Activist Art and Abortion Rights in the Post-Roe v. Wade United States: An Analysis of the Archival Works of REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley, and Andrea Bowers

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Abstract
Feminists in the U.S. viewed the 1973 passage of *Roe v. Wade* as an enormous victory. But in subsequent years this legislation was eroded at federal and state levels. Several artists have addressed this situation, yet their work is obscured by a double veil; feminist art is often sidelined, and issues surrounding abortion are further complicated by their polarizing nature. Therefore, artists reckoning with this topic have often taken an archival approach, rendering visible the history of abortion. Here, I address works produced by REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley, and Andrea Bowers. They consider contemporary restrictions by recalling restrictions past; producing works that excavate overlooked accounts of abortion and abortion rights. Their projects productively question the intersection of art and activism, the aesthetic and activist potential of the archive, and the struggle that women face in insisting that their stories be told.

Key words: feminism, reproductive rights, abortion, archive, activist art

Resumen
En 1973, las feministas en EE.UU. vieron el fallo de Roe contra Wade 1973 como una enorme victoria. Pero en los años subsiguientes esta legislación se erosionó a nivel federal y estatal. Varios artistas se han ocupado de esta situación, sin embargo, su trabajo ha sido oscurecido por un doble velo; el arte feminista a menudo es marginado y las cuestiones relacionadas con el aborto se complican aún más por su naturaleza polarizante. Por lo tanto, los artistas que abordan este tema a menudo han utilizado los archivos para hacer visible la historia del aborto. Aquí, me dirijo a las obras producidas por REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley y Andrea Bowers. Ellas examinan las restricciones contemporáneas al recordar las restricciones del pasado; producen obras que excavan en lo profundo de los informes sobre abortos y los derechos al aborto que han sido pasados por alto. Sus proyectos cuestionan productivamente la intersección del arte y el activismo, el potencial estético y activista de los archivos y la lucha que las mujeres enfrentan al insistir que sus historias se cuenten.

Palabras clave: feminismo, derechos reproductivos, aborto, archivo, arte activista

In 1935, when I was 11 years old, my mother left our Wisconsin house on a bitter February night and dashed to the farm next door to help an ailing woman who'd had an illegal abortion. Our neighbor was writhing in pain so severe that she was having convulsions and was chewing her lip raw. It took her two days to die of blood poisoning. She left six children behind - and left me with firsthand knowledge of the injustice of illegal abortion.[1]

MILDRED HANSON, M.D.

Hanson, who spent thirty years of her career as the medical director of Planned Parenthood Minnesota and South Dakota, recalled this horrified awakening in 2006, thirty-three years after the momentous passage of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court case that declared that a right to privacy under the due process of the Fourteenth Amendment extended to a woman's decision to have an abortion. In those thirty-three years, an entire generation had grown up relieved of the suffering and agony brought on by the two decisions women had hitherto been offered for unwanted pregnancies: accept the consequences and have the child, whether equipped to handle the responsibility or not, or procure an illegal and likely unsafe abortion. But women of older generations still remember the sentences that an unwanted pregnancy could represent: women were fired from their jobs, young girls were sent away to maternity wards to secretly birth and give their children up for adoption, married women carried pregnancies to term whether or not they could afford another mouth to feed, and the health of the mother (concerning metastasized cancer, for example) was often discounted in favor of privileging the health of her fetus.[2]

Feminists in the 1960s and early 1970s rallied around a host of issues in the United States that included abortion rights, but in the years since *Roe v. Wade* this landmark legislation has been eroded at both the federal and state levels, with subsequent judgments chipping away at a woman's right to choose. In this paper, I analyze the works of artists and artists' groups that have addressed this situation. These artists are few and far between, even within the feminist canon, and much of their work has been obscured by what I would characterize as a double veil; feminist art itself is too often marginalized by the narrative of art history, and issues surrounding abortion are further obscured by their polarizing nature, even within feminism and feminist art.[3] Abortion has long been a tendentious, if not downright taboo topic, often surrounded by misinformation and falsely neutral accounts. Many artists who have addressed this issue thus take an archival approach, revisiting the real history of abortion rights, excavating information that has been repressed or forgotten.[4] Yet

[1] Mildred Hanson, qtd. in Molly M. Ginty, "Life Before Roe v. Wade," *Choice! Magazine,* January 19, 2006, http://www.alternet.org/story/31049/life_before_roe_v._wade.

[2] Ginty, np.

[3] For an account of this polarization within feminist ranks, particularly in the international arena, see Kathy Davis, *The Making of* Our Bodies, Our Selves: *How Feminism Travels Across Borders,* Durham, Duke University Press, 2007, 153-158.

[4] Many, but not all; while I chose to pursue the archival aspect as I see it as a strong link, I have also come across the following projects: 1) Mother Art's *Not Even If It's You* (1981) was a performance in which a pregnant woman stood behind a scrim while a second woman outlined her silhouette and drew the fetus within the swollen outline of her abdomen. A woman dressed in a man's suit then stenciled the word's "government property" across the outline, and the members of Mother Art chanted "No legal abortion, not even in the case of rape, not even in the case of incest, not even when the woman will die, not even when it's a child who is pregnant, not even when the fetus cannot survive, not even when the fetus is defective." The woman in a suit and the pregnant woman then carried a naked female "corpse" onstage, as a tape narrated the illegal abortion that had led to her death. See Michelle Moravac, "Mother Art: Feminism, Art and Activism," *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 5.1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 69-77. 2) Carnival Knowledge hosted a series of workshops – or "carnivals" – in the 1980s that were meant to demystify abortion and to raise consciousness concerning the potential repeal of *Roe v. Wade.* 3) A more recent project has made international headlines – Women on Waves' crusade (active since 1999) to provide contraception and abortion services to women in countries with strict abortion laws. See Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Twelve Miles: Boundaries of the New Art/Activism," *Signs* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 309-327. 4) Aliza Shvarts' 2008 senior performance at Yale University ignited scathing press coverage. She allegedly artificially inseminated herself every month and then induced abortion via herbs, again every month, documenting the nine-month process with video recordings and preserved collections of blood gathered from the abortions (which may very well have just been her monthly menstruation). 5) Heather Ault's *4000 Years of Choice* (launched in 2009) celebrates the "practices of abortion and contraception as positive, historical acts through visual art." See Heather Ault, "4000 Years for Choice: Celebrating Abortion Care and Reproductive Freedom with Visual Arts and Culture," http://www.4000yearsforchoice.com/pages/about.

the art historical occlusion of their own projects has re-enacted the very situation that they had hoped to mitigate. By undertaking research of my own into their projects –primarily addressing the work of REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley, and Andrea Bowers– I hope to begin to ameliorate this problem.[5] These artists consider contemporary restrictions by recalling restrictions past; examining the rules and regulations in place prior to *Roe v. Wade* as well as the brave individuals and groups that risked their lives in order to flout them.

[5] These three examples are particularly interesting, as REPOhistory is an artists' collective, Kerr + Malley is an artistic partnership, and Bowers is an artist who works alone. The strategies behind their works are sometimes indicative of the difference plurality can make; REPOhistory, for example, covers more ground in terms of archival research likely because their membership numbers allow for greater cumulative time spent in libraries and records offices.

Their projects take different material forms, but all productively problematize the distinction between public sphere and private gallery, bringing activist messages regarding reproductive rights into art institutions via installations of archival or archivally derived materials.[6] This differentiates them from the few works on abortion that have achieved recognition; namely, poster and graphic works intended for the street corner rather than the gallery wall. Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* (1989) is a quintessential example of such a work. In this close-up view, a woman's face is bisected into a positive black and white photographic image and its negative. The light and dark contrast is overlaid with blunt red-encased white text with the parenthetical titular phrase, "Your Body is a Battleground." The stare of this woman, and the stake in her own body that she claims for herself, disrupting patriarchal traditions of ownership, has become iconic as a singular image that encapsulates the sociopolitical and art world debates over women's rights, capabilities, and identities that were raging at the time. While the image is often discussed in the art historical contexts of conceptual art and appropriation, the social circumstances surrounding the production of and initial use of this work are sometimes obscured in the mainstream canon. The image appeared on a call-to-arms poster for the 1989 March for Women's Lives, a march staged in Washington, D.C. in support of the abortion rights movement.[7] Overlaid on Kruger's original image, additional text stated the time, place, and goals of the march. Underneath the image, further text discussed *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* –a Supreme Court case that sought (and eventually failed) to overthrow the *Roe v. Wade* verdict– the case against which the march was staged. These posters were pasted throughout New York City in an effort to mobilize marchers.[8]

[6] These installations can be linked to early feminist conceptual art that subjected the conceptualist strategy of critiquing modes of art production, reception, and commodification to gendered questions of identity. Lucy Lippard made an early connection between feminist and conceptual art in her curating and writing. See Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art,* New York, Dutton, 1976. See also Jayne Wark, "Conceptual Art and Feminism: Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin, and Martha Wilson," *Women's Art Journal* 22 no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2001): 44-50.

