

The Hungarian University of Fine Arts

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The Preservation of Sin in the Green Paradise

Theses

As an artist, I create works of art in which I formulate my thesis in the most impeccable way according to my aim, will and taste. I endeavored to express it in my dissertation as I was looking for my own “female voice” that could reflect my artistic attitude. “Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history -by her own movement.” Hélène Cixous writes about female language and the method of female writing in her masterpiece of *The Laugh of the Medusa* which has always inspired me to find my own style in writing which reflects myself and it does not necessarily meet the expectations of academic writing style. I am a woman artist – and that is the way I write. To choose my topic certainly meant the most difficult task, since I wanted to write about the fat female body or how women see art through the vagina or how household chores appear in the art history. As I see, each of these topics would require its own dissertation. In the near future, I would like to write a book and I consider my present essay as a station and a part of a process. Eventually, I have chosen the depiction of kitchen works in the art of women artist. I do not attempt to describe works in an extensive way, but I focus on works of art through which I am able to explain my thoughts or the aspects of kitchen processes I studied.

My goal is to describe the invisible work of women in which I only mean housework, more precisely, kitchen tasks. Exclusively, I investigate female artists’ and women artists’ artworks. In 2009 I decided that I would highly emphasize the reinterpretation and appropriation of long-forgotten female artists’ artworks. I came to this decision when I bought Frances Borzello’s book: *Femmes au Mirror* in Paris. Most of the time, I realized I could identify myself with the desires of the first generation of feminists with all their aims and stalwartness. However, I am a heterosexual feminist who considers men and women as equals and who grew up in a relative equality. I

proscribe all kinds of discriminations based on gender which, unfortunately, still exists in our everyday life from our workplace to education and I experience and go through all these discriminations day by day. Simone de Beauvoir, Linda Nochlin's writings are strongly determining for me along with essentialism, phenomenology and Judy Chicago's theoretical researches and efforts. I am not a radical feminist in the strict sense of the word, since I live in a traditional nuclear family. As my name also indicates I am married, but I am a feminist who follows traditional female roles and gives voice to taboo topics.

In the introduction of my dissertation I touch upon the invisible housework and I state my feminist viewpoint, opinions through which I contemplate the world. The structure of my dissertation is determined by time line. I progress from the oldest to our present days. I do not characterize eras, I concentrate on given works of arts that support my thesis.

I begin with Lilly Martin Spencer's painting, a conscientious composition from 1850, the earliest demonstration of household chores in the kitchen. It shows kitchen tasks -and not a landscape- being completed by a woman. The woman is standing in the kitchen slicing onions and crying or she is kneading some dough and stirring some food in a pan, anyhow, she is up and doing in the kitchen. This is my first thesis, the female artist depicts the woman conscientiously, the woman who is working in the kitchen. This is the basic idea which appears in 1850 and continues in the art of the 1970s with the critical definition of this type of picture in the 4th chapter. The 1st chapter is about Lilly Martin Spencer's highlighted artworks, additionally, I describe the era to clarify the reasons why she had been forgotten, where she was placed and who her contemporaries were. Naturally, I am going to mention female artists and what they depicted. Was kitchen work interesting in that time as a genre picture?

Then, in the 2nd chapter we travel from the 19th century America to Russia where I present 50 years older art, the era of the Russian Avant Garde, art before the Revolution. Natalia Goncharova's neoprimitivist artworks between 1908 and 1909 and Zinaida Serebrjakova's masterpieces between 1914 and 1920 respond to the Barbizoni school with the way they demonstrate women and their hard-working everyday life. They depict peasants working in day-labor and cultivation, people doing manual labor and the preparation of ingredients for dishes. We can observe scenes of production, collecting crops or harvesting. In this chapter the main motive is the type of picture in which we glance at a bag or a basket with fruit or vegetables rolling out of it, in other word, the food around which our life is spinning. Yet, it is not about still-lives, but -as we pointed out in Lilly Martin Spencer's works- a still-life is embedded in a genre picture. This

moment stopped, like in a photograph but it is about something more. These scenes are taken from everyday life events through a female point of view. It is important to emphasize that we never see the kitchen itself-unlike we do in Spencer's artworks-, in the case of Russian female painters we can only suspect that all the activities are completed in the kitchen. The paintings are genre pictures, happenings interior, supposedly, around the kitchen table. In this chapter I mention a number of Hungarian female painters, however, we have a limited knowledge of several of them, especially, and of their real message only the sight painted can speak to us.

