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# 'In Process':
# An Interview with Cherie Moses

Denise Blais
Edmonton Alberta

*Cherie Moses is a multi-media artist, who has been exhibiting across Canada since 1974. Her work has also been shown in Boston, Mass. and New York. Ms. Moses received a Master of Visual Arts degree in Printmaking and Mixed Media from the University of Alberta in 1979. Presently, her work involves the exploration of stereotypes relating to women's experience and sexuality within the mediums of photography and fabric sculpture. She has given lectures and participated in workshops concerning 'papermaking' and 'women in visual arts.' Ms. Moses has also researched aspects of health and safety within the field of art, and is the principal author of* ***Health and Safety in Printmaking: A Manual for Printmaking*** *(Alberta Labour, 1978). Currently, she resides in Edmonton, Alberta where she teaches and has held the position of Co-Ordinator of the Fine Arts Major at the Grant MacEwan Community College since 1980.*

The following is a transcript of an interview with the artist, that was recorded on March 9, 1983.

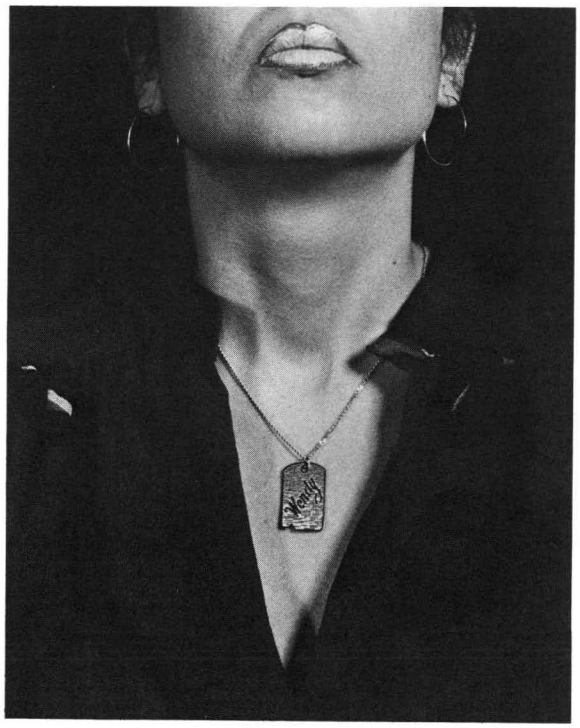
Q: In terms of the arts, your first involvement was the study of literature. What drew you to that field, and what literary forms and movements were of particular interest to you?

MOSES: The drawing point of the literature was the fact that I loved to read. Reading novels, for me, was a pleasant experience. Also, at that time, I don't think that I knew the choices that would be open to me and I never would have considered being an artist; a visual artist. To me an artist was someone who could draw things more or less realistically. I was naive in terms of what art could encompass. So, I was attracted to literature because I liked to read, and also I was good at it and progressed well in school. At that time, I was involved with Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialist literature[149]... Ionesco, Albee, Camus, Jean Genet. A lot of those writers intrigued me because of their position on life by pointing out the tragic-comic view of the fate of people within life. I went to graduate school in literature for about half a year and was disillusioned with the program—that's when I first came to Canada.[2] I didn't like the program, I quit, and at that point because I had put so much energy into it and I was geared to go through a master's and into a doctorate, I developed something which I still don't know the name for, but I couldn't read for a while. I couldn't comprehend. It was sort of...

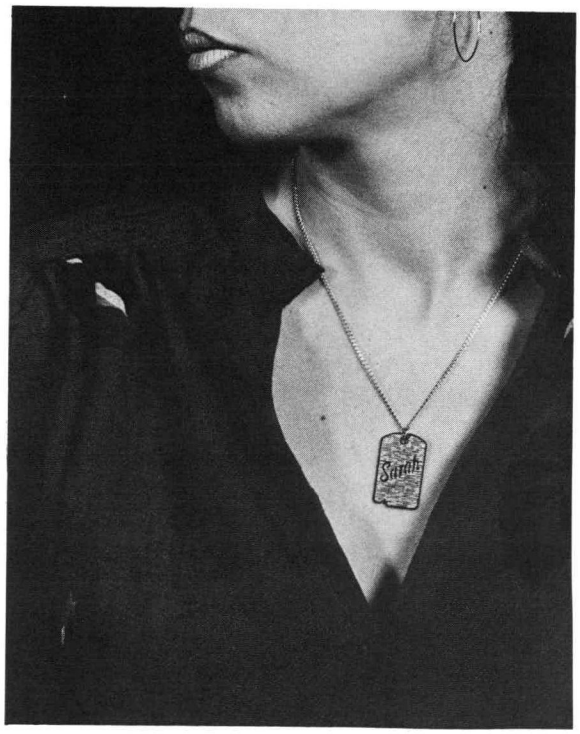
Q: ...like a block?

MOSES: ...a block; yes it was like a block, because I was quitting something that had meant a lot to me. I felt like I was failing, even though I hadn't failed; I had quit. I was going through this feeling that somehow literature and

*IMPOSED IMAGE: OTHER WOMAN* from a series of twelve 11" x 14" black & white photos, by Cherie Moses.







I weren't going to make it—what was left? I could no longer read, after all the reading I had done. So during the first six months of that period when I was no longer reading—it was dramatic; it was like all of a sudden not drinking milk or not eating meat; it was like this complete thing missing from my diet—I started doing more manual things, and I started to get involved in photography. I was literally feeling like I was going to go crazy if I couldn't do something with my thoughts. But I could no longer sit passively and read. It was sort of the move from being someone who is more passive—in terms of reading and analyzing literature—to someone who wanted to do something that was more active. The photographs eventually led me to decide to apply to art school. At the same time, I also applied again for a master's in literature because I was still insecure about making the transition, and I had to know that I could get into master programs in literature. Which I did; I got into them and I also got into the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. And that's where the transition happened.

Q: How has your background in literature played a significant role in the development of your visual work, for instance as a source of, or catalyst for ideas/themes?

MOSES: Well, literature has defined a lot of things for me. The stereotypes in literature, or the archetypes, are the same ones that are in culture, or the same ones that are in art. For example, some of the things that I'm doing, like 'evil' woman, the 'other' woman; are mentioned throughout literature, or alluded to. Specifically, 'other' woman; one comes across that in passages when you're reading fiction.[3] The idea of posture and role playing is clear in literature. They seem to be literary ideas, but they're also sociological ideas. I think what's happened for me...the literary training has given me an analytical approach to looking at life. I tend to dissect what I think is happening. That, combined with my interest in interaction—how people deal with life and living, and how they impose categories which is a real absurdity to me, in order to better understand or make someone harmless, or to disqualify someone from being a contender or competition—has been very interesting to me. It certainly coincides with the move upward from graduate school to teaching, and to professional life and the kind of peer struggles that occur.

