Not For Sale:
Feminism and Art in the USA during the 1970s

A video essay by Laura Cottingham

Featuring over 100 visual artists
Music by Yoko Ono
Edited by Sally Sasso and Leslie Singer
Written and directed by Laura Cottingham
Produced by Hawk’s Eye Productions with Mary McIntire, Sally Sasso and Leslie Singer

90 minutes, BWV and color with sound, Beta SP

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as a political group and organized for the right to participate in cultural production as visual artists, it seemed imperative to me to attempt to locate this radical departure, situate the terms of its emergence, and preserve its outward appearance in art production—before it was too late to do so.

In addition to its relation to my professional practice as an art critic, returning to the 1970s allowed me access to my own historical autobiography. As a teenager during the 1970s, this decade shaped my earliest self-adopted beliefs. Although too young to have actively participated, I have vivid childhood memories of the events circa '68 as witnessed on television and magazine covers. Of course to consider the impact of the Women's Liberation Movement and the mobilizations for civil rights and Black Power, anti-war and student rights, Gay Rights and the general challenge to traditional and governmental authority that erupted in the United States during the sixties and seventies, one is left to address the work left undone, the changes still unmade, the political tensions as yet unresolved. Obviously change cannot happen without our assistance, just as the status quo cannot perpetuate itself without us. Where and how do we locate ourselves, individually and collectively, in this process called history?

On the making of Not For Sale

It was a desire for history—to know, to acknowledge, and to actively produce history—that motivated me to begin the work that has become six years later a 90-minute video tape called Not For Sale: Feminism and Art in the USA during the 1970s. Prior to this project, contemporary art had been my primary focus. Although the basis of my work had been established according to feminist concerns from the moment I began writing art criticism while still in college during the early eighties, it wasn’t until 1992 that it first made sense to me to go back to “the feminist decade.” As I witnessed an echo of the “70s reverberating in contemporary works by Janine Antoni, C. H. Duve, Ann Gerber, Sue Williams, Lynne Tatamatu and other artists, I became aware of how little I knew about the feminist Art Movement. Given the time sixties and early seventies marked the moment in American history when women first identified themselves consciously...