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Mira Schor

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Women's Caucus for Art  
**Lifetime Achievement  
Awards**

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**2013**

## Mira Schor



We honor you,  
Mira Schor,  
for your work as a  
feminist painter, art historian,  
and critic.

Photo courtesy of the artist.

## Mira Schor

By Jodi Throckmorton

The words “pub(l)ic h/air,” rendered in blood-red cursive script, are discharged from a warhead shaped penis. As the letters flow across a line of adjoined canvases, they slash the fleshy surface of the painting before disappearing into a blood-filled toilet. It is as if those letters—“pub(l)ic h/air”—have sliced through skin leaving hairy wounds in their wake. This passage, a portion of Mira Schor’s epic 200 feet long multi-canvas *War Frieze* (1991–1994), responds to the now infamous discussion of pubic hair during Anita Hill’s testimony at the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. Almost thirty years later, one thinks about the very “public airing” of Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony of her sexual assault, as well as the countless unnamed women

whose experiences remain unspoken. This is the persistent power of Mira Schor's work—to transform paint into the flesh, muscle, and blood of these forever tender wounds.

Schor is a first generation American born in New York City to Ilya and Resia Schor, who emigrated from Poland to France, then, in 1941, to the United States. Schor witnessed her parents—both artists making work, which included abstraction and representation, jewelry and Judaica, craft and modest scale painting—contend with the dominance in the New York art world of Clement Greenberg's aesthetic theories. From an early age, resistance became a driving force in her life and art. As early as her late teens, Schor was fighting to be taken seriously as a painter who worked with personal subject matter and in 1972 she joined the Feminist Art Program (FAP) at the California Institute of the Arts finding a generative political context. At the time, though Schor certainly understood the groundbreaking significance of the FAP, she was not fully aware of how the program would shape her entire artistic career—it catalyzed Schor's lifetime commitment to feminism and positioned her as a pioneer in feminist art history.

At that time (and for her contribution to *Womanhouse* in 1972), Schor focused on personal narratives, employing self-portraiture in erotic fantasy landscapes as a way to explore female sexuality. By the mid-1970s only traces of representation of the female body remained in her work—empty dresses and personal diaristic text in her often illegible handwriting as image, for example. Beginning in the mid-1980s, she began to emphasize the “bodily qualities of oil paint itself,” an impulse that set her apart from much of the work being made by the “Pictures Generation,” many of whom were her CalArts cohort who worked with mediation, appropriation, and photography. At a time when Laura Mulvey's feminist critique of visual pleasure represented a dominant discourse, Schor remained committed to reclaiming a feminist erotics of painting and, in addition, began to incorporate the penis as a reoccurring symbol of the patriarchy in her work—a bold gesture considering the fraught



Mira Schor. *Slit of Paint*, 1994. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches.

nature of representation of sexual and gendered embodiment at that time (and even today).

From the art historical research of the groundbreaking FAP, Schor learned “the necessity for women artists to create their own critical discourse, their own art history, and also on how important it was to leave a paper trail: *it wasn't enough to have done the work, text helped keep you from falling out of history.*” Coupled with her painting practice, in which representation of language—since the 1980s mostly appropriated from theoretical texts and the daily news stream—played a central role in relation to the body, Schor’s prodigious writing output attests to the fact that she will be known as one of the rare artists who can both make art that contributes to contemporary discourse and critically consider and shape that discourse through her essays and lectures. When unable to find a publisher for her essay “Appropriated Sexuality,” which took to task David Salle’s use of the female body, not content to wait for acceptance that may never come from art world gatekeepers, Schor and fellow painter Susan Bee created *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, a journal which, from 1986 to 2016, gave a platform to underrepresented perspectives on art and ideas and paved the way for other alternative art publications to thrive in the future.



Schor’s career now includes an almost fifty year painting practice, numerous publications—*Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* is required reading in almost all feminist art classes—and a respected teaching record that covers many of the most well-known arts institutions in this country. Schor has remained true to the agenda she set for herself at the beginning of her career, “to bring into high art the experience of living inside a female body—with a mind—in as intact a form as possible.” The work that she is doing today, as well as her work from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, has never seemed more vital. Schor’s commitment as an artist, writer, activist, and teacher to create equal rights for women (in the art world and beyond) is unparalleled in its scope and influence. While Schor should, certainly, be celebrated for these achievements, most inspiring is the way she continues to unite politics and paint and create alternate histories and discourses that will, ultimately, surpass the patriarchal structures that have held up the art world for so long.

*Jodi Throckmorton, Curator of Contemporary Art,  
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*

Mira Schor. *Dicks or the Impregnation of the Universe*, 1988.  
Oil on 21 canvases, 112 x 53 inches. (Each canvas 16 x 12 inches and 16 x 20 inches)

## Biography

Mira Schor is a New York-based artist with deep roots and engagement—as painter, writer, editor, and educator—with feminism and with art history, particularly the practice of painting in a post-medium culture. Schor’s paintings operate at the intersection of political and theoretical concerns and formalist and material passions. The central theme in recent paintings is the experience of living in a dangerous moment of radical inequality, austerity, accelerated time, and incipient fascism, set against the powerful pull of older notions of time, craft, and visual pleasure.

Schor studied art history at New York University and received her MFA from CalArts where she was a member of the CalArts Feminist Art Program and a participant in the historic feminist art installation *Womanhouse* with her walk-in painting, *Red Moon Room*. Her education marked her generationally in terms of a conceptual and process-oriented art practice and politically in terms of dedication to a feminist analysis of art and personal and social experience which has been the text and the subtext of all her work as a painter and writer.

Schor has been the recipient of awards in painting from the National Endowment for the Arts, and from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Marie Walsh Sharpe, and Pollock-Krasner Foundations, as well as the College Art Association’s Frank Jewett Mather Award for Art Criticism, a Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant, and an AICA-USA award for her blog *A Year of Positive Thinking*.

Schor is the author of two books of collected essays, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* and *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life*. She contributed the chapter “Backlash and Appropriation” to *The Power of Feminist Art*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. Schor was co-editor with fellow painter Susan Bee of the journal and thirty-year editorial project *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* and editor of *The Extreme of the Middle: Writings of Jack Tworikov*. She is Associate Teaching Professor at Parsons Fine Arts. In 2017, she was inducted as a National Academician in Visual Arts to the National Academy of Design. Schor is represented by Lyles & King Gallery in New York City.



Mira Schor. *Create and Resist*, 2017.  
Oil, ink, on gesso on linen, 16 x 20 inches.