to imitate and exemplify both physical and moral beauty, the art of the Sister Chapel proposes images and models as aspects of a vision of the ideal. If several hundred years from now an archeologist or art historian were to come upon the Sister Chapel as an artifact of our predominantly materialistic culture in which the popular image of the spiritual guru was that of a male figure, often in oriental garb, a chapel composed exclusively of western heroic female icons would definitely seem heretical and

Sharon Wybrants, Self-Portrait as Superwoman, 1975. Pastel on paper, 101/2x5'. Photo

meditation upon questions such as What

Sylvia Sleigh, Lilith, 1976. Acrylic on canvas, What then is the transcendent principle of woman that the Sister Chapel affirms

and in what ways does it differ from the

traditional depiction of woman in sacred

Second Sex has identified and criticized

the myth of the Eternal Feminine. It is

basically this myth that the Sister Chapel

overthrows in its creation of the heroic

aspect of womankind. According to Daly,

"The characteristics of the Eternal Woman are opposed to those of a

developing, authentic person, who will be

unique, self-critical, self-creating, active

and searching. By contrast to these

authentic personal qualities the Eternal

Woman is said to have a vocation to sur-

render and hiddenness; hence the symbol of the veil."(12) Thus, the Eternal

Woman, whether virgin, bride, or moth-

er, is a passive being, removed from the

arena of action, non-assertive, asexual,

and therefore sublimely mysterious. The

image of the female in traditional western

religious symbolism creates the myth of

Mary Daly in The Church and the

iconography?

the pure, virginal woman in the image of Mary and the myth of woman as temptress in the image of Eve. The images of woman in the Sister Chapel challenge the biblical stereotypes of women as virgins, temptresses, harlots and wives, and posit the definition of woman as creator, pioneer, activist, poet, visionary, artist and supreme creatrix. Because throughout history the symbolism of the Great Goddess has been connected with fertility rites and with the image of

Deities worn by actors in Oriental and classical plays; they are images inhabited by the daemon, which if properly worn, mother as a heroine, exemplifying the qualities of fortitude, courage and love, Alice Neel and June Blum have selected feminist mentor-figures to represent those ideals of moral integrity and political activism that are complementary qualities which enter into the new definition of the female archetype that is emerging with the creation of the Sister Chapel. While most of the other portraits in the chapel occupy the entire nine feet of the canvas, Alice Neel's portrait of Bella Abzug only fills in about two-thirds of the allotted space. Yet the energy in her face and in her gesture towards us makes us aware of her presence as a vortex of forces that somehow energize activism and positive vision in the viewer, convincing us that it is through charisma not brute force that the revolutionary message will be spread. Although Alice Neel has captured the outrageous, out-

of our time, one who alone was responsible for bringing about the biggest change in women's lives today by inspiring the founding of the current Women's Liberation Movement. Blum's larger-than-life portrait of Betty Friedan went through many stages of metamorphosis. However, the ultimate metamorphosis has been the personal effect that the work has had upon the artist's life and subsequent artistic development. When the sittings were terminated and there were only a few details left to be worked on in the painting, Friedan left her long red dress with June Blum so that the artist impossible for her to have children, wanted desperately to bear the child of her husband, Diego Rivera. She suffered a series of miscarriages, Caesarian sections and abortions, and the pain of her existence is immortalized in her paintings, which were the first to bravely depict the full truth of women's biological crises in art. As a result of many operations, Frida became confined to a wheelchair and later to her bed. After the amputation of a leg, she was reduced to lying on her back and painting in bed with an easel fastened over her. Her spiritual courage in the face of such pain was undaunted. She continued to paint and even wrote in her diary "Legs, why should I need them when I have wings with which to fly?"(14) Frida painted in order to perform miracles, to heal the spirit. Is this not the inspiration behind the very creation of the Sister Chapel? Shirley Gorelick has painted Frida in the costume she used for her own self-portrait. She is carrying a small, doll-like Frida, which is an image of herself as the Victorian Frida, taken from her painting Las Dos Fridas. Thus, she is here depicted as the nurturant mother of herself. Floating above her in the sky are two balloons which are attached to the minia-