The Guerrilla Girls, a feminist arts collective who characterize themselves as "the conscience of the art world," have also produced posters in service of the pro-choice movement. In *Discover the Shocking Truth* (1992) we see the archive surfacing in the context of art addressing the contemporary struggle over abortion.[9] The poster proclaims in large, all-caps text "GUERRILLA GIRLS DEMAND A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES ON ABORTION," with a subtext stating: "Before the mid-19th century, abortion in the first few months of pregnancy was legal. Even the Catholic Church did not forbid it until 1869." The text pits the typical conservative rhetoric of "traditional values" against the aims towards which such so-called traditions are generally mobilized. By inverting conservative rhetoric to implicate both church and state on their flip-flopping (to borrow a contemporary political neologism), the Guerrilla Girls uncovered the hidden history behind pro-life ideology. The group publicized this excavated information when they carried this poster in a pro-choice march

[7] The March for Women's Lives was sponsored by the National Organization for Women, and took place in April of 1989.

[8] It is important to remember too that Kruger's popular, graphic style was often coopted by other designers. Steven Heller notes: "Since she has achieved high visibility, various designers now brazenly imitate the Kruger style… But when it is used to promote issues that she believes in, as in the case of a 1998 advertising campaign for women's free choice that appeared on the sides of New York City buses, Kruger doesn't mind at all. (Incidentally, regarding the pro-abortion campaign [which has won a few advertising industry awards] permission to use her style was requested, which she gave)." See Steven Heller, "Barbara Kruger, Graphic Designer?" in *Thinking of You,* ed. Stephanie Emerson, Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999, 115.

[9] This poster can be seen on the Guerrilla Girls' website. See Guerrilla Girls, "Some of Our Greatest Posters, Stickers, Billboards, Books," http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/catholic.shtml

on Washington in 1992 (just three years after Kruger's *Untitled (Your Body is a Battleground)* was used in such a march).[10]

While the poster arts of Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls have gained the greatest deal of recognition when it comes to artworks that take up the issues surrounding abortion, other artists of the era were grappling with these issues as well.[11] In 1992, the same year that the Guerrilla Girls marched on Washington with *Discover the Shocking Truth*, REPOhistory produced two installations that similarly used archival information to problematize the contemporary pro-life stance that was gaining political ground. REPOhistory was an artists' collective of writers, visual and performance artists, filmmakers, media activists and historians active from 1989 to 2000. They namely produced collaborative projects, repossessing forgotten, overlooked, or suppressed histories.[12] Their first work, an installation carried out in 1992 titled *Lower Manhattan Sign Project,* is among their best-known endeavors, not least for its wide historical scope and rigorously researched details. Gregory Sholette, one of the original members of the group, has recalled that this first project took three years to plan, research, and install.[13] Permits were needed as the installation consisted of street signs placed in areas of great but forgotten significance to the history of the city.[14] The work was hardly restricted to addressing the history of abortion rights; Sholette has outlined a fuller scope of the public installation thus:

> It featured street signs that marked a variety of locations around New York City that had been the site of important, but little discussed, events: the original "pre-Columbian" coastline of Lower Manhattan on Pearl Street when the island was inhabited by the Lenape people; the temporary overthrow of British rule by Jacob Leisler, almost a century before the American Revolution, the site of an alleged slave rebellion near Wall Street in 1781; and the location where Madame Restell, AKA Ann Trow, operated a prosperous abortion clinic next to the World Trade Center.[15]

Altogether, the work included thirty-nine aluminum signs that were placed throughout the city at such sites of significance. REPOhistory members also designed a map meant for self-guided walking tours.

The project in its entirety deserves further analysis, but for the purposes of my parameters here, I focus on the signs pertaining to Madame Restell. Lisa Maya Knauer and Janet Koenig were the "REPOhistorians" who uncovered the forgotten history of this female abortionist and her practice on the north side of Liberty Street at Greenwich Street. Their blurb in the exhibition catalogue for the project reads:

> Restell, a well-known 19th century abortionist, had offices on this block. She was a target of anti-abortion crusader Anthony Comstock, who also helped establish legal censorship of sexually explicit materials, including abortion and birth control information, and homoerotic literature. The signs also recall the role that the American Medical Association played in the campaign to criminalize abortion in during the 19th century.[16]

There were two such signs (designed by Knauer and Koenig); one with a line drawing of Restell and one with a line drawing of Comstock [Fig. 1].[17] Further information is included

[10] The Guerrilla Girls carried their poster at the March for Women's Lives, a pro-choice march organized again by the National Organization for Women that took place April 5, 1992.

[11] Somewhat ironically, posters produced by Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls, originally meant for the public sphere, are now frequently exhibited in galleries and museums. This shift, which is partially due to the growing institutionalization of feminist art, should serve as a warning against drawing too stark a distinction between public and private spheres of art.

[12] Their name refers to the 1984 indie film *Repo Man*.

[13] Gregory Sholette, interview by Jessica Hamlin and Dipti Desai, ""Committing History in Public": Lessons from Artists Working in the Public Realm," in *History as Art, Art as History: Contemporary Art and Social Studies Education,* New York, Routledge, 2010, 76.

[14] The group originally intended to enact illegal, guerrilla actions, but then Tom Klem joined the group. Klem had connections with the New York City Department of Transportation, the governing body that controls the official street signs, lampposts, and traffic lamps in New York City.

[15] Sholette, 76.
[16] REPOhistory, *The Lower Manhattan Sign Project,* New York, REPOhistory, 1992, 20.
[17] The Restell and Comstock signs were crushed by flying debris just a few months later when a truck-bomb was detonated in the garage of the World Trade Center in 1993.

Fig. 1, REPOhistory, ***The Lower Manhattan Sign Project*** [Madame Restell and Anthony Comstock signs], 1992-93. (Permission: REPOhistory / Lisa Maya Knauer and Janet Koenig)

on the signs; Restell's notes that she not only provided abortions, but also dispensed contraceptives, housed unwed mothers, and arranged adoptions. For such activities, upon her arrest in 1878 she was proclaimed to be "the evillest [sic] woman in New York!"[18]

Her arrest followed the legal success of Comstock, who had long harangued Restell and other proponents of women's choices regarding their bodies and sexuality. In 1872 he set up the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, an organization dedicated to eliminating lewd and lascivious materials and behavior. A year later, in 1873, Comstock lobbied Congress into passing *the Comstock Act for the Suppression of Trade in and Circulation of Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use*. This included materials meant for contraception or abortion purposes, making the Comstock Act the first federal anti-abortion legislation in the United States. The law would control abortion policy for the next century.

Histories such as this are recounted in REPOhistory's *Choice Histories: Framing Abortion* (1992), a work that was produced both as a book and as an installation at Artists Space.[19] In the gallery context, a greater emphasis could be placed on the research and archival excavations in which REPOhistory members were so invested. The project is both narrower in scope, in that abortion is given precedence over other social issues, and wider, in that a greater degree of information concerning the forgotten and repressed histories of abortion is conveyed to the viewer.