Q: Presently, you work encompasses a range of mediums. You described your study, at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, as being a transition point for you: What materials and ideas were you dealing with before arriving at this multi-media approach? What kind of evolution has occurred in terms of your concepts and materials?

MOSES: At Nova Scotia, I thought that photography was what I was going to art school for, because I had been doing these photographs on my own, and they seemed pretty successful, and I seemed to understand how to do it. So, when I first went to Nova Scotia, I immediately went toward photography. Then I started doing both printmaking and photography. Finally I was discovering that the photographs that I was doing were technically okay, but they hadn't any content that was meaningful to me—and I wasn't interested in social landscape, documentary and that sort of thing. I had worked through a number of techniques and was at a dead end. So I dropped the photography, concentrated on the printmaking, and then took a course which was extremely influential to me and a number of other people who are now artists in Canada; and that was called "Mixed Media."[4] We were asked to look at the mediums we were familiar with and approach it in a different way; to try to change our position toward whatever technology we had been using. I also introduced new problems that we had to solve. So that course was extremely influential in terms of giving me the space, and the time, and the motivation to figure out different approaches to art-making. But I was still committed to printmaking because that

seemed to be what I had been doing—primarily intaglio and screenprinting.

Q: Do you see your choice of juxtaposing and incorporating many mediums as having inherent political or aesthetic implications, in that it is 'anti-specialist?'

MOSES: Well, it would have been political if I had done it maybe, earlier in the sixties. But other people have done it at a time when it was more political; like Linda Benglis, who was notorious for her use of media. I think within Edmonton one gets the misunderstanding that things in the world are still that specialized. I think in the 'real' art world you can still see specialized activities, but you do see a lot of works that are inter-disciplinary in nature. Now, I think it's an accepted convention. So, although I might like to feel that I am really making a political statement about not specializing, coming from the east, and living in New York, for a while, and coming out here, I can see that, in fact, that was a convention I was familiar with. I had seen other people do it. I was more of an oddball here, to do it but I'm not really breaking any new ground.

Q: I think when I said 'political' I didn't necessarily mean just within the context of the art world, but in terms of the comment that it makes toward a larger context; the cultural context as a whole;

MOSES: You mean, using different materials together...

Q: ...because it's anti-specialist, in a way it makes a comment in itself on a larger, or broader, maybe, sociological level.

MOSES: I'll have to think about that.

Q: I was thinking that underlying the decision to combine or play off materials, there might have been a reaction to a number of things that weren't purely within the art world.

MOSES: I think I felt, in terms of materials, that once I had a handle on some basic processes, that the material or the process that I used would have to come second to the idea. I guess I do see my position as a political one, more in terms of the content because, again I feel that using many materials in a mixed media approach is an acceptable convention within the art world. And I feel I am using as acceptable a convention as anyone. That's why I don't feel that I'm making a stand as not being a specialist for myself, although I have some specialized skills: papermaking, black and white photography. I've not chosen to keep working out problems in media, letting the media become a real source of my inspiration, at this point. It'a a conscious decision to say, 'okay, I can't sew, but I've got this idea about brides, and I don't think it can be in paper, and I don't feel I can just print it. I want to make images that have the stature of the female form and have that kind of directness in presentation. So I will now figure out how I'm going to make these, even though I'm not a seamstress, and I'm not a fiber person, and I don't know much about dyes.' And so, I worked myself into that technology, not to learn the technology but because I had to, to do what I needed to do. I suppose that is some sort of anti-specialist position. I'm not impressed by work that is just technically good, but doesn't have anything else behind it. Our technological capability as a culture is quite amazing. But after you've been amazed a couple of times, it's not enough to keep making art just to be amazed.

Q: So, it's a matter of finding the right materials as a vehicle for your ideas.

MOSES: Right. Probably the most consistent vehicle has been photographs. I've gone back and forth to them; they're like a resource to me in the way they make more explicit what I'm really thinking.

Q: In your work, what is the nature of the relationship between the performance pieces and the more object-oriented fabric sculptures, for instance, in 'Brides and Opening Ceremonies' (1981)? Do they each have a distinctive and particular function?

MOSES: Well, the 'Brides' were originally conceived of just as 'Brides', without a performance. I was trying to deal with the stereotype of the June bride and also with my thinking about the American Dream. That goes back to my study of the Theatre of the Absurd, and Albee, and the family, and the nature of the postures of those people. Part of the American Dream—since I am an American, and I'm sure it's a Canadian dream too—is that when you're a young woman, the ideal is be a bride in flowing silks and satins, marching down the aisle, exuberant and radiant. It's the epitome of packaging of the young female before she goes into the married state. But it epitomizes dream imagery for me, cultured, cultural dream imagery—what we've been taught to consider the dream—it's a sort of tragic/comic position, because of course, it would be great if that dream really would work so purely and so wonderfully. I bought bride magazines and figured it out, because I've never been in the position of wearing the stuff myself. I find it...slightly frightening, because no real life can meet the expections of a dream, and that led me to consider the image as a slightly empty one; one without arms, without heads, a bag-like shape. I was thinking 'bride,' 'bag,' 'bed,' and that those three words were interrelated. At first I made things that looked sort of like camping beds, and then they looked like mummy sleeping bags, and then they got refined into dresses that look like mummy sleepping bags.

Q: They also have a 'waist-down' quality. For instance, comparing the shape of the 'Evil Women' (1981-82) fabric sculptures to those of 'Brides,' what struck me was that there is a kind of dissection from the waist down which does not occur in the 'Evil Women.' They were more like robes, more towards a full length.

MOSES: The 'Evil Women' had more of a conscious wing structure starting. I was also thinking about Winged Victory—I have great delusions of grandeur when I'm making these things—you know, Victory with her wings on, getting ready to fly off the wall. The 'Evil Women' are far more overt, and out front, aggressive and demanding images. The 'Brides' are meant to be more passive, waiting, pure, more self-contained, perhaps, less overtly sexual. I wanted the 'Evil Women' to have more lumps under them; they're more formed in some ways, and tend to be more seductive. The 'Brides,' I wanted to look like something you would protect and take care of, and watch out for.

Q: But they're both hollow shapes.

MOSES: Sure, they're just images. They're hollow.

Q: The pieces in both 'Brides' and 'Evil Women' function mainly as parodies of established stereotypic notions of women. Why do you think you gravitate toward parody as a device or vehicle?