ture Frida. One bears the face of Diego Rivera and the other the body of a fetus. It is the small self that is haunted by these two apparitions, for Frida the artist and nurturant mother has transcended the particular details of her life, and is presented in an image that looms as large as that of a mother goddess. She wears the symbols of her suffering like bracelets (braces and skeletal forms), for they are merely talismans for transformation. While at work on the painting of Frida, Shirley Gorelick by some strange coincidence of destiny suffered a back injury, and had to paint the portrait sideways, for she could not spend long hours standing up. Gorelick thus had to relive, in a karmic sense, the artistic struggle that Frida Kahlo so poignantly expressed in her own work. This revisitation of the fate of one artist upon another illustrates the depth of psychic merging that occurs in all portrait painting-that slipping into the skin of another to relive their life story, to take on their spiritual strength in order to resurrect the spirit of their existence through art. May Stevens' selection of the 17th century painter Artemisia Gentileschi as her heroic role-model illustrates once more the kinds of deep affinities between women artists which are timeless and boundless. Stevens, who is well-known for her series of Big Daddy paintings in

Stevens' portrait of Gentileschi resembles a scroll or an illuminated manuscript. The artist stands poised in front of an unfurled, gilded narrative statement of her life that is embossed upon a sort of tapestry. The words 'Filia d Horatii Gentileschi,' 'Sposa,' 'Matrimoni' and 'Pittori' can be easily deciphered, and stand out as representative of the unique life history of an artist whose extraordinary talent made her a member of the Academy in Florence by the age of 23. Later she was estranged from her husband, and devoted herself to her father just before his death, for he had been her art teacher and chief mentor figure. Stevens' choice of royal blue and gold for the painting lends to Artemisia a regal, heroic, legendary aura, that immortalizes her for us as one of our own "biblical" heroines. Betty Holliday has written that the poet Marianne Moore "deserves a place in the Sister Chapel as one of the wonderful band of women whose contributions have been at such an intellectual peak as to defy patronization by male critics. Her answer to why she had not married was that she was not prepared to assume the "60% responsibility" that she felt would be required in a successful marriage. She does not elaborate to point out (as seems obvious) that she cared enough about her work and was protective enough of it to make a choice that a male counterpart would not have to make...Her personal bestiary gives me an opportunity to cast my own characters in their image...my purple grackle rides her arm and my siamese kitten snarls from the carpet covered with "household lions as symbols of sovereignty," "over-serious

reindeer," "snobbish camels" and a

single chameleon prepared to "snap up

Marianne Moore at a poetry reading at

Loeb Center. She then made a photo-

sculpture entitled Marianne Moore: Mod-

el for an Improbable Billboard. For her

painting of Moore she used the photo-

portrait of the poet by Rollie McKenna,

and took the rest of her clues from

William Carlos Williams' description of

her in his Autobiography. Holliday writes

that she has chosen to paint her in a mood

that is meant to be both playful and

out that learned women could not become Rabbis. Since Rabbi means teacher, and in the Cabbalistic tradition learning means "reception," a kind of total

imbibing of the essence and the spirit of the teachings of a great master, one can say that in spite of the secular orientation of most of the artists who worked on the

In 1967 Betty Holliday photographed

the spectrum for food."

which a virulent critique of male power is overtly expressed, has chosen to celebrate the work of a woman artist whose themes are strikingly similar to her own. Artemisia, who had been the victim of rape as a teenager, chose as the subject of several of her major paintings the image of Judith's decapitation of Holofernes. Both the American Stevens and the Italian Gentileschi, though separated by three centuries, focus upon a similar image of male oppression in their work. If Artemisia chose Old Testament heroines as subjects for her art, is not May Stevens, too, choosing a heroine of similar dimensions as the model for her own work?