The 3rd chapter is the proceeded thought of the previous one's , considering the fact, that while Russian female painters of the early 20th century prepare or depict setting up the table and serving dishes in progress, in the 3rd chapter Meret Oppenheim is actually doing it. It became an artistic gesture to set the table and serve the food. She did this on a female naked body in 1959, 100 years after Lilly Martin Spencer's paintings. Meret Oppenheim's gesture is expropriated by surrealists, then, by the Fluxus. Meret Oppenheim reflects consuming food frequently on a certain object, but her *Spring Banquet (Le Festin)* in Bern in April, 1959, is a highly significant artwork. I described this dinner -or we can call it as a ritual-and I place it in a contemplative perspective. The artwork responds to futurist kitchen, but for her, this is only a dinner organized for an intimate company which is rather a ritual, a communion, but in no way a Dionysus' orgy. In my view, Meret Oppenheim precedes eat-art, since a year later; Daniel Spoerri introduces the first snare-picture which is always preceded by a company's dinner. Spoerri documents in the same way I do in my painting practice when I document *Common Jam* apple picking and apple preservation actions.

From the 4th chapter I analyze almost no paintings, as the world of art was buried by artists due to the impact of the theories of Minimal Art in the 1960s. Those painters exclaimed the death of painting that only saw the possibility of artistic expressions in new mediums. The 4th chapter is about feminist artist of the 1970s and their happenings, actions and performances. According to my observations, I divided this era into two groups based on the representation of female artists' individuals. One of the guidelines is those women artists who use their own bodies to demonstrate the kitchen, a household device, or a dish and they identify all these appliances with their body. They make spectators look under the built-up costume and touch or take an insight into the vulnerable naked female body. Meret Oppenheim's dinner is the prelude in which the tableware is the naked female body people eat from. However, women artists do not use another woman's body, they do not humiliate and display it to the spectators' reactions, but they experience it on their own bodies. Their bodies become the surface, the material, the canvas, the raw material. According to the other guideline, women artists use their own bodies, although, it is less typical to use the naked

body. The emphasis is put onto the role and the situation with which they identify themselves. Their critical attention is paid on the vulnerability of their situation and role; the role which has to meet the expectations of the society and the role of their sex. They are standing in the kitchen behind the counter as they were on a stage- the place assigned to women. They explain food-making process in a critical way and these performances are preceded by Lilly Martin Spencer. Beside both theses, a third one appears that is less typical in this era, because it is about eating but it is represented by Natalia L.L. and I need to emphasize it. Natalia L.L. only eats and the way she does it is only a symbol, a tool to express her message which reflects the vulnerability of the woman and how women are used as a sexual object. Natalia L.L.'s masterpiece *Consumer Art* is as scandalous in Poland today in 2019 as it was in 1973, since the headmaster of the National Gallery of Warsaw had the picture removed from their permanent exhibition. According to his opinion, this work of art may do harm in sensitive young people.

Finally, theories previously discussed in each chapter are interwoven and become accomplished in the 5th chapter I introduce Central and Eastern European artists' works, mainly, Hungarian contemporaries, focusing on female artists and women artists coming out in the 1990s and reflecting on kitchen works. I divided the chapter into topics determined by the artists and I examine what sorts of artworks were made about food preservation, canning, kneading, breast's milk and the status of the good housewife. In a symbolic way, I dissect apple strudel or apple pie into elements which arise interesting questions both culturally and internationally. Finally, I remove peels from the apple.

Then, in the 6th chapter I speak about the action I called into being together with Ágnes Eszer Szabó and which we organize as a ritual every year; this is a *gesamtkunstwerk*, in other words, a common art action. In the *Common Jam* action we meet the depiction of kitchen work in different layers in different genres and it is a method and principal of relation aesthetics. My *Common Jam* paintings respond to Russian female painters in the 2nd chapter. These women artists document everyday life in their pictures. Not the video recorder documents events but the painting does, which is the artistic product of the event.

As a conclusion, I am going to present my Masterworks. Through my happenings I am able to take my art to those who have never been interested in contemporary art before. As I see, this is an excellent way to teach about art and transmit the knowledge of art unawares through the subconscious. I create a kind of art-therapy with my artworks with which I feed the spectators in a symbolic way and I distract them from their everyday life and convenience.