MOSES: To me it's like a double edge; there's humor, and there's the extreme sadness. That's how I perceive these things in a culture. You can look at it in a detached way and find some of the ways that we have assembled ourselves as human civilization, a bit humorous. When a real person is trapped in a category, it's extremely sad, it's pathetic and I'm interested in that kind of double edge. I mean, they are parodies, they are very satirical. It's not a pleasant humor, necessarily. Somebody said that some of the 'Brides' reminded them of coffin liners, and I think that in a way, I am also talking about categories as deathly: as things that take life out of things; things that from a distance maybe you can laugh at, or take lightly, but in essence when human life is com-

bined with the category, it becomes an extremely painful situation. Because I'm interested in things that I see as painful, I don't want to deal with them in a melodramatic fashion, like, 'Isn't this terrible that people do this to each other; let's make life better.'[5] I'm interested in framing it in a spot where it's double, where it could go in either direction. The photographs are less parody, they're a little more stringent, they're not very humourous.

Q: You've made some comparisons between the 'Brides' and the 'Evil Women,' and their dualism. You've also mentioned how, for you, the idea or concept has become much more important. I was wondering, how did you arrive at the particular kinds of materials, colours, and patterns for the four pieces in the 'Evil Women' show (1983)?

MOSES: Well, I thought that if you were an 'evil' woman, one of the things you might be is flashy. I thought about people like strippers, and seductresses, and movies...I saw *Pandora's Box* first, which was the classic movie about the female seductress. Then thinking about Marlene Dietrich, and thinking about the archetypal ways that women can be evil; the pieces are related to tigers and tigresses in pattern and colour. So, I looked for fabrics that were like leopards and tigers, with a cat-like quality. Then I looked for things that were plainly, tastelessly flashy. I wasn't looking for a tasteful, elegant, controlled type of woman; I was looking for the kind of woman that is out there. The image of the 'evil' woman is that she is out there actively, aggressively seeking to suck these poor helpless males into her claws. I'm not saying this image is just promoted by men. By far, women have done this to each other, have laid it on each other, so that the 'other' woman or the 'evil' woman becomes this incredible thing, like a half-monster, half-beauty. So, I tried to pick fabrics that would emphasize that flashy, tacky quality. Some of them I painted certain little, repetitive patterns on. In *Lilith* (1981-82), I felt that the black with the sparkles was seductive, and for some reason—which had nothing to do with conceptual thinking—I decided that the little pink on this particular fabric reminded me, nostalgically, of hair rollers. When I was a teenager, you had little black hair rollers with metal in them, and you stuck a pink pin through it. A lot of the work with the fabric is from my backlog of intricate, little hand-work and things that have caught my interest. So *Lilith* evolved without the idea of a tiger but with the idea of something from the past that was very female. In the end, *Lilith* still looks like a devilish type of figure because of the things crawling down onto the floor; that makes it almost like tentacles, like the idea of being alluring, luring or pulling someone in. So, I was consciously working on that kind of imagery; sort of an octopus of a beauty.

Q: Was the piece *Jezebel* (1981), inspired by the character that Bette Davis played?

MOSES: No, they were all named later, when I looked at their personalities. I made them, and I looked at them, and I collected a whole bunch of names. I looked at the pieces and I named them as I thought the names fit. So I never made one thinking of the name.

Q: But more in terms of general ideas within that framework?

MOSES: Yes. I was thinking of Jezebels, and Delilahs; emasculating beauties.

Q: Many of your concepts and themes appear to be approached from a feminist point of view. For example, there exists a continuity, I believe between your MVA piece, *Portrait of the Artist as Object (1979)*, the work of 'Brides,' particularly the ritualistic performance piece, and your 'Evil Women'; all three bodies of work are concerned with the objectification and dehumanization of women, with women's sexuality being the major focus. How does feminist thought enter into your work, in terms of the process or the ideas?

MOSES: The acknowledgement that women have been stereotyped is part of it. I think a true feminist is really looking for equality in terms of the male and female. In the 'Brides' [performance piece], I tried to show the male is in an equal, stranded role. I wanted to use men [in the performance] because it was a completion. The 'Brides' couldn't be what the bride is without the man; they're a complementary pair. Having a feminist orientation has made me look at the roles of women...first look at myself, and how I felt about restriction, constriction and layering. Then look at broader social categories and decide 'How does this work with men?,' 'What does this mean for them?' That's been harder to do because, of course I can't say it for a man but I can and did ask a man to improvise within a given situation. So that influenced the work. A good feminist is probably a good humanist, and looks at the human condition. The one thing Judy Chicago said that I really agree with was that the human condition has been portrayed for ages, but through men. *Waiting for Godot*, which is a classic that I studied and loved, is about two men. The human condition from a woman's point of view hasn't been that well noted. And one of the things that I'm trying to do, to compensate for my education, is to read works by women, now. Because I want to see how women write about women, and about men, and about those situations.[6] I don't think that women have investigated the human condition in the same way.[7] That's a rather grandiose thing to take on, but it's important for me. Because my condition is part of the human condition, and as I start looking at my own part and branching out, I think it will encompass more. The piece I'm working on now, has men, women—a diversity of people in it—and it's taken me a long time to branch out a little.

Q: Do you think there is a valid connection or relationship between women's art and the feminist movement as a whole, not only in a contemporary sense, but also historically? Does it seem important or necessary to view women's art in the context of feminism?

MOSES: You can only view it within the context of feminism if it's in the art. A lot of women's works have nothing to do with feminism, are more in tune with the mainstream of what art should be. It's important to have some role models in that area (feminist art)—to see women who've done it—because it's not an area where you're necessarily applauded. It's important to have that, to complement the basic everything that you get in art history and contemporary art. I mean, it's important for women to have a position within the art world that is respected; I'm not entirely convinced that some of the ways that this has been dealt with, have been the best. The alternative galleries are interesting. You can see more women's work, but you also see a lot of mediocre work. I think that the first impetus is to get the work out; it's not about making quality judgements.

Q: So, in a sense, there is a kind of exploitation that occurs.

MOSES: To a certain extent, yes, because I've even seen it with Performance Art. Quite often anybody could do a performance, and you can do therapeutic performances, or you can do all kinds of things that are important to you. I think that in the emergence of women as artists, and the big move for women to really expose themselves, it's going to be hard to pick out what's going to be the most potent; it's not all going to be good because it's by women, just like it wasn't all good because it was done by men. To answer your question directly, yes, I do think it's important to see women's art...I find it sometimes more important to read the criticism that a lot of women historians and critics are writing about the nature of all this. People like Linda Nochlin, who has written the essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?."[8] I've heard Ann Sutherland-Harris' lecture about the history of women artists...like Artemisia Genti-

leschi—and talking about the position of women, talking about where that's at today. I have found that sometimes more helpful than just looking at the art itself.

Q: I think what I meant by 'seeing women's art within a feminist perspective' wasn't, so much, to apply that as a label on all women's art, but rather that it may be a valuable perspective from which to view art—to see what it is—whether it's feminist or not. This would be a way of counteracting some of the biases...