God as Female. Her own female God is observed from below in a wide-angled view, revealing her resplendent flowing black hair and the Great Sun flaring behind her. She combines the religious idea of the sun as the absolute, its halo or aura of radiance, a source of energy and spiritual light, with a new religious iconography in which female sexuality is emphasized. The Woman-God's sexual organs are here envisioned as primary attributes of her essence and of her creative powers. Mailman does not call her God a Goddess because, as Mary Daly has noted "Women are inclined to speak and write of 'The Goddess,' whereas one seldom says 'The God.' In our own culture it has been assumed that 'goddesses' are many and trivial, whereas the 'real' divinity is 'God' who does not even require the definite article."(13) As an atheist, Mailman feels especially outraged at the idea of a white, male God. However, she is now fascinated with the idea of the Goddess, and is working on an illustrated book-objet d'art, which will document the history of all goddesses throughout history. Without the catalyzing forces and energies of the Sister Chapel project, Cynthia Mailman might never have taken the leap beyond atheism into a new meditation upon the nature of a transcendent female principle, and might never have gotten involved with the history of the Goddess. Martha Edelheit's female David is a monumental image of a heroine, who, according to the artist, represents a universal aspect of womankind. Based upon Michelangelo's David, female sexuality is once more an aspect of woman that is stressed through the choice of pose and iconography. The heroine's nude body will be tattooed with images of the model in the form of various goddesses-Kali, Nut, Venus, Athena, Diana, and the male Indian God Avilokitsevara, who later became the female Goddess of Mercy Gwannon in Japanese Buddhism, and the Chinese Goddess Kwan Yin. Edelheit reminds us that the skin was the first surface to be painted. Tattoos and make-up, indeed all forms of body decoration were the first, primitive attempts at the transformation of the self. In decorating the surface of the female body

that they are the rightful heirs to the illustrious heritage of the great goddesses whose legendary images, tattooed upon the skin, function like the masks of

emphasize Bella's power by highlighting the dynamism of energy centered in her breasts. In the circular, swirling movement of the breast we can read a statement about the transformation of energy from the sexual sphere to the political arena. Neel seems to be showing us how the woman who would seem to be the most "motherly" from the point of view of the physical stereotype, has transmuted that nurturing quality into a new kind of spiritual mothering, a vote cast in favor of the benefits to future generations of children yet unborn. June Blum depicts Betty Friedan as the new American prophet. She is standing on a superhighway in the middle of America, and seems to have just descended from the mountain, where she, like Moses, has experienced the vision whose word is contained in the sacred book that she

carries. Drawn in her most monumental,

archetypal aspect, as an eternal visage of

the prophet, Friedan becomes the symbol

of modern women who have activated

intellect in the service of humanity. Blum

selected Betty Friedan as her subject in

order to honor the strongest living woman

18

June Blum, Betty Friedan, 1976. Oil on canvas, new frontiers in sexuality, the appropriation of new symbols, and the recognition that in terms of participation in Being, the traditional female image, whether that of the Eternal Feminine or that of the popular Superwoman, is both irrelevant and obsolete. In a totally different style, but interested in the same type of investigation, Sylvia Sleigh's depiction of Lilith as a Male/Female Figure is not simply a vision of androgyny. It is also an image of a being of unlimited gender identification, one in which the very concepts of male and female seem forced and constricting. Here is a vision of the First Woman, one who, made from dust, not from Adam's rib, defied the patriarch. This being is not restricted in its sexuality, but rather represents the expansion of multiple possibilities of experience. It is an image of becoming, of evolution beyond the confines of rigid definitions. Here Lilith is everything: black, white, woman, man and nature in constant metamorphosis and flux. In suggesting that the male figure appears through Lilith, Sleigh conveys the distinct impression that men and women feel the same things and that there is a deeper unity beyond diversity, a oneness within the manifold. For her, maleness and femaleness are psychosensual attributes of all forms of life. In returning womankind to a lost heritage, that of Lilith, who defied Patriarchy, Sleigh identifies the heroic aspect of woman as her most creative attribute. Yet in her lyrical depiction of this indepenas is traditionally believed, we are made in God's image. Mailman, who is a confirmed atheist, discovered the Great Goddess while at work on her painting of