In *Choice Histories*, the information the group had gathered on the history of abortion was presented via four categories: race and class, the history of medicine, issues of sexuality, and law and morality. The last segment of the installation, related to law and morality [Fig. 2], reveals the greatest investment in archival materials. It charts three historical periods in the legal history of abortion in the United States: the period when abortion was not considered to be a legal issue "prior to quickening" (that is, prior to the movement of the fetus in the womb); the period of the late 1800s to 1973, when abortion was criminalized; and from 1973 to the date of the exhibition, an era in which the momentous *Roe v. Wade* legislation legalizing abortion was under attack in both state and federal courts. These three periods

[18] According to the REPOhistory sign, this was the kind of headline that accompanied Madame Restell's arrest. Unfortunately, in this and other signs, too much information was crammed onto the small metal plates; this, combined with the elevated position of the signs on street posts meant that they were difficult to read and easy to overlook.

[19] The installation was produced in conjunction with the 1992 exhibition "A New World Order: Part One." The show, guest curated by Connie Butler, was held at Artists Space and ran from June 11 to July 11, 1992. Founded in 1972, Artists Space has long facilitated experimental and activist art projects that would unlikely be given space in more institutional sites.

are represented by simultaneous sets of slide projections that run through various texts and images from the historical periods. The viewer is invited to sit on a bench in front of these projections as they complete their simultaneous archival trajectories.[20] Watching the historical loops, the viewer's own sense of urgency is activated, as the consequences of past archaic attitudes towards abortion are screened alongside contemporary arguments against *Roe v. Wade*.

[20] For a more in-depth analysis of the installation portion of *Choice Histories*, see Elise Harris, "No Choice" *Queer Weekly* (July 12, 1992): 42.

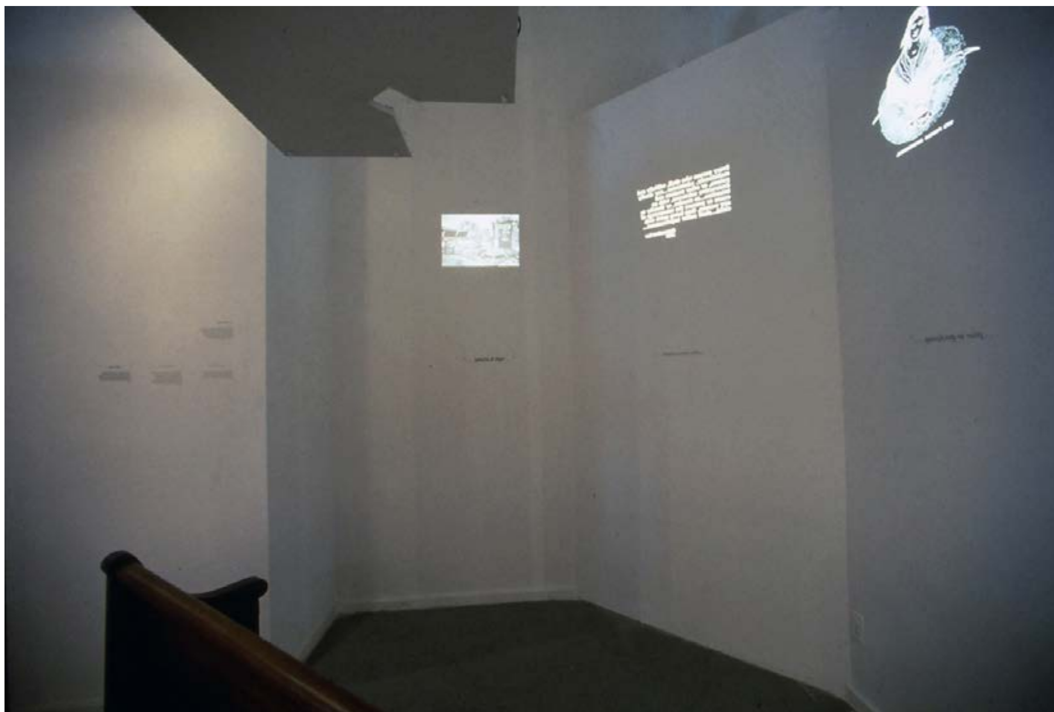

Fig. 2, REPOhistory, *Choice Histories* [installation], 1992 (Permission: REPOhistory / G. Sholette Archives)

More trajectories are traced in the book version of the project, the bulk of which is devoted to an extensive timeline of the history of abortion (mainly focused on the United States, but not limited to this context). For example, *Choice Histories* picks up the account of Restell and Comstock in the timeline, noting that not only did Comstock persuade Congress to pass the Comstock Act, he was also made a Special Agent for the Post Office Department: "Empowered to open any package, letter, paper, or book going through the mails, he alone is judge of what is obscene or immoral."[21] Five years later, Comstock appears again in the timeline: "Anthony Comstock, posing as a man seeking an abortion for his wife, entraps Madame Restell, and she is arrested. The night before her trial, daunted by the prospect of a long prison term at age 66, and abandoned by her wealthy clientele, she commits suicide."[22] A subsequent reference to Comstock states that he "later boasts that he can claim fifteen suicides to his credit," and the final mention of this figure in the abortion rights debate details his fitting death in 1915: "Anthony Comstock dies of a chill caught while watching the trial of William Sanger, the estranged husband of Margaret Sanger."[23] Sources are not cited in the book, but this can be seen as a strategy of subversion in and of itself – the refusal to adhere to western, patriarchal methods of research, archiving, historicizing, etc.[24]

The events surrounding Restell's abortion practice and arrest are accompanied on REPOhistory's timeline by myriad other such events and information from around the globe. The account begins with the year 3000 BC, at which point the "Royal Archives of China hold the earliest written record of an abortion technique."[25] The information included for subsequent years records worldwide implements of and legislation over abortion, variously sanctioned by intellectuals, politicians, and religious leaders. The records also take into account the parallel histories of forced castration and sterilization policies, which were generally carried out for racial and class reasons.[26] In the book, the timeline is interspersed with

[21] REPOhistory, *Choice Histories: Framing Abortion, An Artists Book*, New York: REPOhistory, 1992, 21.

[22] *Ibid*.

[23] *Ibid*., 21 + 24.

[24] Moreover, for those who wish to see their specific sources, the project, its process, and the information uncovered have been meticulously organized and are housed in the archives of New York University's Fales Library and Special Collections at the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library.

[25] REPOhistory, 12.

[26] These are policies we generally assume to be of the distant past, but REPOhistory reminds viewers that such measures were still being introduced as late as 1991: "A bill is introduced in the Kansas state legislature which suggests that women on welfare be paid $500 to have Norplant inserted, as a one-time 'incentive', plus $50 per month as long as they use the method." *Ibid*, 37.

visual imagery, including the line drawings produced by Knauer and Koenig of Restell and Comstock. Other images include a graphic rendering of a blindfolded, Venus-like statue, whose womb is emphasized while her armless, visionless state speaks to the helplessness she experiences in decisions regarding her body and reproductive capacity. The generic, of-the-ancients quality associated with such statues speaks to the fact that abortion, whether legal or not, is an age-old issue. The history of art is also referenced here, as it is in another image in the book that depicts Michelangelo's well-known Sistine Chapel segment wherein God and Adam touch fingers in a patriarchal conveyance of power.[27] This scene intersects, of course, with the Bible and religious history as well; text beneath the stretching limbs references the stances the Catholic Church has taken on sexual pleasure, lust, and the notion of Immaculate Conception. These issues are also brought up in the timeline of the book; the Church's rhetoric is a major theme throughout the text.

