In Defense of Sarah Lawrence College

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three-ring binder; cardboard-mounted slides are in protective plastic sleeves for convenient storage and browsing. A useful selected bibliography comes with each set. The notes include the artist's name, dates (except in Images—Themes and Dreams), full title of the work, date if known, and two to eight lines of commentary giving bibliographical highlights, or historical highlights, quotations from the artist or her contemporaries, or Petersen's and Wilson's way of seeing the work. The notes are presented in the conversational tone of a script for a slide lecture.

The inclusion of 19 slides of medieval works in A Historical Survey makes this a unique collection. The remainder of the slides (often two to six for each artist) are well-chosen to deepen our knowledge of the major artists, and to give us access to fine works by those who are not well-known. There is very little overlap between this collection and Sandak's similar survey. The notes make the paintings accessible to nonexperts; however, the presentation is greatly enriched if the audience has read the accompanying book.

With the exception of Brooks, Kollwitz, Modersohn-Becker, Munter, and Stettheimer, The Twentieth Century gives only one or two slides for each artist, concentrating on the significant similarities among their works rather than attempting to predict who will be greatest. The set reveals interesting innovations, particularly by pre-World War I Russian painters, post-World War II surrealists in Mexico, and 17 Americans in the sixties and seventies. The book is less useful in tandem with this set because it covers only about a dozen of these artists in significant depth.

The same is true of Images—Themes and Dreams, where Petersen and Wilson give their feminist perspective freest rein. It is a fascinating collection of mostly twentieth-century works, arranged thematically rather than by artist, or nationality, or school, and it is likely to be most useful in courses and programs whose primary objective is to understand contemporary women. As in the other sets, there are many self-portraits, but the ones included here are painfully honest, not only about the artist's soul and body, but also about her relationship with others. Many of the paintings are studies of working-class girls or women; many deal with the experience of child-bearing or child-rearing, of growing up, being trapped by clothing or furniture, being overwhelmed; many of the most striking images are of female emergence or female power; a few concern men, and several offer resistance to war.

The set entitled Third World takes the first step toward creating a history of twentieth-century American women's art by members of minorities: the revelation of 80 fine works by virtually unknown Black, Indian, Chicana, Chinese, and Japanese American women artists should stimulate a collective search in each region of the country for similar materials. Since most of these artists are not mentioned in the book, instructors will have to rely on the notes and on other books suggested in the bibliography. Because the slides are well-selected and deal with myths, family figures, dreams, visions, and experiences that are both accessible and powerful, they should become part of our repertoire of familiar images, even if we are not yet competent to "place" them academically. Indeed, it is a rare treat to be able to see such works before they have been processed by the various establishments.

Petersen and Wilson and Harper and Row have performed an extraordinary service in making these images available to a general audience in the book and in the slides. Both formats offer ample proof of greatness among women. And because many women artists have been concerned with self-identity, the female form, and female lives, the works gathered here greatly enrich our understanding of what is possible for female human beings.

In Defense of Sarah Lawrence College

The following letters were written in response to a recent attack in the media on Sarah Lawrence. They were sent, as a group, to the Coordinating Council of the National Women's Studies Association. The staff of the Women's Studies Newsletter has decided to give them national circulation.

May 10, 1977
To the National Women's Studies Association Coordinating Council:

We would like to alert you to an article, "The Trouble at Sarah Lawrence," by Anne Roiphe, which was printed in the New York Times Magazine on March 20, 1977. This article is now being nationally syndicated and may be printed in your local paper. The following letters to the editor were written in response to the article. The New York Times Magazine chose not to print these letters.

We consider this article to be part of a nationwide backlash against women's studies and the women's movement. The article fails to examine any of the real problems of higher education, or the real issues that women's studies is trying to get colleges to face.

The response at Sarah Lawrence has been a gratifying one. Both feminists and non-feminists at the College united to fight for a strong Women's Studies Program, and did not allow themselves to be diverted by the media. As a result of their action, the Sarah Lawrence administration has agreed, for the first time, to support the Women's Studies Program fully, and to integrate it into the operation and budget of the College.

We believe that feminists in the academy must stand firm in defending both lesbian rights, and the rights of all women to nonsexist education. As members of the National Women's Studies Association, we know that you are deeply concerned with the future and goals of women's studies. We hope that you will share this letter and the other materials with as many members as possible, and we hope that you
will be prepared to respond in protest should this article appear in your local paper.

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March 20, 1977
To the Editor of the New York Times Magazine:

The following is a response to Anne Roiphe's article, "The Trouble at Sarah Lawrence." You have my permission to publish it.

"Put the lesbians back in the closet." "Admit as many boys as girls so that they may resume the proper dating game." Such silliness passes for a solution to what Anne Roiphe perceives as Sarah Lawrence's "trouble." Never mind the institutional problems that currently beset all of higher education. Ignore an ambitious building program whose bills are headaches. Focus on a traditional scapegoat, one that also provides a convenient symbol of women's new freedom.

But Sarah Lawrence's problem is not how to restore the deadened "norms" of patriarchy on the campus. It is, rather, how to educate women and men for a changed tomorrow.

I know Sarah Lawrence, not as a faculty member, student, or pious alumna, but from having examined its Women's Studies Program, among 15 others across the country for a report to a federal agency, the National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs. On these campuses, and on dozens more I have visited, I observed not necking, but hundreds of women's studies majors committed to working lives after college and to working on behalf of educational and social equity for women and men.

Such equity includes the right of lesbians (and male homosexuals) to their open sexual preference as well as the right of women to a place in the mainstream curriculum. Even at Sarah Lawrence, the male-centered curriculum dominates the daily lives of students. Their distinguished Women's Studies Program, the only one in the nation to offer a two-year M.A. degree to students in Women's History, also enriches the undergraduate curriculum by providing students with information about the history and culture of half the human race. Neither at Sarah Lawrence nor at any college in the United States is a student required to take a course about women's history, while at most institutions, including Sarah Lawrence, both women and men must still study what remains overwhelmingly men's history, men's painting, and—for all the talk of Plath and Sexton—men's literature.

The creation of a feminist women's studies curriculum and the resistance to any change in the curriculum provide the primary dynamic on many campuses these days, including Sarah Lawrence's. That is a story worth reporting. It is too bad, therefore, that Anne Roiphe seems to have devoted herself to rummaging in the bedclothes rather than to learning in a feminist classroom.

Cordially,
Florence Howe

April 4, 1977
To the Editor of the New York Times Magazine:

I suppose one ought to file Anne Roiphe's article, "The Trouble at Sarah Lawrence," in the March 20, 1977, New York Times Magazine, as a distinguished example of hysteria disguised as journalism and a death wish for a school disguised as alumna interest and concern.

Given such discrepancies between apparent and real intent, it is not surprising that the article is so confused and inaccurate. First, no real conflict exists between the women's movement and "full coeducation." On the contrary, the women's movement has often shown what colleges might do to be genuinely coeducational. Next, the Women's Studies Program at Sarah Lawrence has not only placed "all hopes for a new world . . . on the sexual revolution." Among its many contributions has been the articulation of a number of distinctions between the serious study of women and the glorification of some changes in sexual practices. Next, lesbianism is far more than a momentary compensation for a confused, loveless, immature heterosexual girl, which it becomes after Roiphe passes it through her reductive, distorting analysis.

One could go on. However, to list all of Roiphe's blunders is to give her too much importance. The question is not, "In what ways is the article bad," but "Why did the Times so lower its standards of logic and objectivity as to print it?"

Sincerely,
Catharine R. Stimpson