in the pose of the Biblical David, who, by

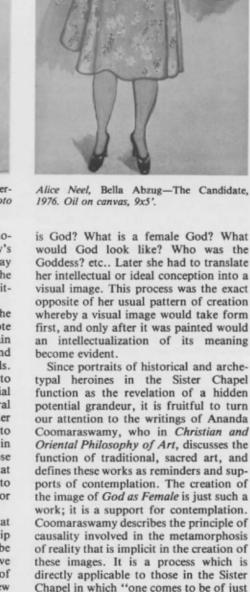
slaying the giant Goliath discovered his own might, Edelheit implies that in over-

throwing the patriarchy, women will

discover their own hidden powers, and

landish quality of Bella's style, her "chutzpah" and her wild daring through the large red hat and the sleeveless tank top that she wears, Neel has done it with great reverence, and has created an image of vitality and exuberance that is at once inspiring and exalting. Neel has chosen to

by Suzanne Kaufman. tion that is being made in both the iconography and style of the work by today's feminist artists, it is the turning away from the esthetic of alienation and the absurd, towards an esthetic of commitment, communality and reintegration. In her original statement about the Sister Chapel, Ilise Greenstein wrote "The circular central hall will contain portraits 9'x5' of heroines chosen and painted by women artists as role models. The circular dome will be a mirror to reflect each person entering as a potential candidate for a Hall of Fame. The central theme is aspirational." In the Sister Chapel women are being called upon to energize these archetypes and models in their own lives, to give form to those images of largeness and greatness that they are capable of imagining, and to become role-models of the future for generations yet to come. The function of the work of art that participates in this particular relationship to Being is non-secular, and must be examined from a traditional perspective rather than from the point of view of contemporary art theory. In an interview with Cynthia Mailman this reversal of the modern creative process in the visual arts became apparent to me. Cynthia related that whereas ordinarily her work had been a purely visual inspiration, in the creation of her piece for the Sister Chapel, God as Female, the idea had preceded the visualization. Her desire to depict God as Female, then led her to an intellectual



such stuff as that on which the mind is

set."(8) Coomaraswamy explains that

traditional philosophy of art which shuns

the mere imitation of appearances and of ordinary reality, for "The imitation of

anything and everything is despicable: it is

the actions of Gods and Heroes...that are

the legitimate theme of art."(9) We need

not accept Coomaraswamy's dictum as

absolute in order to see its relevance to the

Betty Holliday, Marianne Moore, 1976. Study,

Mother Earth, the Sister Chapel does not

replace the traditional sacred image of

woman with a proposed female substi-

tute. It does not posit the Goddess as a

replacement for the patriarchal deity,

even when it proposes the figure of God as Woman. On the contrary, woman artists of the Sister Chapel, have, if

anything, depicted a female godhead with

such overtly popular iconography (wonder woman, superwoman, and the amazon) that we are made all too aware of the impossibility of the anthropomorphism inherent in such a concept. If there is a female principle, they seem to be saying, it is an energy, a force, a power to create, to metamorphose and to transcend by participating intensely in existence. Moreover, the Sister Chapel does not espouse Androgyny as a necessary solution. In wresting woman's sexuality from the patriarchal stereotype of the Virgin Mary, the ideal woman is seen as one who affirms a liberating sexuality, but one that is not necessarily connected with maternity. In fact the power and sensuality of the female body is most specifically explored in just those images of the divine or the archetypal female that are presented such as Superwoman, God as Female, and Lilith as Male/Female. In images of historical models, creativity, revolutionary activism, the spiritual vo-

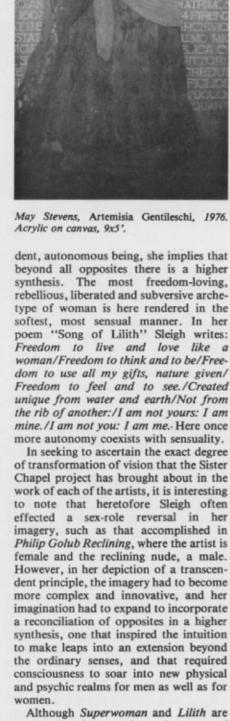
cation and the courage of the pioneer are

