

TRANSMUTATION: ARTISTS AS CARRION EATERS OF SOCIETY

In the Old Testament, God took clay, formed a figure, then breathed life into it. When I was eleven, I made small people out of clay, complete with tiny nostrils. When I gave them mouth-to-mouth, nothing happened. I was starting to doubt religion. I learned to see and question things through art-making. Chimneys don't lean sideways with the slant of the roofline the sun isn't always yellow Transmutation is taking assumptions and then examining what is *really* there in the physical world and in our minds. Later I learned that when done well, art can actually bend the minds of others and influence culture. Harpies are part carrion birds, part funerary priestesses that carry souls to the afterlife. Artists do that. We take something that stinks, something nobody wants to touch, and we work away at it; we transmute and give breath to lifeless matter. Some find that disgusting. To us it's just what we do.

SURVIVAL OF A WOMAN ARTIST

I've recorded ideas from about age eight in visual journals. These often provide me with material for projects. When men draw from their own experiences, their art is perceived as profound, universal. When women make art based on our worldview, it is termed personal, cathartic, and irrelevant to a larger audience. If people don't think art has universal relevance they don't buy it. It's a big struggle to keep the faith. We become experts at reinventing ourselves. Older women artists earn even less than younger ones. It's one of the few careers where you can count on earning less with experience. I changed my name from von Reitzenstein to Burdock in my early twenties, in homage to the deeply rooted plant that thrives globally under diverse conditions.

SEXUAL CONFUSION

In second grade I kissed Karen. I loved her, so that seemed to be natural. "Lesbians!" screeched our classmates. I had just emigrated from Germany; this was a new English word. For the next sixteen years, I kept my girl-kissing under wraps. Occasionally I would draw sexy pictures of girls—then destroy them. I was a victim of incest early on and was getting strong messages saying "Be sexual!" and at the same time, "No, not like *that!*" As a teen I started taking life-drawing classes. The first time I showed my high school art teacher a nude self-portrait, she completely freaked out. I kept on. One of these life-sized paintings was about ancestry, body, passion, and my place in the world as a girl artist. I was asked to keep it in the art room closet: great publicity! Students lined up to view it.

THE F WORD PROJECT: FIVE FEMINIST FABLES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The graphic novel is a way to tell a story, make good art, and bind it all up in a format that takes the work beyond galleries and to the people. I call my *F Word Series* "graphic novellas." They're short, but they aren't comic books because they're not "pop"—the themes are about social problems and the drawings are very detailed. Those are elements of graphic novels. In 2006, comic book artists from Juárez asked me to do a show there, so I decided to make art about the femicides. I wanted to honor the women who had been treated like garbage, and to create a super-heroine that could kick ass with humor and grace. I made *Marta & the Missing* as art to exhibit, then print and disseminate in the graphic novella format. After that I conceived super-heroines to deal with four more current global issues. *Mona & the Little Smile* is about childhood sexual abuse. The third one I'm working on now, about "honor killing," is called *Maisa & the Bad Muslim Girls*. I have wonderful literary agents who are pitching the series as one graphic novel with five chapters. They're also being adopted for teaching curricula and as the basis for a narrative art therapy approach. ♡

Maureen Burdock

is a prolific artist who has constructed large-scale multimedia exhibitions on themes of war and its effects on civilian populations. She has won awards for her surrealist work and has had numerous solo exhibitions. Her current interest is with the graphic novella. In response to the femicides in Juárez, Mexico, which began in the early 1990s, Burdock embarked on a series of graphic novellas entitled the *F Word Project* for which she received an award from Judy Chicago's Through the Flower for New Mexico Feminist Artists Under Forty. Burdock hopes that her novellas will help increase awareness of women's struggles worldwide and eliminate injustices by providing archetypes of strong women with solutions.

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