MOSES: Sure. That's important and most people won't admit that there are biases in the art that one is normally taught. Linda Nochlin says that the art historical point of view is white, middle-class, and male dominant. Which is to say, that the people who have been writing the history, recording the history, talking about what is happening and forming our opinions-which then affects the next group of artists, profoundly—have been of a specific bias, and no one has wanted to pick that out. Nochlin is a PhD, herself, in art history. She's got a good reputation. She's really standing out there—this is years ago, actually—I feel she is saying that, 'Okay, this is the way we have looked at art and yet we've called this objective. We've not taken a sociological point of view. We've not looked at the fact that education, the cultural institutions have either helped or hindered people to become artists and that it has been mainstream, white, middle-class males who are both the artists, historians, et cetera...that the system has been geared for that.' So, what has to happen to make it interesting to be a woman artist and to get the input from women, has to be on a number of levels: the art making; the criticism; the history; the shows that one can see. If you look at the way that things have been...for example,—one statistic—during the 43 years prior to 1972, the Museum of Modern Art had one thousand solo shows; nine hundred and ninety-five were by men.[9] Even the terminology 'one-man' show indicates where our thinking has come from. Because I'm coming from a literary-language context, I see that as incredibly important to our perspectives.

Q: I can see how you would be sensitive to the issue of language containing that kind of bias, and that kind of attitude.

MOSES: Yes...yes.

Q: I see a motif of transformation appearing often in your work. Perhaps it is only suggested to me in part through the delicacy, and fragility of the paper and fabric pieces—particularly *Celebration* (1979)—through the qualities of the material you choose to work with. Even the hollow forms of the fabric sculptures, and the predominance of a triangular, tapering shape in your work, create strong connotations of cocoon, wings, and butterfly; in other words, metamorphosis. Is this conscious or unconscious, or am I reading these aspects into your work?

MOSES: No, I think the cocoon, and certainly the mummified image have had an impact on me. The cocoon has been very much in the work; to me the cocoon is a sheltering, protecting device, but fragile. I think it started when I wrapped concrete pieces, then I wrapped myself, and then I could see that's a cocooning process,—coming out of it, going into it—that sort of thing.[10] But images, to me...the idea of an image is like a facade, it's like a thin shell. So, the cocoon imagery keeps working within my ideas, at the moment, as a layer between the real person and the world.[11]

Q: Earlier, you mentioned the process involved with your hand-made paper pieces—that you would rip them, tear them, and reassemble them. That, in itself, is a kind of transformation. Even though you talk about the pieces of that time being more formal, more aesthetic, it seems that through the process, the materials and ideas strike a kind of balance with one another.

MOSES: Well, even when I was doing formal things with it, my ideas were of...totally destroying this piece of paper and reassembling it into something that was again beautiful. And the notion of beauty was coming from the sense that something can get completely destroyed, and come back again in a beautiful form; and that is a transformation. The ripping comes from that idea, essentially; that in taking the fabrics, painting them, ripping them up, putting them together, it's something more beautiful than I ever started with.

Q: Despite the change in materials, the fabric works make a visual reference to the earlier, paper pieces. For example, I can see how the idea of 'wall pieces extending down and running along the floor'—as in the *Waiting* pieces (1978-79) of your MVA show (1979), and particularly *Excess* (1979)—has been retained in both the 'Brides' and the 'Evil Women.' Does this reflect a formal or conceptual concern that has continued to exist in your work?

MOSES: I think it is a formal current. Formally, I'm really interested in sculptural imagery that is against the wall, but uses the floor. I don't have any rational reason for that, I just like the continuity. I like that idea of something having a sculptural impact without being on a pedestal, or totally in the round. I like the delicacy of that, and the fragility. I mean, you could step on that, but you don't. I like what it did to the pieces; it seemed that all the pieces, when they had things on the floor, it made them a little more mysterious. At least in the MVA show it works. I was interested in waiting, time, process, changing. And the pieces on the floor were always compacted; you didn't know what was in them. In *Excess*, they were just overlapped and in the 'Brides' you can see what's on the floor, but they become vulnerable, for that stuff on the floor is like feet; it's like stepping on someone's train or someone's veil. I find they're very fragile forms. People tend to keep away.

Q: There is also an element of confrontation, in that they are presented frontally and that is how they face or involve the viewer.

MOSES: Yes, they are confrontational pieces.

Q: Serialization and repetition are devices that have been used by many twentieth century artists, for many different reasons. Is this an important aspect in the execution of your ideas, and if so, how would you describe the way you employ it, compared to someone like Andy Warhol, for example?

MOSES: Yes, it is important because I think that the pieces by themselves become too idiosyncratic. You need many of them because it's like creating a fantasy; they reinforce each other. It's like my own army. I feel when I'm with the pieces in a room, that I've created a whole group of individuals. They're that personified for me. One by itself is just a freak and I'm not making a statement about freaks. I'm interested in making a statement about the commonality of these positions. Nor am I interested in just making isolated, decorative objects that don't have any other meanings, not at the moment anyway. How it compares to other people who use series ...Warhol, I think, uses series...I see it more like a pun on advertising, the way he uses the series. This repetition, and alteration of the images, over and over again, emphasizes the kind of commercial value and the depersonalization of the *Marilyn*, for example, in the sense that more and more of them depersonalizes it, or the printing processes—everything that he does to it—makes that person into an image of that person. It's not about what the real person is, it's about their image. In that sense, there is some relationship. I was influenced by the work of Eva Hesse because her 'repetitions' seemed incredibly beautiful, to me. And her work, even though it wasn't extremely literal in terms of what was going on, seemed very, very painful. And in the repetitions...I started to feel, when I saw the work, that it strengthened the position she was taking.[12]

Q: As a woman, have you found that in order to deal with the concepts and themes which encompass your experience, you have had to invent and explore new aesthetic criteria, a new vocabulary? In essence, where do you place yourself in relation to tradition?