For example, the 1869 reversal of the Catholic Church's stance on abortion referenced by the Guerrilla Girls in *Discover the Shocking Truth* is further explored in *Choice Histories;* there is a much longer history behind the nineteenth-century decision. Sometime between 200 BC and the first century AD, early Christians define "ensoulment," noting that it "takes place at 40 days for males and 90 days for females."[28] In 418, "St. Augustine writes *Marriage and Concupiscence*. Procreation is theologically established as the good which justifies the marital act. This document inspires subsequent canon law with its condemnation of contraception and abortion in a passage known as 'Aliquando.'"[29] In 1140, the Catholic *Harmony of Discordant Canon* "establishes Augustine's 'Aliquando' as the Church's most important teaching on contraception and abortion."[30] In 1588, Pope Sixtus V produces his "Bull Effraentum," which "declares all abortion and all contraception by potions or poisons 'which offer an impediment to the fetus' to be murder."[31] Three years later, in 1591, his successor, Pope Gregory XIV, in his "Cedes Apostolica," "repeals all penalties of 'Effraenatum' except those applying to abortions of an ensouled, 40-day fetus."[32] In 1701, the long-held notion of ensoulment is amended due to the declaration of Mary's Immaculate Conception: "The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary, though the product of human parents, was bestowed with sanctifying grace in her soul at the moment of conception… If Mary was ensouled from the moment of conception, then perhaps, it was thought, this was the case for everyone."[33] Finally, echoing the Guerrilla Girls poster, REPOhistory notes that in 1869, "Pope Pius IX eliminates the distinction between the 'fetus inanimatus' and the 'fetus animates,' thus forbidding all abortions from the first moment of conception."[34]

The accounts of Madame Restell and the Catholic Church's stance on abortion are just two of many complex histories that are threaded through the timeline, which ends with the year the book was published and the installation staged, 1992. The impetus behind this project, the posters produced by Kruger and the Guerrilla Girls, and the 1992 march on Washington are made apparent by considering the worrying court decisions made in the years prior. Foremost among them was a 1988 "gag rule," which was held up again in 1991: "The Supreme Court, in *Rust v. Sullivan,* upholds the 1988 Department of Health and Human Services regulation prohibiting physicians in clinics funded with Title X monies from telling pregnant women that abortion is an option."[35] Artists responded to such decisions by producing works that made visible the history of abortion rights – rights that were under juridical attack. As Connie Butler notes in a *Choice Histories* catalogue essay, the project "was transformed by the urgent realization that we must watchfully recalibrate the history currently being written in our own time by the Supreme Court."[36] Sholette echoes these sentiments, explaining that for most members of REPOhistory, "the idea of exploring the past

[27] Other images reference legislation on abortion in the U.S., the story of Rosa Rodriguez, nineteenth-century Inuit abortion methods, the African slave trade and the sexual abuse of slave women, Euro-American sexual policies at the turn of the twentieth century, fourteenth-century illustrations of female reproductive organs, derogatory terms for women through the ages, Aunt Jemima advertising imagery, homemade abortion remedies, advertisements for low-cost abortions from 1992, coercive sterilization, freezing embryos, the differences between nature and nurture, and black and Latina women's experiences with abortion.

[28] *Ibid*., 12.

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] *Ibid*.

[31] *Ibid*., 13.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] *Ibid*., 16.

[34] *Ibid*., 20.

[35] *Ibid*., 37.

[36] Connie Butler, "Pro-life/Pro-Speech/Pro-Choice," in *Choice Histories,* 9. Butler further notes that "there are instructive parallels between the national anti-choice campaign [right wing groups] are waging against women, and the ground war they are championing against artists and freedom of expression through attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts." See Butler, 8.

was about upsetting the assumptions of the present" and that "history was merely a critical tool for addressing contemporary issues of social justice."[37] And REPOhistory was not alone in turning to the archive in order to address contemporary concerns.

Kerr + Malley, a partnership comprised of two women artists, Susan Kerr and Dianne Malley, have, like REPOhistory, produced a number of works aimed at excavating repressed histories, and they too were spurred to artistic intervention by contemporary events concerning the abortion debate in the late 1980s and 1990s. Kerr and Malley moved to Los Angeles in 1988, after finishing their graduate studies. The 1989 formation of Operation Rescue in the Los Angeles area, followed by the aforementioned gag rule upheld by *Rust v. Sullivan* convinced them that their artistic energies should be devoted to exposing the hypocrisy and historical background of the abortion debate. Malley states: "We first started doing work that examined women's reproductive rights historically and then related this to current issues—a historical basis is so important to understanding any subject."[38]

Operation Rescue is a group that was initially launched by the Pro-Life Action Network in 1986, with the goal of closing abortion clinics' doors by physically blocking the entrance. The group is still active, and their website proclaims that they are "the largest movement involving civil disobedience in American history."[39] In 1989, they focused their attentions on abortion clinics in Los Angeles. Kerr + Malley attended pro-choice counter-demonstrations, and photographs they took of these events provide a visual account of the ideologically opposed sides of the abortion debate. One of these photographs shows pro-choice demonstrators brandishing simple, circular signs reading, "Keep abortion legal," while pro-life proponents respond with biblical quotes, including a man holding a sign reading: "witches, lesbians, and basic idiots, repent." Malley has recalled: "When we first saw him, we freaked out because of the 'witches' connection—we had no idea anyone would make it so *clear* for us!"[40]

Kerr + Malley used this link between abortion and witches in *Heretical Bodies* (1989), their first major artistic installation to address the abortion issue in which they had hitherto been involved at an activist level. The installation includes crosses interspersed amongst large black and white photographs overlaid with text [Fig. 3]. In one of the photographs, several witches are being hanged, for what the text characterizes as "crimes against male domination."[41] Malley notes that she and Kerr "began relating the basic pretexts of the *Malleus Maleficarum* –also known as 'The Witches' Hammer'; it was the Inquisition's 'bible' used to condemn witches to death– to the premises in Operation Rescue's manual," finding that "the wording, the quotations, and the whole ideology turned out to be remarkably similar."[42] As Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English have observed in *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*:

> The charges leveled against the "witches" included every misogynistic fantasy harbored by the monks and priests who officiated over the witch hunts: witches copulated with the devil, rendered men impotent (generally by removing their penises…), devoured newborn babies, poisoned livestock, etc. But again and again the "crimes" included what would now be recognized as legitimate medical acts—providing contraceptive measures, performing abortions, offering drugs to ease the pain of labor.[43]

Women thought to be guilty of such acts were tortured until they confessed, and then put to death. *Malleus Maleficarum,* written by German monks Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in the fifteenth century, became the Catholic Church's official text on witch-hunting

[37] Sholette, 79.

[38] Dianne Malley, interview by Andrea Juno, "Kerr & Malley," in *Angry Women,* ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale, San Franscisco, CA, Re/Search Publications, 1991, 154.

[39] Operation Rescue, "History," http://www.operationrescue.org/about-us/history/.

[40] Malley, 155.

[41] Paul von Blum, *Other Visions, Other Voices: Women Political Artists in Greater Los Angeles,* Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1994, 114. Aside from their interview with Juno, von Blum's text is the only sustained academic analysis of Kerr + Malley's works.

[42] Malley, 157.

[43] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women,* New York, Anchor Books, 2005, 39-40. While contraception and abortion continue to cause controversy, few people today would take issue with easing the pain of contractions. But, as Ehrenreich and English recount, at the time of the Inquisition, "the Church held that labor was the Lord's just punishment for Eve's original sin." See Ehrenreich and English, 41.

Fig. 3, Kerr + Malley, *Heretical Bodies* [installation], 1989 (Permission: Dianne Malley)

for the next three centuries. Witch hunts legitimized male doctors at the expense of female healers and midwives, and "the Church lent its authority to the doctor's professionalism, denouncing non-professional healing as equivalent to heresy… It placed him on the side of God and Law…"[44] This situation is echoed centuries later by the pro-life movement, whose members frequently claim religious right as reasoning enough to influence the law.

Another similarity between the rhetoric of witch-hunters and pro-life advocates is the denigration of both the practitioner and the individual seeking her help. Regarding the latter, Kramer and Sprenger declare that "they who resort to such witches are thinking more of their bodily health than of God, and besides that, God cuts short their lives to punish them for taking into their own hands the vengeance for their wrongs."[45] The ease with which this fifteenth-century proclamation can be interpreted via contemporary condemnations of women who seek abortions –putting themselves and their bodies above the will of God– is quite jarring. Kerr + Malley pick up on this discomforting similarity in *Heretical Bodies*, the very title of which conveys a sense of bodies in defiance of restrictions. They compare the rhetoric of Kramer and Sprenger to that of Randall Terry, the author of the Operation Rescue manual, including texts from both publications in the crosses that dot the exhibition. Each cross is comprised of a central photograph depicting a mouth twisted open in anguish, surrounded by texts along the arms of the cross that are taken from Kramer and Sprenger as well as Terry. One of Terry's passages makes the following argument: "The difficulty in rescue missions is that the intended victim is captive inside the mother… In the case of the innocent, pre-born child, the mother must be reached and won. Unfortunately, she is often a willing participant in her child's death." He privileges the fetus, which he calls a "pre-born child" over the pregnant woman, whose desire for an abortion is likened to murder.

