



## Contemporary Metaphorical Representations of Arab Femininity

by Emily Campbell, '12

*Note: The following poems were inspired by and informed by various writings and artwork created by contemporary Arab women.*

### *Excès du Oiseau*

Fall, take the bruises but keep them beneath your skin—be modest, hued in black and white rather than the blues and greens of peacocks. Clean yourself, sweep the soil from your cage; you cannot grow anything in there (and what would you do with a lemon tree?) Don't let the birds build nests—they are attracted to shiny things, and will decorate themselves with pearls and rubies if you let them.

### *Found*

There is coffee on the stove, mending in our hands; our veils are folded away—we are in the women's place. Soon we will serve the coffee, retreat to watch vines flower beneath our needles, and later we will rest our heads on gardens. But first, we will retrieve the emptied cups, read the silt residue, find pictures in their leavings.

### *Fruit Unafraid*

You can be shapeless, can flow with the current, can hide behind things less dangerous than yourself—things which would map you, confine you—but you are a pomegranate, a thing of flesh and color and wetness. Although contained, you do contain, and if spliced apart, cut down from a growth too high, you will bleed possibilities to be gathered by birds and sewn into bracelets; you are a fruit unafraid of the dirt, and in the pits of waste and rotting forms, you will open into the void to meet blackness with seed.

### Artist's Statement

In experiencing the stories of Ulfat Idilbi, Leila Abouzeid, Etel Adnan, Salwa Bakr, and the works of Lalla Essaydi, Doris Bittar, Joumana Haddad, I discovered a recurrence in metaphorical representations of Arab

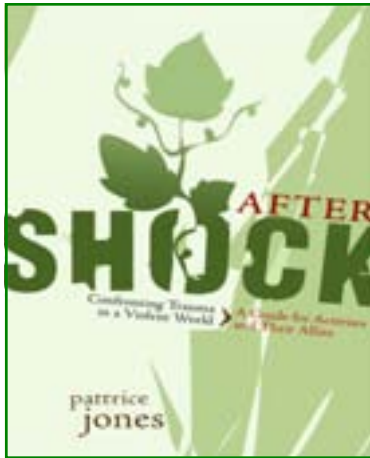
femininity, and moreover, I found that these pieces were in dialogue with one another regarding the same thematic conflicts; these I identify as confinement versus movement, suppression versus subversion, and mutilation versus wholeness. In my poems, I wanted to synthesize these conflicts into three distinct voices, borrowing symbols gleaned from the work of Arab women writers and artists in order to explore each of the above binaries.

My first poem, "Excès du Oiseau," is titled in French to suggest the colonization of women's bodies, and draws on birds, jewelry, and lemon trees in order to create a perspective in favor of women's sublimation through confinement.

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## In Honor of International Women's Day

Gender and Women's Studies  
at Hollins presents

### "Some of those Pelicans Were Gay! Coming Out for the Environment on International Women's Day."

by guest lecturer,  
**patrice jones.**



patrice jones is a queer ecofeminist writer, scholar, and activist. She currently teaches psychology and women's studies at Minneapolis Community & Technical College as well as gender studies at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul. Her book, *Aftershock* (Lantern, 2007), offers self-care strategies for social change activists while also putting forward the idea that the same ecofeminist strategies for trauma recovery can help us to heal our violent and violated communities and ecosystems.

**Please join us Tuesday, March 8th at 7pm in the Green Drawing Room.**

## Starting Smart at Hollins by Candace Norton, '08

\$tart \$mart is an interactive, educational workshop provided by the Wage Project to teach women, especially students, about how to enter the workforce, and how to successfully negotiate for equitable pay. As stated by the Wage Project, over the course of her lifetime, a

woman will earn \$1 million less just for being a woman. The Women's Institute for Policy Research reports that women currently earn \$0.77 on the dollar compared to men in comparable positions; for women of color this number is even lower: \$0.69 for every dollar earned by a white man. One of the first steps

to take in order to change this inequality is to become informed, and then take action. Hollins students will have the opportunity to do just that on April 13th. This will be the second time that the Hollins community has held a \$tart \$mart workshop on campus; during my final semester at Hollins, Spring 2008, this workshop couldn't have come at a better time. I had only recently decided to forego graduate school in favor of entering

the workforce, and the lessons about doing your salary research and the salary negotiation role-plays made an impact in my ability to get a job in my chosen career field, and to get paid well to do it. It pays to know the difference between an entry level salary in Roanoke, VA



versus the salary for that same position in New York City. The \$tart \$mart workshop highlights several online tools that will give attendees facts and figures that will make the process of negotiating their salaries much easier. The role-playing activities have participants take turns negotiating salary offers, making an initial offer, and learning how to get the most out of the benefits

package. I admit, I am not a huge fan of educational role-playing, but for me this was probably the most informative part of the program.

For more information on \$tart \$mart at Hollins, contact the Gender & Women's Studies Program via Professor Thomas, or contact the Career Center at [cdc@hollins.edu](mailto:cdc@hollins.edu) or drop by and make an appointment. Visit the Wage Project online at <http://www.wageproject.org/>.

## On Being a Dance Artist by Erika Hand, '03

N and I were riding the subway back to Brooklyn after a show. We were chatting about a mutual friend. To our incredible jubilee, the subway doors open and that very friend steps from the platform onto our car. We discuss the possibility that together, with our powers combined, we may be extra psychic. What is the feminist dialogue around intuition?

We were dancing THE LIVE PERFORMANCE by The Labor Union at Dance Theater Workshop. The *New York Times* was in the house that night. The music unexpectedly cut off. Silence. Holding on to each other with sweaty palms, we danced through the silence. Was the dance better this way?