stressed. In the contemporary feminist re-

definition of Being as a transcendent

principle, female sexuality is affirmed as a

primary source of energy and as a mani-



portrayals of an archetypal aspect of woman's participation in Being, and

magically transfer their energies and

powers to the actor (or wearer), who then

becomes possessed by the spirit of the god

the mask (here tattoo) represents. Edel-

heit's portrait of woman is thus a magical

image with the goddesses functioning almost like votive offerings that promote

a healing and invoke a blessing for a

particular aspect of the being. Edelheit

has represented the heroine's slingshot in

the image of the cloak that the Virgin

Mary wears, marking the progress from

cloak to weapon of self-defense. It is in

this sense an image of the disrobing and

eternalizes a universal aspect of the

female archetype while immortalizing her

own immigrant mother. Her statement

can be read as a metaphor for contempo-

Ronni Bogaev's Immigrant Mother

unveiling of female strength.

rary women, who have also come away from oppression, away from the old country of their minds, and emigrated to a promised land, where all values are to be reinvented. This pioneering, messianic spirit is what permits women to explore the unchartered territory of the soul that the Sister Chapel exemplifies, and to experiment with new identities, new roles and new forms of life, while forging a different society for their progeny to inhabit. Immigrant Mother is the prototype of the pioneering female spirit that the five historical role-models exemplify in different ways. Ronni Bogaev has written of her offering to the chapel: "My Shells from Southold, 1970, w/c on pencil, 4x6"

might paint herself in it as a model for those parts of the work that needed to be completed. As June Blum looked at herself in the mirror dressed in Betty's red gown, she began to notice the many resemblances in physiognomy between the artist and her model. June Blum began to see herself as the fair Betty Friedan, as the mild Betty Friedan, and Betty Friedan began to take on the symbolism of the darker aspect of June Blum. The metamorphosis of June Blum into Betty Friedan was than documented in photographs in which she was dressed as Friedan, and in others in which she posed

with her own portraits of Betty. Finally

June-June and June-Betty engage in an

intimate inner dialogue, whose iconography reminds us of Frida Kahlo's The

Two Fridas. Here then quite literally the

act of contemplation has caused a meta-

morphosis of reality to take place, one

whose effect is similar to the effect of

oriental masks that was alluded to

previously. By slipping into the skin of

another, one acquires the other's vision

and powers. It is clear that June Blum's

depiction of Betty Friedan as prophet

foretold something about the effect that

her crusading spirit would have upon the

artist's personal life, one that is similar in

many ways to the effect she has had upon

the lives of all women today. We have all

come to resemble Betty Friedan in our

thinking and in our struggle for libera-

One artist whose choice of heroine was

influenced directly by the spiritual nature

of the chapel concept is Elsa Goldsmith.

Her portrait of Joan of Arc does not

depict Joan in male attire or in armor.

Joan is, in this artist's vision, a humble

girl of peasant origins, who resembles

many young women of today who dress

with a certain "medieval look." These

women reminded Elsa Goldsmith of Joan

April 5-May 3



not present any pre-conceived image of

the deity, nor any version of the myth of

creation. Instead, according to Ilise

Greenstein "the circular dome will be a

mirror" and "the 18 foot round ceiling

collage covers the seasons in a woman's

life from birth to death; sunrise to sunset

expressed metaphorically. The purpose of

this ceiling work, which I consider a para-

digm and metaphor of the human

experience as lived by a woman painter, is

to elevate the contribution of women in

our society to a point of equality."

Because the collage traces the life-cycle of

woman, the Sister Chapel ceiling is about

rebirth rather than original creation. In

this sense the women artists of the Sister

Chapel have proposed a new myth, one

that does not deal with the origin of

humanity, but with its evolution. Women

artists are saying that if indeed there is a

divine power that intervenes in history, it

is none other than the power of their own

consciousness, which has the ability to

transform the meaning of the past and to

create the future. This chapel, then, is not

about the creation of man, but about the

has said that it is difficult for art to suffer

the disappearance of the absolute. He observed that "Everyday we see more

clearly modern civilization's inability to

give forms to spiritual values."(1)

Andre Malraux in The Voices of Silence

rebirth of woman.

