ABOUT THE COVER


Moving from the Inside Out: Hammond’s Radiant Affection

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ABSTRACT. Harmony Hammond, known both nationally and internationally, is a contemporary lesbian artist from New Mexico who has lectured and published extensively on feminist art, lesbian art, and the cultural representation of “difference.” Radiant Affection is representative of Hammond’s organic work from the early 1980s that makes present the gendered body. Despite a demanding schedule, Hammond continues to be involved and supportive of the lesbian and gay communities and has curated several art exhibitions of contemporary works by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and two-spirited people. doi:10.1300/J367v04n02_02 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Harmony Hammond is a contemporary lesbian artist who resides in New Mexico. She was born in 1944 and grew up in a postwar lower-middle class housing project on Chicago’s south side. She married at 19 a man who was struggling with his sexuality. They moved from Minnesota, where Hammond had completed her BA in painting, to New York City in the autumn of 1969—just months after the Stonewall Riots and the birth of the Gay Liberation Movement. She came out as a lesbian during her time in New York City where she contributed to early feminist and lesbian art projects. When they first separated in 1970 (he died of AIDS years after they divorced), Hammond learned she was pregnant with a daughter, Tanya.

During the 1970s Hammond was a co-founder of Artists in Residence, the first artist-run, not-for-profit women’s cooperative art gallery in New York. Known only as AIR, the gallery advanced the status of women artists by exhibiting quality work by a diverse group of women artists. The gallery began in 1972 as a collective of 20 feminist artists who worked to create a professional space to showcase their work, since it was difficult to rely on recognition from the male-dominated gallery/museum system. Hammond is also founder and co-editor of three issues of Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics. Each issue of the journal, first published in 1976, had a different theme and editors. Hammond co-edited the groundbreaking first issue, “Lesbian Art and Artists” (Issue #3), and “Power, Propaganda, and Backlash” (Issue #9). The journal discontinued publication in 1993.

A pioneer of the feminist art movement, known primarily for her Bags, Presences, Floorpieces, and wrapped fabric sculptures of the 1970s and early 1980s, Hammond has lectured and published extensively on feminist art, lesbian art, and the cultural representation of “difference” (Hammond, 2005). Hammond curated the first exhibition of lesbian art in New York City in 1978. “A Lesbian Show” at 112 Greene Street Workshop received positive reviews in the Village Voice and Women Artist News and included the work of Hammond, Betsy Damon, Fran Winant, and Kate Millett, among other artists. The cover, Radiant Affection, is one of these wrapped sculptures.

Hammond recently retired as a professor at the University of Arizona (Tucson) where she taught painting, combined media, and interdisciplinary graduate seminars on contemporary art issues and practices. She always integrated issues of gender, class, race, sexuality, geography, and other constructions of identity into class discussions of the creative imagination, censorship, and First Amendment rights (Hammond, 2006).

During one semester she taught a graduate seminar that focused on “Lesbian Art in America.”

Many of Hammond’s early writings and lectures from the 1970s and early 1980s were published in Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art, and the Martial Arts (Hammond, 1984). Dedicated to her daughter, this book features the work of other feminist artists such as Louise Fishman, Janet Cooling, Nancy Graves, and Ana Mendieta as well as her own work in relation to her ideas on feminist art and art practice. In 2000, Hammond authored the landmark Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History. This affirms a career-long interest in the problems of lesbian self-representation in a patriarchal society where images of women are still primarily controlled by men and their bodies objectified by male desire. Hammond’s book not only explores what it is to “see” and represent as a gendered, lesbian subject, but goes beyond representation that is abstract and conceptual work (Hammond, 2006; Ivey, 2002) in her art and the art of Catherine Opie, Patricia Cronin, Deborah Bright, Deborah Kass, Judith Baca, Hulileh Tsinhaljinnie, and Nicole Eisenman, Joan Snyder, Linda Matalon, Millie Wilson, among others. Radiant Affection is representative of Hammond’s organic work from the early 1980s that makes present the gendered body. Recently, she reminisced about Radiant Affection:

Being a lesbian I always felt that in some way that notion of being fully who you are or being made out of self... [was], in a way, [a] kind of identity or self-identity. We were self-constructing in some ways and it was very open. I could be who I wanted to be and I could make myself out of myself. And that concept actually [is] the basis of a lot of [the] wrapped fabric [work] that I was doing back in the 70s. These look like wrapped sculptures but they’re not about bandaging. They’re not about bondage. They’re not about mumifying. They’re not about tying up. They’re really about moving from the inside out... because the fabric is around an armature inside... [They’re] about building a form out of its self, out of its own material. In fact, I would even say [that] what you see on the outside is really the substance of the inside. The work for me is connected to the fact that I’m lesbian. (Lampela, 2005)

Since 1990, Hammond has focused on large-scale mixed-media installation paintings that combine the tradition of oil painting on canvas with assorted materials ranging from human hair and straw to corrugated roofing tin and water troughs (Hammond, 2000). Recent works are nearly monochrome and rely on thickly crusted surfaces of oil paint to convey
meaning. In 2005, Hammond’s large paintings were exhibited at the Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Fe. In *Art in America*, Arden Reed (2005) noted that this work investigated the nature of the diptych by pairing compositions close enough in character and location. The large monochrome red and black paintings with heavily impastoed surfaces invited the viewer to wander through them (Figures 1 and 2). Writing about the same exhibition, Jon Carver (2005) praised Hammond’s work and noted that she could play “hardball with the big hitters of modernist abstraction” including Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Agnes Martin. The abstract paintings and prints are works that do not overtly address Hammond’s lesbianism but do make reference to a queer sensibility, however difficult it may be to define.

As a first generation feminist artist, Hammond has continued to create both overtly political art and abstract art that makes subtle statements about body politics. Ivey (2002) noted that Hammond employs symbolic substances and images in abstract ways. Her works use paint as an expressive substance and the paintings become a dialogue of human relationships. Her work balances the tensions between thick and thin, and the raw feelings that are created by the great physicality and scale of the works and their suggestion of bodily substances. The paintings become metaphors for the private and sexual body. “While there is no agreement as to what exactly constitutes,” Hammond (1999, p. 5) observed, “queer art, it is generally thought to reflect queer identity and to contribute to the development of that identity. Just as there is no fixed queer identity, there is no single queer aesthetic or sensibility.”

Hammond is known both nationally and internationally and has exhibited extensively in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Havana, Mexico City, the Hague. Despite a demanding schedule of producing art, lecturing, and writing, she continues to be involved and supportive of the lesbian and gay communities, including those in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. She curated “Out West,” a 1999 exhibition of work by 42 queer artists from Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas at PLAN B Evolving Arts in Santa Fe. Hammond (1999) wrote in the exhibition catalog that the contemporary works by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and two-spirited people focused specifically on issues of sexual identity and examined the lives, struggles, and cultural expressions of LGBT individuals living in the southwest.

In 2001, Hammond participated in an exhibition of works that were created from the over 600 vandalized books at the San Francisco Public Library. The vandal targeted those devoted to issues of LGBT individuals as well as AIDS and women’s health issues. Hammond transformed the
damaged book by Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women*, into *Representing Women: A Primer*, an art work that was exhibited with other works in the exhibition, "Reversing Vandalism," in San Francisco. She was also invited to participate in a sister exhibit, "Insight Out: Reversing Vandalism" in Santa Fe. For this exhibition Hammond transformed Patrick Higgins' *A Queer Reader: 2500 Years of Homosexuality* into *A Queer Reader*, a work of art that was exhibited at the Center for Contemporary Arts (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3.** *A Queer Reader*, 2003, Archival inkjet print, 66 3/4 × 44".

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As an artist, curator, and educator, Hammond continues involvement in local, regional, and national queer art projects and events. She served as co-chair of the Queer Caucus for Art, an affiliated society of the College Art Association from 1996–98 and, in 2004, organized a lively panel of young queer artists for the caucus-sponsored Intersections Conference, at the City University of New York. In June 2005, Hammond participated as a co-grand marshal, along with gay artist, Delmas Howe, in the Albuquerque Pride parade. Both led the parade down Route 66 and exhibited their work at the state fairgrounds. Hammond exhibited *A Queer Reader along with* several of her smaller, more political works in an exhibition on censorship.

Currently, Harmony Hammond is curating an exhibition of queer art "Made in Texas" that will open at Landmark Arts: Studio Gallery at the School of Art, Texas Tech University in October 2007. A website about Hammond's work can be found at www.harmonyhammond.com.

**REFERENCES**


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