

## afternoon arena

her brittle shining eyes, smooth  
Vogue smile and precise  
laugh demanded that i  
acknowledge forever the  
iron-clad obligation  
to prepare myself  
for our delicate meeting,  
every wayward hair assembled,  
every freckle and line discreetly  
covered and creamed away into  
nothingness,  
every crow's foot emolliently  
sopped up,  
each fold of clothing in its place,  
eyes set in proper focus,  
smile on straight,  
all signs of pain, regret  
or mortal folly  
hidden under every means of  
fashionable subterfuge  
for that great afternoon  
spot of tea.

and then what is more,  
she deemed  
that discussion be sociable,  
to avoid any awkward silences where  
real feelings and honest misgivings  
waited in the shadows;  
and no one, on the threat of being  
culturally excommunicated,  
could become serious about a heartfelt doubt  
or passionate devotion, for those things  
took too long to trot out for  
the proper number of minutes.  
After all,  
the show must go on  
and the arena can only  
accommodate so many acts in one afternoon  
of tea.

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*Atlantis* is pleased to publish these thoughts of M. E. VanWyck about *Artfemme\**, an exhibition of work by women artists from the national capital region, held by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, from September 20th to October 29th in 1982.

VanWyck focuses our attention again on the plight and successes of the female visual artist. It seems that progress, though slow, is there. One of the women she mentions as among people who have been keeping alive the "movement to establish professional equality in the art world" is Avis Lang Rosenberg, whose article "Women Artists in the Canadian Art World: A Survey" was published in the Volume 5 Number 1 Fall 1979 issue of *Atlantis*. It is interesting to note that a cursory check in the Maritime region that was done in 1981 found that the statistics Rosenberg discussed, largely based on the years 1970-77, are still relevant except for one—the Art Gallery of Mount Saint Vincent University where the percentage of women artists represented in one person shows and in the Gallery's private collection was 50%.

This article is an example of the continuing support of women's groups (in this case the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women) for the contributions of women to our culture. It speaks of women's cultural expression in such a way as to add to the critical analysis of the subject, not only in terms of the work of the specific women in the exhibition but also to women's cultural expression in general.

The exhibition itself seems to have been unabashedly, though not stridently, feminist and as such it is an example of courage in the face of the continuing dangers of exhibitions of women's work succumbing to the underlying fears of some contributing artists to be ghettoized as "women-artists" rather than artists. This underlying fear can manifest itself in subtle ways—through form, content and/or the total expression of an exhibition or the refusal of

artists to contribute. It is therefore particularly significant that artists with established reputations would contribute their work to the *Artfemme\** exhibition, thereby presenting themselves as role models to other aspiring women artists as well as maintaining the visibility of the high standards of women as artists.

Another survey not mentioned in the article that is relevant to the status of women artists in Canada is the one prepared by Sasha McInnes-Hayman for Womenspirit Art Research and Resource Centre in London, Ontario called *Contemporary Canadian Women Artists: A Survey, 1980*.