13



the imagining of God as Female. "In this

sense art is the antithesis of what we

mean by visual education for this has in

view to tell us what things that we do not

invisible real and ideal images of woman-

kind, creators of the Sister Chapel are

ascribing to the transformative value of

art which "serves as a support of

contemplation tending towards a trans-

formation of the worshipper [here substitute "viewer"] into the likeness of

the archetypal form to which...the honour is paid."(11) In this kind of art

there is more magic than propaganda, for

this art promotes transformation, meta-

morphosis and rebirth rather than the re-

inforcement of an entrenched system of

values that aims of the suppression of

a space-time continuum, a nexus where

images from past, present and future,

both real and virtual, converge to

coalesce, catalyzing the imaging processes

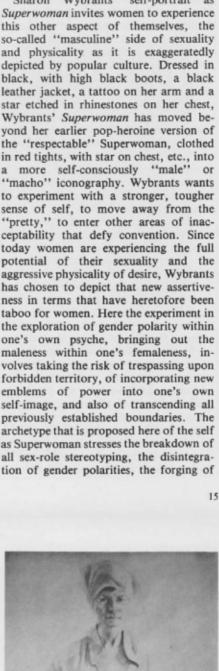
Thus the Sister Chapel is the module of

In attempting to depict these heretofore

see, but might see, look like."(10)

from which a new history will be born. These processes function both inductively and deductively-they permit the extrapolation of transcendent principles from historical role-models, and, at the same time, the imagining of historically viable alternatives and exemplary destinies from archetypal models.

Cynthia Mailman, God, 1976. Acrylic on canvas. Study, 14x8". festation of forceful potency. Sharon Wybrants' self-portrait as



Ronni Bogaev, Immigrant Mother, study for although both explore the integration of the masculine principle into the total definition of the self, neither purport to be figures of God or of the Goddess. Cynthia Mailman is actually the only artist of the group who has attempted to define the female God. She cites the American Heritage Dictionary's definition of God as 1.A being of supernatural powers or attributes believed in and worshipped by a people 2.One that is worshipped or idealized as a god 3.God. A being conceived as the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient originator and ruler of the universe, the principal object of faith monothei and offers her own commentary as her statement for the Sister Chapel. "The question as to the true existence of God is moot. It is really the concept of God which affects our life. The idea of God being a male figure is an unprovable assumption. It would seem far easier both intellectually and emotionally to believe the concept of "Original Creator" as being female. Clearly it is through the female, and not the male that life is Mailman's speculations about the female God also take the form of a selfportrait, for she is depicting the god within herself as well as the idea of an externalized deity. Mailman has realized that gods always resemble their own people: African gods are black, Asian gods are oriental, Western gods are caucasian, and therefore it is natural that the god of women should be female, since,

heroine cannot be the figure of other

people's legends...a Florence Nightingale

or Joan of Arc. Their portraits have been

painted, their work illustrated. None of

this is mine. I am an artist. I must paint what I know and feel. I have painted an

ordinary woman, who like most women,

has gone about the task of daily life

unsung and unrewarded. I have given her

the form of my own Eastern European

mother whose personal struggle on a new

continent with a new language and new

customs symbolizes to me in a very

personal way the courage and greatness of

soul of all the women who pioneered

America, whether in that first bleak lost

colony at Roanoke or in oxcarts pushing

west. For in truth, my mother, and

millions of women like her who immigrated to America during the early 20th century, was a pioneer. She faced no "starving time" like Jamestown, no

physical hardships as Indian wars like those who went west, no religious

persecution like the Mormons. Instead

she met the challenge of raising a civilized

family in a going, new uncultured society

whose primary values were based on a

brawling, commercialist system that must

have seemed as terrifying and destructive

to her as any encounter with Indians on

the Western Plains. What she set out to

accomplish has never been written except

in her heart...I cannot say it. I can only

If Bogaev chose to celebrate her own

paint it, with love as it was given."

SYLVIA SLEIGH: Stones and Flowers

QUEENS COLLEGE ART CENTER

Paul Klapper Library

City University of New York

Flushing, N.Y.