Terry then proceeds to fear-mongering, stating:

> Almost all young women about to abort their children do not understand what is going to happen to them. Risks and complications of the various procedures are often glossed over or not even mentioned by abortion clinic personnel. Women… encounter the immediate risks of infection, excessive bleeding, or perforation of the uterus, which may result in a hysterectomy.

As in Kramer and Sprenger's text, Terry indicates that going through with an abortion will lead to a dire outcome. Of course, the complications and risks described by Terry are seldom

[44] *Ibid*, 44. This was part of a larger turn concerning the devaluation of women's work. See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch,* New York, Automedia, 1994, 92-99.

[45] Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum; The Hammer of Witches,* ed. Pennethorne Hughes, trans. Montague Summers, London, The Folio Society, 1968, 150.

the result of abortions performed in the clinics he references here, but rather are the brutal result of the illegal abortions from which desperate women would have no recourse should the legal system recriminalize abortion. This rhetorical disjoint is underscored by an ominous wire hanger overlaid on the text, the infamous symbol of pain and death reminding viewers that clinics or not, women will seek out abortions.

Kerr + Malley's *Heretical Bodies* makes manifest a specific comparison between an archival text and one produced more recently, whereas REPOhistory's *Choice Histories* provides a more comprehensive history, allowing viewers to make their own internal comparisons. The crucial role played by the archive and its continued significance characterizes each of these works, but they mobilize history in different ways. Moreover, the artists involved in these groups clearly have differing interpretations of certain peoples and events. While Kerr + Malley focus their installation on the Los Angeles activities of Operation Rescue, REPOhistory details only their campaigns in Lawrence, Kansas and Buffalo, New York; their timeline makes no mention of the demonstrations in Los Angeles that Kerr and Malley attended, documented, and used as the basis for their first installation on the history of abortion rights.[46]

This difference in archival agenda is perhaps most evident in their markedly contrasting accounts of Madame Restell. As indicated above, REPOhistory members view her as a hero, a brave early proponent for abortion rights who risked and eventually lost her life fighting for the cause. The conclusions drawn by Kerr + Malley (who presumably were not aware of the research being undertaken simultaneously by REPOhistory, particularly since the members of REPOhistory were New York-based, whereas Kerr + Malley were working in Los Angeles) present a very different situation. Kerr describes her thus:

> Her real name was Anne Loehmann. She started selling abortion pills by mail order. Of course they didn't work—none of those pills did at that time. They all contained a combination of ingredients that made you so sick to your stomach, you would probably go into shock! Those pills were in principle similar to other early self-abortion methods: drinking coffee containing bits of lead, eating ground-up black beetles, or ingesting mercury compounds…[47]

Malley continues their description, noting that, "Madame Restell became very wealthy and opened an office in Manhattan."[48] Her description of Restell and her practice are highly unflattering: "After finding out that the pills didn't work, women would come in for a more conventional treatment—be jabbed inside and have an abortion that way. Her downfall came about because she flaunted her wealth; she bought a carriage and horses and rode around New York dressed in her finery."[49] This is hardly the heroine –martyr even– invoked by REPOhistory in *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* and *Choice Histories,* and the discrepancy should serve as a warning against viewing the archive as a neutral body of knowledge.

However, both REPOhistory and Kerr + Malley agree on the significance of a group simply called "Jane." The year 1969 in REPOhistory's timeline includes the following: "In Chicago, the 'Jane' collective, a group of housewives, mothers, and activists, begins helping women obtain safe, illegal abortions through a referral system."[50] Indeed, the story of Jane is a significant thread woven into their timeline, with subsequent entries noting that in 1971, "after learning that their abortionist is not a doctor, 'Jane' members train themselves and begin performing abortion themselves," and that "by the time 'Jane' disbands [in 1973] in the wake of *Roe v. Wade,* they have performed over 11,000 abortions."[51] Kerr + Malley take up this remarkable story as well, in their 1991 project *Just Call Jane.* This work was specifically made in response to the *Rust v. Sullivan* decision, which further eroded women's choice concerning

[46] The timeline records that in 1991: "'Operation Rescue' supporters flock to Lawrence, Kansas and besiege abortion clinics, disrupting abortion services for two weeks." And in 1992: "'Operation Rescue' targets Buffalo, New York, attempting to repeat their Kansas success. Due to the concerted efforts of local pro-choice activists, and the failure of clergy to back them, their efforts fizzle and they beat a hasty retreat." See REPOhistory, 37.

[47] Kerr, interview by Andrea Juno, "Kerr & Malley," in *Angry Women,* ed. Andrea Juno and V. Vale, San Francisco, Re/Search Publications, 1991, 160. REPOhistory refers to Restell by her maiden name, Ann Trow, while Kerr + Malley call her Anne Loehmann, a slightly misspelled version of Restell's married name, Ann Lohman.

[48] Malley, 160.

[49] *Ibid*.

[50] REPOhistory, 28. For a comprehensive account of the collective, see Laura Kaplan, *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service,* New York, Pantheon Books, 1995. The text is somewhat biased, as Kaplan herself is a former member of the group, but her knowledge of the history of this hitherto hidden collective is invaluable. See also Pauline B. Bart, "Seizing the Means of Reproduction: An Illegal Feminist Abortion Collective—How and Why it Worked" *Qualitative Sociology* 10 no. 4 (Winter 1987): 339-357.

[51] REPOhistory, 29 + 32.

abortion rights. Countering this contemporary contestation of women's reproductive rights, Kerr + Malley produced an installation that references pre-*Roe v. Wade* histories. The title recalls Jane, the aforementioned group that sought to provide women with safe abortions in an attempt to lessen the likelihood of botched procedures, whereas the materials of the work reference earlier histories. Eight freestanding, stele-like panels depict full-length, nude photographs of the artists that alternate between front, side, and rear views of their bare bodies [Fig. 4]. Their faces are blurred so as to give the figures an "everywoman" sense. Superimposed on these photographs are nineteenth-century illustrations that David Pagel's review of the show describes as "depicting various medical procedures that look more like forms of torture than accepted treatments."[52] Paul von Blum, on the other hand, does not characterize these as nineteenth-century medical procedures per se, but rather argues that they are representative of "male authority figures [who] feel free to poke and prod, secure in the knowledge that they —and they alone— have dominion over female sexuality," further noting that this is "a reality that simultaneously encompasses and transcends the present controversy about abortion rights."[53]

[52] David Pagel, "Art Reviews: Ephemerality is Essential in 'Raw' Exhibit", *Los Angeles Times,* August 8, 1991, http://articles.latimes.com/1991-08-08/entertainment/ca-344_1_art-history/2.

[53] Von Blum, 119.

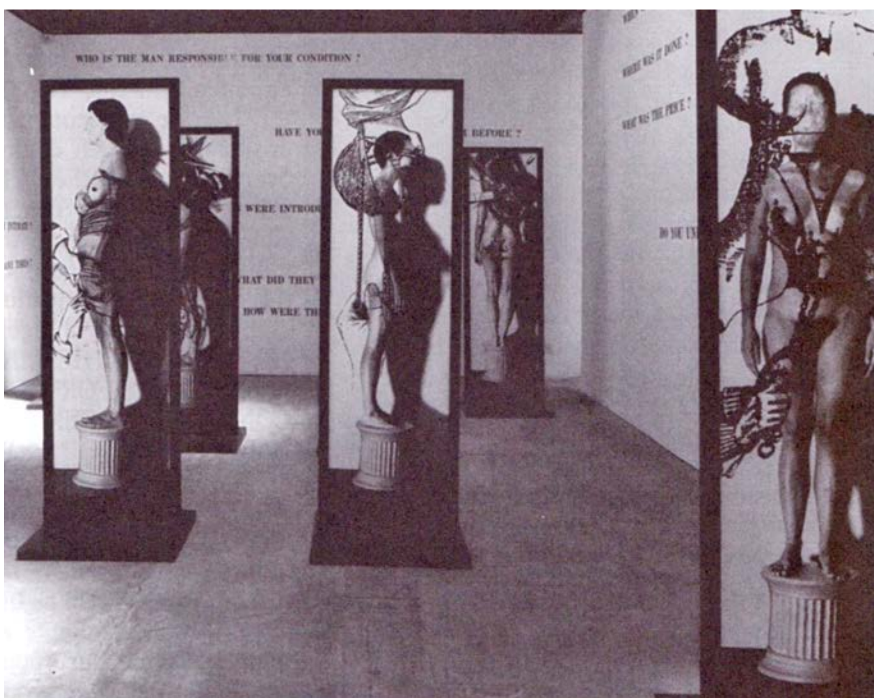

Fig. 4, Kerr + Malley, ***Just Call Jane*** [installation], 1991 (Permission: Dianne Malley).