MOSES: Well,...that's a hard one. I don't know that I've invented anything new, because I really think people have influenced me. Primarily people like Benglis, and like Eva Hesse. Even to some extent, someone like Lucas Samaras. I see them working with modes that on first impact appear...well, Benglis' pieces are more totally decorative perhaps. Samaras' pieces, although they are highly decorative, have painful elements like pins. In terms of using the materials, I see myself within the tradition of the sixties where using different kinds of materials became very common. There's also the tradition, which has been evolving, of social-political art. That has been with us for awhile. It's not new. Even Picasso's *Guernica* is a political statement. We don't discuss it that way so much. But it is. It's also a painting. Trying to make a statement with one's art is perhaps more acceptable today. Not necessarily right here, in this city, but it is not an unusual occurrence—political statements, social statements. I do see myself in line with contemporary traditions; they're not necessarily Renaissance, or...only in so far as some of the imagery that I try to use, have the kind of impact that very traditional painting or sculpture has, in terms of stature. That's all. In terms of content and materials, I think it's real sixties, early seventies kind of work.[13]

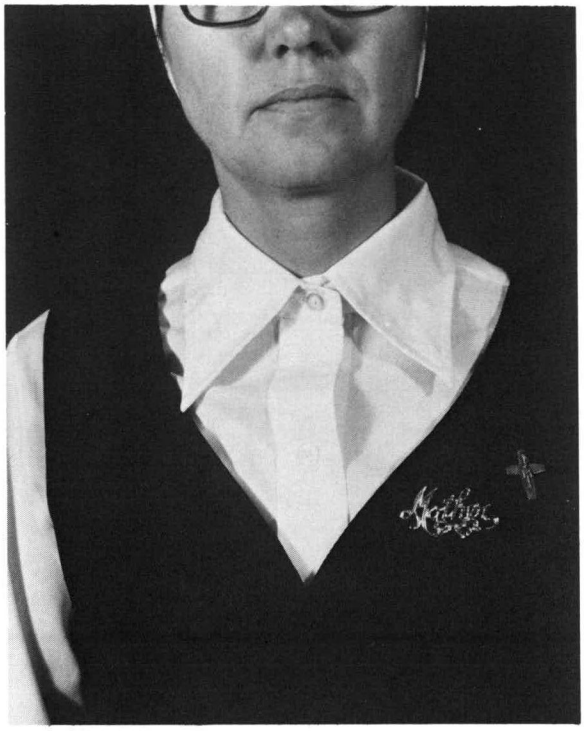
Q: But, in terms of social and political comment within art history as a tradition, they have been predominantly statements from a male point of view, about more male concerns or about concerns that would exclude women—a very selective view. I think that women might have a different perspective; that's what might be new. That in a way it is a continuation, but in stepping outside the scope of tradition, it is also a criticism.

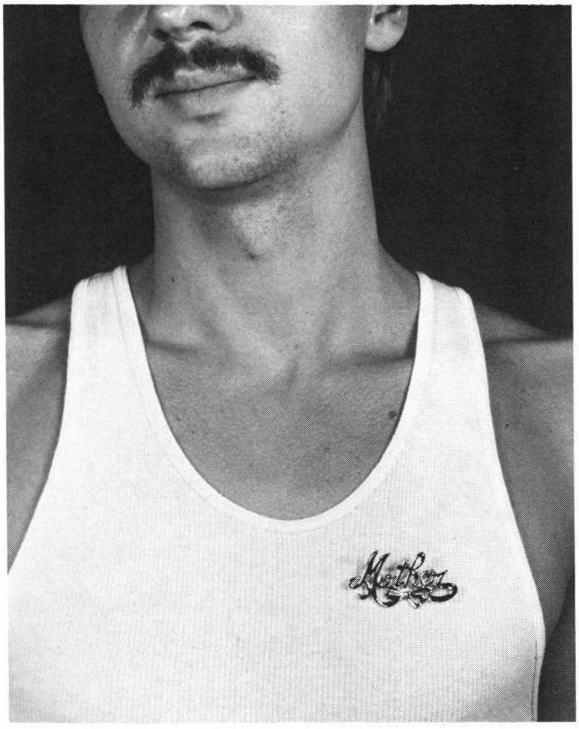
MOSES: That question is hard for me to answer because I tend not to see myself as doing something new. I'm too much in the middle of it. I may be doing something that is a deviation, and the only sense I have of that is—and it's just a visceral sense—every now and then when I'm working, I think my things look very strange. I sincerely sit there and I think, 'This is very bizarre. Why am I making these things? Other people make paintings, and they're making things that look more like they should be art, and I'm making these very bizarre things.' Not the photographs so much as the sculptural pieces. I mean, they're real odd looking things by anyone's standards. They're not a kind of format and imagery that easily fit into a category...I guess fiber artists would accept it more, because they seem to be more liberal in terms of what can be art. So, I guess that what I have been sort of pushed into, because I'm using fabric, is fiber art tradition. I'm glad of the acceptance there, and I feel a big debt to fiber art, but I don't feel that's only what it's about. I don't feel that's why I came into it. So, in that way I find myself, even with a whole body of work, a little idiosyncratic in terms of where I am with it.

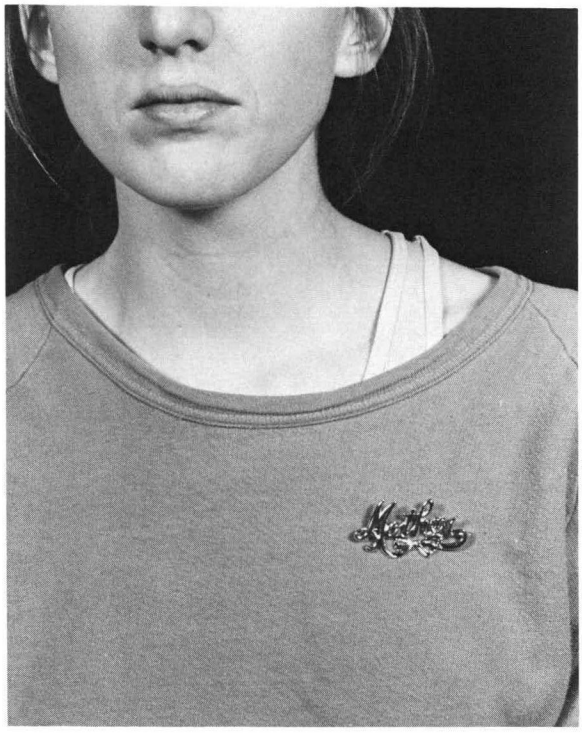
Q: Lawrence Alloway, in a 1976 article on women's art, wrote that the development of women's art in the seventies was much faster than what art critics and dealers were prepared to handle; thus resulting in a discrepancy or gap between work and theory.[14] Do you see this situation as still existing? What kinds of response have you received from critics and curators, concerning your work?