February 14-March 12, 1977

Ilise Greenstein, Sister Chapel Ceiling, 1976. Collage with mirror, 18' diameter. of Arc, and she saw them all as possible heroines. However, it was Joan's visionary nature that caused her to change her own interpretation of the role of woman. From her simple peasant background she went on to lead armies, to crown kings, and to be martyred for her steadfast adherence to her inner voice and to her own beliefs. The painting is constructed around a strong vertical and horizontal compositional axis. Based upon the formal and thematic elements of crucifixion, it honors the memory of a woman of prophecy and clairvoyance who never compromised in the face of adversity,

who was a great leader, a healer, and

who, accused of witchcraft, might even

have been, according to the scholar Mar-

garet Murray, a believer in the old matri-

archal religion in which the Goddess was

worshipped. In her statement, Elsa

Goldsmith says: "I see her as having the

same fears, confusion and doubts we all

have as we strive to achieve the unknown

and possibly unattainable goals. Faith

sustained her. She is a child of nature;

intuitive and untutored." This painting's

healing aspect had a positive effect upon

the health of the artist herself, who

emerged from an illness in a deeply

spiritual state while involved in the

that the Sister Chapel honors are in a

special sense metaphors for women artists

of today, and particularly for those whose

energies have gone into the creation of

Kahlo pays a great tribute to the Mexican

artist whose entire body of work is

concerned with the physical and psychic

suffering of women. Frida Kahlo, who

Shirley Gorelick's painting of Frida

The three portraits of women in the arts

painting of Joan of Arc.

this chapel.

was the victim of an accident which injured her spinal column and made it **IDELLE WEBER** April 30—May 21, 1977

Hundred Acres 456 West Broadway New York 10012 CYNTHIA MAILMAN **Portraits** THE ROOTS OF CREATIVITY WOMEN ARTISTS YEAR 6 The Paterson Public Library February - March, 1977 Paterson, New Jersey Funded by the NJ Committee for the Humanities AMERICAN ART February 15-March 5 -IMPORTANT PRIVATE COLLECTION SPANNING A CENTURY MEDINA CAMPENY March 8-April 2 CATALAN SCULPTOR -SURREALIST SCULPTURE

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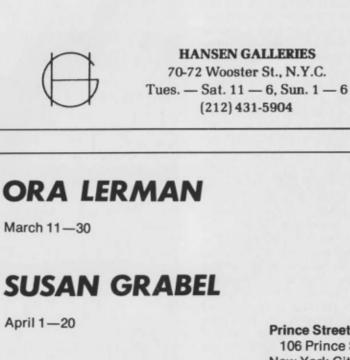
-RECENT WORKS

1976 OILS & DRAWINGS

poetry of Marianne Moore seems to have inspired in her not only the visual image of the great poet, but also a verbal poetry of inspired fantasy that bespeaks a deep familiarity with Moore's work and a love of her imagination. Holliday has said that the painting of Marianne Moore has given her the opportunity to explore a new symbolic iconography that she had never

worked with before. Women artists of the Sister Chapel have eloquently shown how the process of celebration can become a magical process of self-transformation. The evolution of their own work illustrates the way in which the artistic spirit travels through time and space in order to be reborn again in new form In order to bring these separate portraits into a harmonious unity, Maureen Connor, an environmental artist, has designed an architectural form which will hold the 11 paintings and support the ceiling. Each painting will float against a panel backdrop suspended by a metal frame, which will compose a

FEBRUARY 5 — MARCH 6



Prince Street Gallery

SUSAN GRABEL

CYNTHIA MOLLOD

chapel, a real "learning" was imparted. In an interview with many of the Sister Chapel artists, it became evident that a group spirit had been born which transcended the individual egos of any of the members. In striving to accomplish a higher goal, each artist had to step slightly outside the limits of her normal work habits, style, techniques and thought processes. Most found that the realism of their work was undergoing a shift towards a more imaginative and inventive iconography. Every artist felt that it was important to have executed a nine foot canvas. Several of the artists have had unexpected off-shoots from the Sister Chapel influence the direction that their new work was to take. One strongly shared sentiment was that this was the first time a group of artists have worked harmoniously together without feeling competitive with each other. Everyone wanted the chapel to be as beautiful a collection of art works as possible, and each encouraged the other to do her finest work. Sylvia Sleigh has said that she wanted the chapel to glow like the Sainte Chapelle. The Sister Chapel clearly marks a new point in feminist consciousness. The era of focusing upon woman's victimization seems to be behind us. Today women are busy resurrecting a lost tradition and elaborating a new culture. Through an inquiry into the meaning of transcendence women are creating history, and through an inquiry into the meaning of women's history, they are discovering the need for new spiritual values. The Sister Chapel will have completed the process of its transformatory magic when that sacred space of which Mary Daly spoke will have been created in the lives and in the minds of women everywhere. **FOOTNOTES**