On the reverse side of the steles, Kerr + Malley transcribed, in their own handwriting, the "dying declarations" of eight women who perished due to botched abortions between 1899 and 1936. The criminalization of abortion in the nineteenth century led to illegal and frequently unsafe abortions. When these procedures went wrong, dying women were routinely denied medical care until they consented to record and sign a dying declaration giving up the name of the man responsible for the pregnancy (if unwed) and the abortionist responsible for its termination. As von Blum notes, these declarations "were the humiliating results of official interrogations conducted by police officers, prosecutors, and doctors" and the texts "reflected the perverse male fear of and fascination with female sexuality, a combination that perpetuates a fundamentally patriarchal social order."[54] Photographs of the installation show that Kerr + Malley covered the walls with examples of the types of questions asked, implicating both the father and the abortionist: "Who is the man responsible for your condition? Been sexually intimate? How many times? Where was it [the abortion] done? What was the price?"

[54] *Ibid*., 120.

A transcription of Maria Hecht's 1899 declaration duly answers such questions. She prefaces her response with a statement indicating her awareness of her impending death:

"I, Maria Hecht, now lying dangerously ill at the St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and believing I am about to die, make this my ante-mortem statement…" She goes on to identify the father, one John Schockweiler, with whom she "had sexual intercourse… about five or six times." The abortionist is named as Dr. Louise Hagenow. The statement foregrounds the risks taken by women seeking illegal abortions in the years prior to *Roe v. Wade* as well as those taken by abortionists in providing such services, while pointing to the callous treatment of women whose behavior deviated from social standards. In the context of the installation, the bodies of Kerr and Malley stand in for the bodies of Hecht and the other seven deceased women. The photographs activate the archival material, embodying these absent women who are both strong and vulnerable, defiant yet exposed.

Decades after Hecht's declaration and death, the members of Jane sought to minimize the number of botched abortions in and around their native Chicago by collecting information on and sending women to trustworthy abortionists. They were also invested in protecting the identities of themselves and the abortion providers, which is why the collective came to be known simply as "Jane." By the late 1960s and early 1970s, abortions were an open secret among many doctors and police officers, but interrogations like that suffered by Hecht had by no means disappeared. Members of Jane were careful to keep track of individuals sympathetic to their cause, ranging from doctors who agreed to help, no questions asked, if a procedure went wrong, to supportive police officers whose wives or sisters had requested the help of Jane.[55] Though several members of Jane were arrested in 1972 after a raid, the charges were dropped, and they continued arranging abortions until the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Most of these procedures were performed in Chicago, but women with the ability and means to travel were also referred to London, where abortions were legal, as well as Mexico and Puerto Rico, where abortions were illegal but nonetheless frequently performed under safe conditions in hospitals and clinics.[56]

Unbeknownst to members of Jane at the time, another group of women, working in the San Francisco Bay area, were making similar international referrals. Patricia Maginnis, Rowena Gurner, and Lana Phelan aided some five thousand women in procuring abortions between 1964 and 1973. They received letters from all over the United States, requesting information on safe abortion providers. A flyer produced by the women is indicative of the kind of information they were distributing; names, contact information, travel details, and cost are recorded for a number of doctors and clinics in Mexico, as well as one doctor in Japan. Some information is also included for Sweden, Hungary, and Poland. Unlike the members of Jane, for whom secrecy was paramount, Maginnis, Gurner, and Phelan gave speeches, penned articles, and were generally vocal about their political views on abortion and their knowledge of abortion providers. With a published P.O. box number, they were flooded with letters requesting this information.

In 2005, artist Andrea Bowers retrieved these letters from Maginnis's own house, where they had been sitting for decades, and used them as the basis for three works: *Wall of Letters: Necessary Reminders from the Past for a Future of Choice, Letters to an Army of Three,* and *Letters to the Army of Three* (all 2005). The "Army of Three" refers, of course, to Maginnis, Gurner, and Phelan. Bowers notes that for her, these letters "really brought to life what that time must've been like, both in that moment and still today in the midst of issues around women's health-care rights, abortion, and birth control."[57] The strategy of linking the struggles of abortion-seekers past to contemporary concerns over women's health —a strategy used by artists in the late 1980s and early 1990s following the 1988 implementation of a "gag rule" and the 1991 upholding of it— was again taken up in the years following 2003. For in this year,

[55] Kaplan references these unspoken agreements throughout her text.

[56] Kaplan, 33.

[57] Andrea Bowers, interview by Brook Kellaway, "Letters to the Army of Three: Andrea Bowers on Abortion, Then and Now," *Walker Magazine,* December 3, 2012, http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2012/andrea-bowers-patricia-maginnis-abortion.

Congress passed and President George W. Bush signed into law the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act, the first direct federal restriction on any kind of abortion since the Supreme Court legalized abortion in *Roe v. Wade*. This Act would be debated in the courts for the next four years, culminating with the Supreme Court upholding it in a 5 to 4 decision.[58]

As the debates took place, Bowers began work on *Wall of Letters*. Brook Kellaway has described the start of the project thus: "Recognizing the letters' historical importance as well as the subject's ongoing relevance, Bowers felt compelled to honor the women's work though her own form of activism."[59] She did so by painstakingly replicating the letters in graphite on paper. If the original was typewritten, Bowers mimicked the font; if it was handwritten, she strove to adopt the individualized script of the original writer. Bowers explains: "While making these, I hoped that people, in considering my labor, would then be more considerate of the issues raised by this work."[60] She connects the formal aspects of the work to her background in conceptual and feminist art:

> Drawing, for me, is a conceptual project in that it's an equation: you set up a list of procedures and you follow it through. At the same time, I come from a strong background in feminist art practice, and I think that something that has been left out of the male tradition in art is empathy. This project combines those two things. In conceptualizing these works, I thought if I make it by hand and there's a lot of labor in it, there will be more respect for the image and the subject matter than if it was, for example, just a Xerox copy.[61]

Her emphasis on labor is echoed in Jill Dawsey's analysis of her drawings. Dawsey acknowledges that, "it is Bowers's labour, and the temporality implied by it, that reanimates and revalues a politics that might be considered outmoded by some… drawing serves as a means of translating historical knowledge into material form in the present."[62]

The anxiety of the original letter writers comes through, and the dangers endemic to asking for and distributing abortion information, not to mention actually having one, are clear. In Letter #1, Jan acknowledges, "I realize that by asking you for the names of willing doctors, I am putting you in a very difficult position." As a postscript of sorts to Letter #3, Polly asks "PLEASE DON'T PUT YOUR RETURN ADDRES [sic] ON YOUR ENVELOPE when you answer me." In Letter #5, K.M. describes her situation: "My doctor has informed me that for my own safety and health I must obtain an abortion at the earliest possible time and can wait no longer than a month." Her letter is indicative of a common occurrence; doctors would often be willing to discuss the option of abortion with their patients, but would refuse to actually perform the illegal procedure, which could lead to jail time and license revocation. Letter #2 is unusual in that the writer, C.W., is a gynecologist offering Maginnis, Gurner, and Phelan his/her services as an abortionist. S/he explains: "I am deeply concerned with the problems of today, but I cannot serve except discreetly. If I'm found out, I have a great deal to lose. So, I am available until then, or until our law changes." The other letters, seeking willing gynecologists like C.W., are written by frightened pregnant teenagers, matrons with unsustainably large broods, and women who see childbirth as ruinous to their careers. Most of the letters come from the women themselves, but boyfriends, fiancés, husbands, and mothers penned several of the pleas as well. In Letter #22, after requesting information on abortion provision, Rudy effectively sums up the sentiment behind all of the letters: "Thank you for just being courageous maybe someday things will be different."