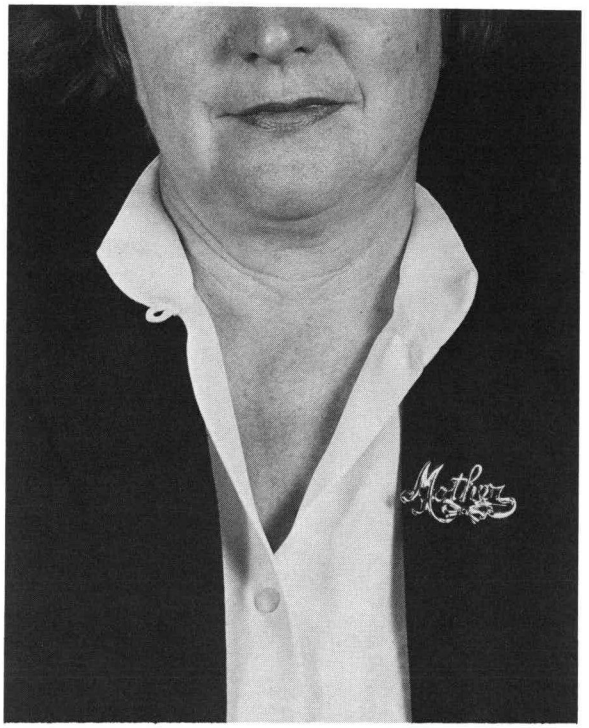
MOSES: Well, about criticism and the gap, I'd say, especially in Canada, there's a gap in terms of a lot of critical writing, anyway. What gets covered tends to be in areas where there are people who are being very articulate, and writing—and only certain kinds of shows and kinds of art.

*IMPOSED IMAGE: MOTHER* from a series of sixty 16" x 20" black & white photos, by Cherie Moses.





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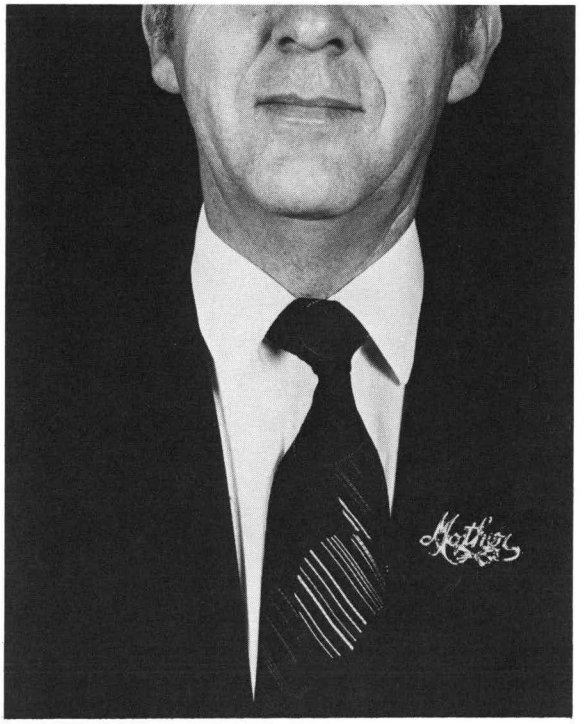
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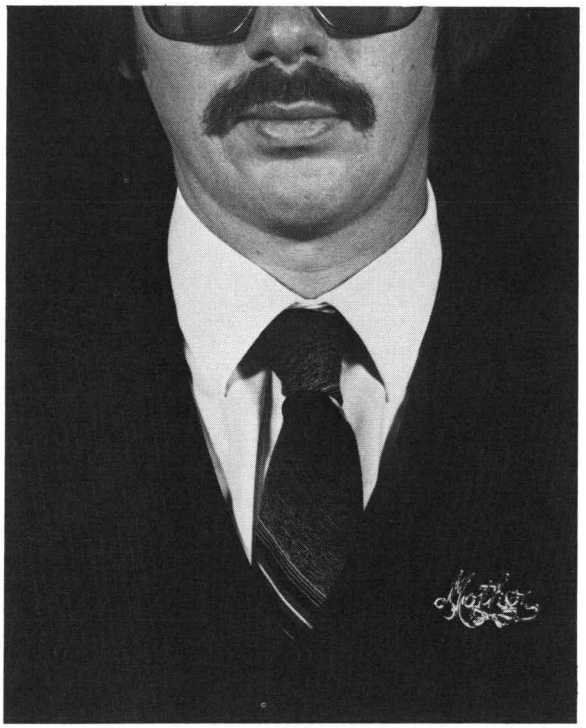
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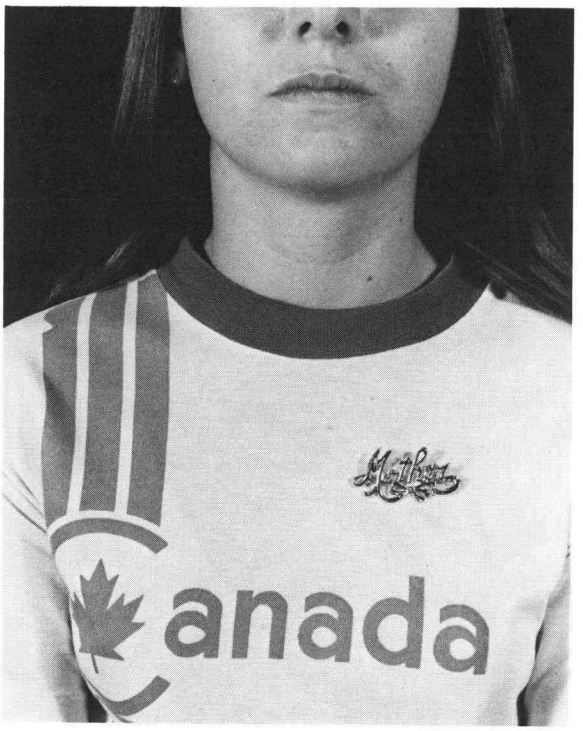
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There isn't enough competition in terms of the good critical writing, period, let alone about women's art. I think that in many ways, for someone who's writing criticism,—unless they're well established, or unless they're someone writing in the newspaper, where you're supposed to review everything—there's probably still a bit of stigma in writing about works that are not high status things to write about, at the moment. It would be more high status to write about a new figurative painter in Canada, because, of course, that is what's important internationally, now. In terms of my own work, when I showed in Toronto I did get a review in the newspaper.[15] I've never been reviewed in any art journals. Even when I had a show here, and a major show in Calgary, no one was interested in covering it even when someone offered to write the article.[17] So, that hasn't happened for me; in terms of this work and art periodicals, I don't know if it will. I don't know if that's because it's women's art or because it's...I mean I'm not in biennials, or anything; part of this geographical isolation makes it hard to compete on that level. So, I'm not sure if it's the lack of writers, or the lack of the work having a prestigious enough subject matter. It's probably a combination of those things. Maybe for some people it's just not important work, too. That's possible. But one has to face the fact that the art that gets heard about is the art that is shown and the art that is written about. Not even necessarily the art that is sold; unless it's sold to a collector whose whole collection eventually gets sold. But the politics of the situation is that you need to have your work discussed and written about critically in publications which are considered important. Eventually that needs to happen. However, there have been lots of artists who have not had that kind of affirmation for a long time, and I think people have a tendency to review things that they understand quite well. Most of the reviews I have had, of this particular work...actually here, in the [Edmonton] Journal, Lois Sweet gave what I felt was the most perceptive view.[18] In Calgary, there was no review at all.

