

# Conversation with Mira Schor, New York, 2003

## KEY FIGURES

Kirsten Dufour, Mira Schor

## DETAILS

Format:  
Video

Duration:  
39:19

General comment:  
Conducted by Kirsten Dufour

Mentioned people:  
Julie Ault  
Susan Bee  
Faith Wilding

Topics:  
Feminist Art Program, Judy Chicago,  
Virginia Woolf, essentialism, Miriam  
Schapiro, backlash, Reagan era,  
M/E/A/N/I/N/G, CalArts, painting,  
commodification, Womanhouse

## TRANSCRIPTION

In this conversation, Mira Schor discusses her involvement with the feminist art movement, which began during her time at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1971. Schor participated in the Feminist Art Program, led by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago, which was a separatist program for women students only. Part of the program revolved around the Womanhouse project. "The premise was based on Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*... of what would happen if a woman artist had a room where she could do anything she wanted, and didn't have to make a living space for anybody, or to please anyone." Despite critiquing the abusive power dynamics within the program, Schor acknowledges that her year in it profoundly influenced her life. It became the basis for her long-term commitment to painting and writing, "it really taught me the problems that painting has within a political project ... one of the themes of my working life has been the interrelationship between feminism and formalism." In the 80s, Schor got involved in critical art writing and co-founded the Magazine *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* with Susan Bee. The journal addressed issues such as post-modernism, gender representation, and the backlash against feminism in the 1980s. Schor got caught up in "very divisive battles within feminism between two ideologies which, roughly speaking, would be social construction of gender... versus essence." A polarizing debate she could not see herself in. While trying to move beyond essentialism, and the commodification of women's bodies, Schor asks "whatever happened to wanting to be Virginia Woolf?" A desire within her own work connecting painting and writing. "I'm involved with feminism. I still think of myself as someone who's also dealing with the aftermath of modernism and formalism. So it's a continued dual practice. Another way of looking at it is that it's a layered practice."