Bowers initially recreated these letters for Ralph Rugoff's 2005 show "Monuments for the USA," in which fifty artists were invited to submit proposals free of any kind of budgetary

[58] Ruth Bader Ginsburg's dissent declared that the majority decision "cannot be understood as anything other than an effort to chip away at a right declared again and again by this court," adding that depriving women of the right to make an autonomous choice is indicative of a "way of thinking [that] reflects ancient notions about women's place in the family and under the Constitution – ideas that have long since been discredited." See Robert Barnes, "High Court Upholds Curb on Abortion," *The Washington Post,* April 19, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/18/AR2007041800710.html.

[59] Kellaway, np.

[60] Bowers, np.

[61] *Ibid*.

[62] Jill Dawsey, "Andrea Bowers's History Lessons," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 14 (Autumn/Winter 2006): 20. She connects this to Pamela Lee's notion of "the double time" of drawing. See Pamela M. Lee, "Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art," in *Afterimage: Drawing Through Process,* ed. Cornelia Butler, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1999: 25-38.

or practical restraints. Their hypothetical proposals were meant to "reflect each artist's ideas about the type of monument the people of the United States currently need or deserve."[63] In her proposal, Bowers suggested that her letters be hung in the Red Room of the White House, noting: "Not only is it a public governmental place but it's also, usually, the room that has been decorated the most by the First Ladies, and it's where all the parties are. How's that for reaching people?"[64] The thought of George and Laura Bush decorating a room of the White House with decades-old letters pleading for abortions is both parodic and poignant, and points to the Bush administration's role in chipping away at the rights gained by *Roe v. Wade.*

[63] CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, "Monuments for the USA," http://www.wattis.org/exhibitions/monuments-usa.

[64] Bowers, np.

Fig. 5, Andrea Bowers, ***Letters to the Army of Three*** [installation], 2005. Photocopies and decorative wrapping paper, 24 x 18 in. each (Photo: Scott Groller. Permission: Gallery at REDCAT, Los Angeles)

Of course, "Monuments for the USA" was never actually staged; it existed in the hypothetical form of proposal only. But while the letters were never installed at the White House for the very political reasons that led Bowers to suggest that they be hung there, the Gallery at REDCAT has shown them, accompanied by *Letters to the Army of Three* and *Letters to an Army of Three*. In *Letters to the Army of Three*, as in *Wall of Letters,* Bowers produced copies of the letters and affixed them to the gallery wall [Fig. 5]. While the letters in the latter are crafted by hand, framed, and hung on the wall in a singular line, the letters in *Letters to the Army of Three* are photocopied and pinned to the wall with metal tacks in a grid-like formation that also includes swaths of decorative wrapping paper. Moreover, the work exists in book form as well; viewers can see the pages disassembled and spread across the wall while concomitantly flipping through a bound volume of the same images. Mary Leclére has analyzed this work in terms of the public/private divide that its dual manifestation sets up. Addressing the bound text, she argues that the "scrapbook format speaks to both the intimacy of the letters and the personal nature of the archive from which they're drawn."[65] The individual, private act of reading these letters is contrasted with the public, collective act of experiencing the work installed across the gallery wall. She notes that the decorative paper, when placed on the wall in this manner, transforms into a kind of wallpaper, which itself has private and public connotations:

[65] Mary Leclére, "The Skeptic's Question," in *Nothing is Neutral: Andrea Bowers,* Los Angeles, California Institute of the Arts/REDCAT, 2006, 88.

> The wall is a significant site for this work because it alludes simultaneously to a public art that is often intended to be political (the mural) and a decorative element in the private sphere (wallpaper). Wallpaper has served as a metaphor not only for domestic space, but for women's restriction to it since the end of the nineteenth century, when Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a

social critic and feminist fiction writer, published "The Yellow Wallpaper," whose protagonist, diagnosed as a hysteric, is prescribed a "rest cure" and forbidden to write. Bowers's wallpaper doesn't prohibit writing but instead makes it public—publishes it—inverting its symbolic role in Gilman's short story.[66]

Leclére characterizes the juxtaposition of image and text in both iterations of this work as a refusal to separate politics and aesthetics, instead allowing them to be "thought together."[67]

I am more interested, however, in the way the archival aspect of the work functions alongside the aesthetic; the archival being the texts, and the aesthetic the lush, patterned, frequently floral paper. Dawsey claims that, in the paper, "late-modernist design encounters its own worst fears: decoration and kitsch (a distinctly political 'feminine' kitsch)."[68] This characterization inevitably connotes Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party,* a work that was roundly criticized for its qualities of feminine kitsch. The bright colors and decorative aspects of Chicago's work can certainly be visually compared to the wrapping paper in *Letters to the Army of Three,* particularly the floral segments. However, the archival aspect of the letters can be linked to the exhaustive and oft-overlooked research undertaken by Chicago and her associates in uncovering the hidden histories of the notable women they included in their work. Of course, these women are named and have widely differing histories while the women writing to Jane remain anonymous in *Letters to the Army of Three,* but both Chicago and Bowers participate in uncovering accounts left unaccounted for in "master" narratives. Their works disrupt patriarchal history by demanding attention for people and practices long ignored, buried in the archive.

Chicago and Bowers both, moreover, insist on foregrounding the body; if Chicago privileges female anatomy via her decorative vaginal plates, Bowers' emphasis on women seeking abortions inevitably connotes the female body, whether or not it is visually represented. In *Letters to the Army of Three*, the absence of physical bodies is not a rejection of the aesthetic feminine body so much as it is a poignant reminder of the death sentence that an unwanted pregnancy could represent in the years prior to 1973. We do not know what happened to the bodies inhabited by the women behind the letters.

This play on bodily presence and absence is further explored in *Letters to an Army of Three,* an hour-long film during which the letters are read, one each by thirty people. With each reader, the sequence is the same. The segment begins with a shot of a flower arrangement on a table, with a richly colored, occasionally patterned curtain in the background. Slowly, the flowers begin to fade out as a figure on a stool replaces them, resulting in a few seconds of the flowers and figures occupying the filmic picture plane simultaneously. The figure is silent until the flowers have completely dissolved, at which point s/he commences with the recitation of the letter. At the conclusion of the letter, the figure fades away as the table, holding a different floral arrangement against a new curtain, comes into focus. This sequence continues, until thirty of the hundreds of letters received by the Army of Three are read through, after which the entire film begins again, playing on a loop in the gallery space.

By including the body, the document, and floral imagery, Bowers positions the film as a tripartite rejection of her training. She recalls, "I received an education in feminism at CalArts in the early 90s that I completely rebelled against," noting that the program "focused on theoretical postmodern feminist writings that at the time I found inaccessible and impractical."[69] Influential artist-theorists like Laura Mulvey and Mary Kelly were advocates for a feminist focus on semiotic and psychoanalytic concerns, Griselda Pollock rejected documentary for its inevitable connection to identity, and Chicago's floral-vaginal imagery was deemed

[66] *Ibid*, 88-89. Dawsey also references Gilman's short story in her analysis of Bowers's works. See Dawsey, 24.

[67] *Ibid*, 82. Her analysis –indeed, the title of her text– is in part a response to Tim Griffin, who declares: "The mere appearance of politics in art… is often taken to be enough, leaving open the skeptic's question of whether the work is at all meaningful and effectively 'political.'" See Tim Griffin, "The Art of Politics," *Artforum* (September 2004): 205.

[68] Dawsey, 24.

[69] Andrea Bowers qtd. by Sam Durant and Monica Bonvicini, in "Andrea Bowers" *Neue Review, Art in Berlin* (December 2003): 4.

essentialist and reductive.[70] While most scholars now view the stark division between essentialism and theory as outdated, Bowers felt pedagogical pressure to pick the latter strategy.[71] Instead, she refused these parameters, foregrounding both the body and its abortive intentions via documentary letters spelling out such intentions as well as floral imagery that connotes the vaginal site of most abortive passages. She rejects the perceived stigma of identity and biologized feminism in art just as she refuses the social (and potentially legal) stigma of abortion.