Q: In the same article, Alloway quotes Rosalyn Drexler, a New York artist/writer, as saying, "No one thinks collectively unless they are involved with propaganda." Do you see yourself as an individual working in isolation, or as a member of a collective or community of women who share basically the same goals?

MOSES: I don't feel I work collectively. I feel that I have something in common with lots of people—women, and now, quite a few men—who believe what I believe; I don't believe that makes me a collective worker. I would agree that if you're working collectively, to a certain extent it is related to propaganda. I don't think that means it isn't art, because a lot is, in essence, propaganda for whatever kind of art it is espousing. But I don't feel I'm part of a collective unit, working with that kind of consciousness. I do feel there is a lot of back-up in terms of people who believe what I believe, but they're writers, they're musicians, they're people who go to work everyday as secretaries, or waitresses. I feel there is a whole group of people that I have a lot of thinking in common with, and who are a support system in their ideology. I don't think I'd be a very good collective worker, because I don't like the 'religious' approach, but I share the philosophy strongly.

Q: You've touched upon the relationship between politics and art; do you see the aspect of reform, for instance, as having a valid or legitimate role, particularly in women's art?

MOSES: Sometimes real, conscious reforming doesn't work, sometimes it does. I see it in the work, but I see all art doing that, to a certain extent. Any art activity causes people to think and perceive in a particular way. So, women dealing with very specific issues are going to have some effect, because it's starting to network: I do the work thinking one thing; you see it and pick up on what I'm thinking; that spurs you to do the next thing...That's what art has been about all the time, in terms of causing reactions

and reforming thinking. So, yes, I see work as doing that. I see political work as doing that, just more overtly.

Q: In reference to the recent showing of *The Dinner Party*, in Calgary, what do you think about Judy Chicago's work and the kind of exposure it has received lately?

MOSES: I think she deserves the exposure. There have been lots of artists—male artists who have been of similar temperament, and who have done grandiose things and who have gotten lots of exposure. I think she's been a bit more up front about how one gets into history; she hasn't been demure about it. She's been very up front. 'If you want to get into history, get lots of people to see your work, you make sure you've got slides out on the piece, you get a couple of books out and you do all this....' It doesn't bother me. It's not what I would do. I mean, aesthetically or emotionally, that would not be an enjoyable thing for me—to work with four hundred people and do that kind of thing. But I appreciate what she has done because I think it is significant,...so, maybe it is a monument to women, what's wrong with that? A lot of the criticism seems geared against the ambitiousness of the work and the artist. So what if it's ambitious? So was Picasso! No one said, 'Well, he had, you know, two wives and two mistresses, and so he's not a very good person and so his art is not that important.' You are, as a person, what you are, you espouse what you believe in. Some people look at it and appreciate it, other people condemn it. That's been the nature of things all along, and just because a woman does it, it's not different. She's being very political; perhaps more overt than a lot of men have been, but then they didn't need to be. She's trying to rectify and balance the situation; it's a monumental thing to attempt. So, I respect her for that. The piece was very important to me when I first saw it, because I had just finished graduate school and wondered, 'What next?,' 'What's left?.' Then I looked at that, and thought, 'Oh, my God,'—you know—'One can do all sorts of things.' So I found it inspirational in that way—not in the sense that I would really feel strong about the ceramics, or the tapestry—I feel strongly that someone had the commitment to do that.

Q: From your experience, what are some of the problems or obstacles that women artists still face today? Has there been any positive change?

MOSES: I think some of the major obstacles are still in the realm of both education and exhibition. In educational institutions, particularly the universities, women still play a very minor role on faculties, and are often in less secure positions. They are often given very little respect and very little promotion, in terms of tenure. Few women get tenure. They're not commended for their individuality. I feel that the lack of role models within educational institutions is very demoralizing. As we well know, in art schools—for more than just this decade—the graduates have been mostly women; women have comprised the majority of the student population, and yet have been taught almost solely by men. I don't think men are bad teachers, or that they shouldn't teach. I just feel there should be a balance there, so that women have a chance to see other women succeeding in their field. You can use men as role models, but we have enough educated women so that there should be more equality. So, I'd say education is a real obstacle in that sense. In terms of professional life and exhibitions,—major exhibitons—I still don't think women are represented enough. The most recent exhibition I can think of is the international one called "Zeitgeist" in Berlin—"Spirit of the Times." There was one woman, Susan Rothenberg, who was shown. That was a major international show. So, if that's any indication of how positive things are, then I really wonder.

Q: What about alternatives? You mentioned alternative gallery systems. What are some of the ways that you, or other artists have been able to

gain exposure without compromising your integrity?

MOSES: Well, there has been plenty of gallery interest in my work, not so much commercial as public or alternative galleries. I guess, the way I am looked at is as someone who they must feel is interesting to show or someone with potential. Certainly not as someone who is commercially viable. So, I have had the opportunity to show in some pretty nice galleries. Most of the shows have been in public galleries where there is no onus on selling. I have been fortunate in that way. I still haven't done anything in major places—major museums and galleries; although my work will be included in a group exhibition at the Nickle Museum in Calgary in November. I am still, in terms of my art life, young at it. Alternative gallery spaces are interesting when they're in locations where they have some impact, and where they start bringing things in. I enjoy exhibiting within that system, as long as the work is respected. People do seem to be interested, so far. So, I don't know what will happen. There are a number of parallel galleries in Canada, too, which allow for exhibition of lots of new work, and work that is not necessarily commercially viable, at the momemt. And I say 'at the moment,' because, of course, work gets integrated. It's pretty hard to stay right out there, on the edge. For people who are starting and can't get shows anywhere, then banding together and making alternative spaces—making a space a gallery, instead of waiting for a gallery to give you a space—would be the solution; and to start writing about the art, not just showing it.

Q: You have been involved in at least one workshop on women's art which, I believe, encompassed a feminist point of view.[20] What are some of the concerns and propositions or strategies that have emerged from that situation?

MOSES: Are you talking about the panel discussion at the SUB Gallery?

Q: Yes.

MOSES: At that discussion I talked about graduate school and my experience—what it felt like, and what it meant—and the impact that it had on me. For some of the people who are then going to graduate school,...If they feel that they are in a similar predicament, they might relate to what I have said rather than feeling any problem which occurs is their fault. A lot of thinking came out of it, and a lot of connections; I met many people through that particular workshop, whom I still know and am friends with. I think it gave people a sense that they're not freaks, or that their problems are not dissimilar to the person sitting next to them. As you stop feeling that you are totally responsible for the whole thing and stop feeling 'it's your fault,' you become much more functional.