1. Andre Malraux, Les Volx du Silence. Galerie de la Pleiade, Paris, 1951. p. 493 (Translations by Gloria

2. Ibid. p. 593
3. Ibid. p. 599
4. Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Theory of Women's Liberation. Beacon Press. Boston, 1973, p. 33.

Boston, 1973. p. 33.
5. Ibid. p. 33.
6. Ibid. p. 40.
7. Ibid. p. 156.
8. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art. Dover Publishers, New York, 1956.
9. Ibid. p. 11.
10. Ibid. p. 11.
11. Ibid. p. 81.
12. Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex. Harper & Row, N.Y., 1968. p. 107.
13. Mary Daly, "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion," Quest. A Feminist Quarterly. Vol. 1, No. 4, Spring 1975, p. 35.
14. All other quotations are taken from personal interviews with artists, from correspondence, personal statements and tapes.

Orenstein).

enigmatic as was her work. "She is surrounded by creatures based upon works

> FREIDA SAVITZ PASTEL DRAWINGS

through art.

April 1-20

Viridian Gallery 24 West 57 Street New York City 10019 Tues. - Sat. 10:30-5:30

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106 Prince Street New York City 10012 **Paintings** March 5-24

Maureen Connor, Model for Sister Chapel Structure, 1976. Velvet, nylon, 6x18" diameter. The structure for the Sister Chapel is awaiting adequate funding for its realization. space of 25 feet in diameter. The material of which the chapel is to be constructed of art in tribute to her passion for all Art. will be dark red velvet, which, when set Early on she had wanted to be a painter, into a series of modular units, will form and references to paintings are constant in soft arches and flowing red velvet flying her poems. Behind her, two birds of prey buttresses. Designer Connor's inspiration based upon the 'falcon of Kings' said to comes directly from the traditional objects of women's crafts-quilts, sewn have surmounted the staff of Fredrick II stand guard, perched on a lion-headed sculptures, and clothing, all simple, soft chair (sled? throne?). She carries a rolled and lightweight, a perfect solution for copy of the New York Times because the easy packing and shipping. Connor has Times was a continual source of subject taken cloth and made it function like matter for her poetry. Louise Bogan has stone, whereas ancient temples have used said of her: 'She takes the museum piece stone to imitate cloth. Velvet was selected out of its glass case and sets it against the as the fabric in which to envelope this living flower.' It has been my intention to Byzantine space in order to honor the set Marianne Moore among the lively female imagination. By going back to the images of her fastidious imagination.' Byzantine model for a chapel, Connor has If I have let the artist Betty Holliday chosen to create a space that is more describe her own work, it is because the intimate than that of a temple and one that is specifically built to human scale. If the historically celebrated process of creation of the Sistine Chapel is juxtaposed with the creation of the ceiling for the Sister Chapel, the full spiritual import of the meaning of this communal, non-hierarchical, feminist chapel-building project becomes clear. Ilise Greenstein writes that she held a paint-pouring ceremony at her studio in Florida. Eighteen people signed the canvas and poured three cups of white paint each into

the ceiling-gold white, pearl white, unadorned white. For Ilise, 18 is a magical number. It is Chai, which means Life, and it is the Cabbalistic number for her name Ilise. Those present at the ceiling ceremony intoned a Hebrew prayer which gives thanks to the supreme creator for having lived to reach this time and place. The entire event was photographed. Ilise Greenstein's inspiration for the Sister Chapel comes of a deeply religious source, for she was raised in an orthodox, talmudic Jewish family, and it was not until she was 13 that she found