She also refuses linear narrative in the film; as Lecläre has noted, the progression of the film is "effected through a series of narrative sequences strung together." Her analysis of the sequence is astute:

> The individual sequences suggest a kind of roll call in which the actors participate in the ritual acknowledgment of their presence—their counting and being accounted for—except that the group they belong to has been assembled temporally rather than spatially… The order of the letters could be altered without changing the video in any substantive way, because the video isn't structured like a story—it has no beginning, middle, or end…The shift from one scene to the next actually occurs in the superimposition of images. This means that sequence is spatialized: the images don't appear to follow one *after* another but rather one *through* another.[72]

This notion of nebulously reading through rather than following a linear sequence disrupts the conventional master narrative, the greatest example of which is history itself. The filmic medium in this particular work thus formally foregrounds an aspect of all the archivally-based artworks I have included in this paper. The past is brought into the present, and the present is read through the past, rather than as simply following it.

The act of *reading* the past through the present is crucial; the works of the artists I have discussed do not reference the past uncritically, as a rhetorical flourish, but rather to grapple with the issue of abortion by comparing various historical manifestations of it to contemporary threats on women's right to choose. As Dawsey rightly notes, "Bowers's project is never a case in mere 'historical' sampling', as it is with many less-critical practitioners who borrow from past moments and movements with apparent abandon," because a "crucial aspect of her practice is that it serves not only to preserve or represent history, but is an active participant in the reception and interpretation of history."[73] Her reference to "historical sampling" stems from Hal Foster's influential article "An Archival Impulse," in which he reads the archivally-based works of several contemporary artists through Freud, Derrida, and Foucault.[74] Other art historical analyses of the archive include Okwui Enwezor's *Archive Fever,* a text that considers how photography shapes collective memory and cultural experiences as the preeminent form of archival material.[75] Enwezor's analysis builds on that of Allan Sekula, whose "The Body and the Archive" explores how photography has been put to use in social categorization and control.[76] Their consideration of the ideological capacity of the archive is salient to the discussion of abortion and the attempt to control women's bodies, but their sole focus on photography is too narrow a scope for the multi-media practices of REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley, and Bowers. Sven Spieker, on the other hand, has analyzed the bureaucratic aspect of the archive and how it has affected art production from the late nineteenth century to the present.[77] Again, parts of the argument are useful – his description of contemporary artists like Walid Raad and Boris Mikhelov as attacking the nineteenth-century archive in its objectification of the historical process is comparable to the agendas of artists criticizing the traditional, patriarchal narratives on abortion. However, while the artists Spieker references

[70] See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* 16 no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18; Griselda Pollock, "Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice—A Brechtian Perspective," in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art,* New York, Routledge, 1988, 212-261; and Amelia Jones, "The 'Sexual Politics' of *The Dinner Party,* A Critical Context," in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, 82-18. Lecläre further unpacks the significance of Bowers rejecting her pedagogical training; see Lecläre, 86-90.

[71] For an early account of such division and an attempt to contest this kind of polarization, see Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, "Introduction: The Expanding Discourse," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, New York: Harper Collins, 1992, 1-25.

[72] Lecläre, 85.

[73] Dawsey, 20.

[74] Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 3-22.

[75] Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art,* New York, Steidl, 2008.

[76] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), 3-64.

[77] Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy,* Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2008.

"have variously questioned the archive's archaeological logic by introducing error… into its operations, revealing in the process the mechanism that allows archives to distinguish history from fiction," such strategies are at odds with the artists discussed in this paper, who attempt to mitigate the falsehoods and omissions of the archive by correcting and excavating lost histories.[78] While these analyses have become seminal texts on contemporary mobilizations of the archive in art, I counter that the works of REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley, and Bowers would be more productively read through various feminist theorists' considerations of time and temporality as related to women and feminist concerns.

[78] Spieker, 174.

Julia Kristeva gave early consideration to temporality as a feminist philosophical subject; her theorization of women's time as both cyclical and monumental disrupts traditional trajectories of history. She argues that, "there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality…"[79] On the other hand, she notes that perhaps as a consequence of this cyclical time, "there is the massive presence of monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits."[80] Women's time functions as a loop, bringing the past into the present, and yet past and present are not markedly different; those cycles enact their temporal curving within the context of a monumental mode of sameness. Each mode disrupts the master narrative, replacing the neat, linear, phallic trajectory of history with the rounded forms of cyclical time or the anti-historical stasis of monumental time.

[79] Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs* 7 no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 16.

[80] *Ibid*.

These conceptions of temporality certainly can be seen to circumscribe the debate surrounding abortion. The issue pertains to monumental time in that its significance for women is unchanging; women who do not want to be pregnant get pregnant. This happened to women in Ancient China, women in 1960s America, and it happens to women in the present-day. Pregnancy, whether desired and longed-for or feared and perhaps prevented/aborted, remains an unchanging aspect of the bodily experience of being a woman. Of course, the fact that debates over abortion rights have emerged again and again points to Kristeva's second characterization of temporality: cyclical time. The cycle of criminalizing, legalizing, legislating (particularly regarding the details of abortion, such as third-trimester procedures, cases of rape and incest, etc.) and re-criminalizing abortion has raged in church and state for centuries, as REPOhistory's timeline exhaustively illustrates. Madame Restell, the members of Jane, and the Army of Three were all harassed and/or arrested for the same reason; they fought the disregard of a woman's right to decisions concerning her body. Where REPOhistory appropriates a seemingly linear conception of history –the timeline– to subvert it by emphasizing the hidden, cyclical histories of abortion in *Choice Histories*, in *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* they, like Kerr + Malley and Bowers, excavate repressed archival information about a specific moment and represent it via both image and text. The seeming neutrality of the historical archive is called into question by the uncovering of stories left out of the narrative.

In theorizing the Virtual Feminist Museum, an unrealizable museum that would function abstractly as a "feminist space of encounter," Griselda Pollock states: "I want to ask questions of the *unknown* history of women at moments of cultural radicalism and cultural trauma across the twentieth century. I want to look back with difference, to make a sexual difference to the stories of art by situating this questioning in a larger work on memory, on time, space and the archive…"[81] While she is particularly focused on art of the twentieth century, her emphasis on trauma and larger archival frameworks transcending time and space could certainly be used as a way to think through histories of abortion. Pollock also notes "*feminist*

[81] Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive*, New York, Routledge, 2007, 11.

itself marks the virtual as a perpetual becoming of what is not yet actual."[82] The Virtual Feminist Museum is in a constant state of becoming, perpetually challenging the patriarchal circuits in which contemporary museums exist by recovering artworks and artists that exist outside such circuits.

This uncovering relates too to Kristeva's theorization of "a kind of 'future perfect,' where the most deeply repressed past gives a distinctive character to a logical and sociological distribution of the most modern type."[83] In this, her rhetoric is echoed by Drucilla Cornell's concept of a feminist "future anterior." Cornell emphasizes "the recollective imagination in which what is remembered is envisioned differently as it is recollected in the reading of the historian."[84] Feminist time functions as the always already have been; time can never be fully re-constituted, and to remember is to reconstruct, via one's own symbolic social order.

And yet, as Hélène Cixous proclaims, women are always in the process "becoming," but in a more fluid, less linear progression, in the "moving, open, transitional space."[85] She too differentiates women's time from that of men: "Opposition, hierarchizing, exchange, the struggles for mastery which can end only in at least one death… all that comes from a period in time governed by phallocentric values."[86] History, the archive, the timeline, the narrative; traditionally, these linear accounts of the past were purported to be neutral, universal records of mankind. Feminists rejected such accounts, exposed the now-obvious gendered hierarchy of "*mankind's history*" and set about recovering the missing mistress narratives. The history of abortion is one of these narratives, and one whose recovery is particularly pressing in light of legislation enacted in the United States in recent years.[87] The installations of REPOhistory, Kerr + Malley, and Bowers serve as poignant reminders of reproductive injustices of the past in order to contextualize and combat encroaching violations in the present. ■

[82] *Ibid*., 10.

[83] Kristeva, 14.

[84] Drucilla Cornell, "Rethinking the Time of Feminism," in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange,* ed. Nancy Faser, New York, Routledge, 1995, 152.

[85] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms,* ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtviron, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1980, 264.

[86] *Ibid*., 264.

[87] For an account of such legislation at the federal level, see Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, 29-33.