Q: And you find that basically, you're not in total isolation.

MOSES: Yes, and I think a lot of the reason people are writing things, stating things, for example, like Judy Chicago's *Through the Flower*, ...people find that ego-maniacal. Well, fine,—it's her experience—but you can still look at it and say, 'This relates to something that has happened, or is happening to me,' or 'It doesn't.' It still provides you with the information; and that information has not been accessible. Most of us have not even had mothers who've gone through this sort of thing. So, where do you go when you're having particular problems that do relate to being female, in a professional role, or attaining a professional role? Usually, you end up with a psychologist.

Q: What new work or ideas do you have planned, or are you currently pursuing?

MOSES: Well, I just finished a piece entitled *Imposed Images: Mother*. It's a series of sixty, 'sixteen by twenty' black and white photographs of different people, a cross-section of different

kinds of people; from older women, to black men, to nuns...I've tried to put a lot of different people in it, and they're all cut off. It's very important, in the photographs, that the eyes don't show because then you get attached to the person. I'm concerned with the image, and I'm using language with it. [I'm using] a 'mother' pin, and the pin, the language and the person...of course, the meanings seem to change from person to person. It has been exhibited at the Robert Vanderleeiie Gallery in Edmonton and will be exhibited in a group show at the Nickle Museum in the Fall.

Q: With your photographs, isn't cutting off the eyes, also a way of cancelling out identity?

MOSES: Right. You can see through the eyes a person's soul. But you don't want to see that if you're stereotyping. I have in mind, after this,—I don't know if I'll do it—to do a piece on Canadian content. I'm interested in the notion of the self-consciousness of content in Canadian work. It'll probably be a bit satirical. I'm also going to do more 'Evil Women'—that was planned to be a much larger series. So, I'm probably going to make more of those. Those are my thoughts on future work. But, what will happen with them, I really don't know.

NOTES

1. Here, Moses refers to the period she studied at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio where she received a bachelor degree (English Literature) in 1972.
2. In September 1972 Moses had begun a master's program at York University in Toronto, Ontario.
3. On this, Moses comments, "The 'evil woman' and the 'other woman' are not necessarily coming from a specific work that I have read, but from general reading; the 'evil' quality associated with women is a common thread throughout literature (think of Hester in the *Scarlet Letter*). It is a common stereotype. The 'other woman' is a subcategory of the more general 'evil woman' and the exact terminology is used numerous times in contemporary fiction as well as in our 'normal' conversaton as a society: 'Is there another woman?,' 'Who is the other woman?,' etc.."
4. The Mixed Media course was taught by John Fernie at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (Halifax, N.S.) in 1976.
5. Ms. Moses sees herself as an observer/commentator rather than a reformer.
6. To this Moses adds, "Almost all the [fiction] I have read by women in the past three years has affected my work and thinking. [The] last names of some: Atwood, Atkins, Arnow-Simpson, Berkman, Bank(s), Buck, Forster, Gutcheon, Hellman, Hobson, Jaffee, Klein, Kumin, French, Kohan, Marsh, Oates, Ogilvie, Beresford-Howe, Drabble, Gordon, H.D., Lessing, Plath, Nin, Stead, Van Herk, Howard...Since I had read quite a bit of Existentialist literature (Malraux, Camus) and a fair bit of Absurdist Theatre (Beckett, Ionesco, Albee), I am interested in the problems of existence posed by these women."
7. Ms. Moses states, "My observation of women's view of existence is that a sense of positivistic survival surfaces rather than a more nihilistically oriented endurance."
8. Linda Nochlin in "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Art and Sexual Politics*. Thomas Hess and Elizabeth Baker, New York, 1973.
9. Barbara Erlich White "A 1974 Perspective: Why Women's Studies in Art and Art History?" Art Journal, 1976:XXXV/4, pp. 340-1.
10. Here, Moses is referring to *Waiting* (1979), and also to her 1979 performance piece and series of black and white photographs, both entitled *Portrait of the Artist as Object*. These were included in her Master of Visual Arts thesis show, "Indications of Time, Process, and Change" at the Ring House Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.
11. On this imagery Moses elaborates, "To me, the most obvious reference is 'Flight' and indirectly 'Freedom.' The butterfly has always symbolized beauty, but I am hard put to see its metamorphosis from caterpillar, cocoon, butterfly as vain. I see it as ephemeral, the butterfly, but within nature—in accord with nature. Now, what Icarus did with wings is another story."
12. Moses' reference to Eva Hesses's 'position' alludes to the relationship between serialization and absurdity that she perceives in Hesse's art. Moses also sees this as a means of moving beyond the purely idiosyncratic, in both Hesse's work and her own.
13. I later asked Cherie to clarify this particular perception she has of her work. She responded, "I don't feel my work is 'out of date' but I also feel it is not 'avant-garde,' which seems to be a term used about my work here in Edmonton. This misperception has indicated how 'out of date' the art scene is in Edmonton. It is also a way for certain persons to avoid dealing with my work as serious art."
14. Lawrence Alloway, "Women's Art in the 1970's," *Art in America*, May-June, 1976.
15. "Moses Weaves a Simple Symbolism," *Globe and Mail*, 24 December, 1980. A review by John Bentley Mays on Moses' 1980-81 solo show, "Sculptures and Paperworks" at the Yarlow/Salzman Gallery in Toronto, Ontario.
16. The first national coverage of Cherie Moses' work by an art magazine in Canada appeared in the May 1984 issue of *Vanguard*; a biographical sketch and a review of her recent work were included in the article, "The Underside of Edmonton," written by Liz Wylie (*Vanguard*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 17-20).
17. "Brides and Opening Ceremonies," March 1982, solo show at the Alberta College of Art Gallery in Calgary, Alberta.
18. "Lohengrin in an Empty Wax Museum," *Edmonton Journal*, October 1981. Lois Sweet's review of Moses' show, "Brides and Opening Ceremonies" at the Students' Union Art Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta (in October, 1981).
19. 'Parallel' galleries in Canada are non-profit, artist run centers whose aim is to support the development of new art, especially of younger, local artists. Most of these spaces are members of the umbrella organization, The Association of National Non-Profit Artists' Centers. In 1981, ANNPAC was y of Alberta, Edmonton. There were also five other Edmonton women artists who participated as panellists: Christl Bergstrom, Joan Borsa, Ann Clarke, Shirley Glew, and Lyndal Osborne.

20. "Women in Visual Art—a supportive feminist workshop," 8 March, 1981, panel discussion at the Students' Union Art Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton. There were also five other Edmonton women artists who participated as panelists: Christl Bergstrom, Joan Borsa, Ann Clarke, Shirley Glew, and Lyndal Osborne.