Location-one of my side jobs to pay my bills: J says in her lilting British accent, "Erika! Keep it short, and snappy!" I figure as an executive secretary she knows what she's talking about. Why does calling yourself a secretary seem so anti-feminist?

I met the choreographer Pina Bausch twice. The first time she sat perched across from me in the hotel lounge at the Marriott Brooklyn. I was acutely aware of her gaze on me. As if I could

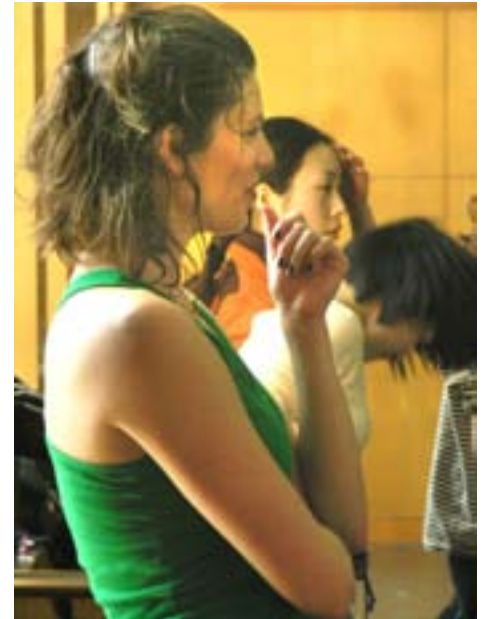
see myself from her point of view and mine simultaneously. Isn't that standpoint epistemology?

My favorite correction Marjorie Mussman ever gave in ballet class went something like this, "Babe. Do you feel that thing that you're doing? Don't do that anymore." Sometimes oversimplifying is right on.

### Why does calling yourself a secretary seem so anti-feminist?

I really wanted to get this job dancing for a woman I admired. I decided it, deep within myself. I put on bright red lipstick and focused myself before the audition. I got the job. I don't care what people say about makeup being oppressive to women. Wearing lipstick is a choice.

As you move through your life, it is to be hoped, as Donna Faye would say, that you will bring your theory closer to your practice.



Look around at the women sitting next to you, and across from you. Thank them. Especially the ones you disagree with.

Reminders:

Connect to your inner voice.  
And have a laugh.

*Erika Hand graduated from Hollins in 2003 with a B.A. in Dance and Women's Studies. She currently lives and works in New York City.*

## SEWSA Conference 2011

### Structural Adjustments: Queering Privatization, Framing Disaster

The Southeast Women's Studies Conference Association will take place

**March 24-26**

At Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia

This conference will shed light on such issues as the structural adjustment programs that have devastated indebted economies, the impact on buildings of these (un)natural disasters, and the shifting spaces resulting from gentrification and privatization. SEWSA 2011 will bring together scholars interested in asking how feminist, womanist, and queer modes of analysis can intervene in these narratives and open up possibilities for revisioning alternatives.

# Contemporary Metaphorical Representations of Arab Femininity

by Emily Campbell, '12

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In Idilbi's novel *Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet* and Bakr's story "The Bird in His Cage," birds are used to represent the caging of an essence that is meant to move, and an effort to confine this essence in a decorative manner that belies the ultimate purpose of control. Parallels can be seen between "The Bird and His Cage" and Abouzeid's novel, *Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman's Journey Toward Independence*, a text which applies the bird's mindset to a recently divorced woman, Zahra, who mourns her lost dependency before discovering a new agency in her life. In "Excès du Oiseau," I wrote to characterize the societal voice that seeks to convince women like Zahra that a confined state is the only choice they have, that they cannot "grow anything" for themselves. Conveying the desire of women to "grow" things, to create movement in their lives, Idilbi has Sabriya hang herself from the branches of a lemon tree, whose fruitfulness she envied while alive, as "the ancient lemon tree is proud of what it produces. It still bears fruit despite its age... my femininity wails in its cage like a wounded beast."

My second poem, "Found," represents a more complex perspective which seeks to reveal the openings for subversion within traditional women's roles. I wanted to give voice to characters like Sabriya's mother, who appears to accept a state of service and submission without question, but may have found less visible opportunities for agency than those chosen by her daughter. In



Image from thedailygreen.com

**you are a fruit unafraid of the dirt, and  
in the pits of waste and rotting forms,  
you will open into the void to meet  
blackness with seed.**

characterizing this voice, I was significantly inspired by the multimedia piece "Our Mothers Taught Us to Embroider" by artist Doris Bittar. In this video installation, Bittar shows the viewer a tablecloth made by her mother, emphasizing the intricate embroidery that has lasted years without fading. Her mother's handiwork is spread on the table again and again in the video, this repetition illustrating the prominent visibility of women's work in everyday life. The visual aspect of the tablecloth and its design suggests the creation of domestic experience through the hands, and the imaginations, of women. Bittar also narrates a memory of her sitting with her mother and grandmother,

interpreting the designs left in their cups by coffee grounds. Thus, "Found" draws on embroidery and cup-reading as metaphors for the ways in which women are able to create value within a traditional "women's space," representing domestic tasks not as acts of submission, but as complex opportunities for redefinition and subversion. I used passive verbs like "serve," "retreat," and "rest" in order to set up a façade of submission, but placed these in the context of things imagined and made by the women, things "found" through their own ingenuity.

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My third poem, "Fruit Unafraid" is delivered in a voice that encourages women to find this ingenuity and energy, not within their external environments, but within themselves. As this poem works to empower women to embody their agency, it challenges the veracity of real mutilation of women, suggesting that their essence is that of wholeness, as they are capable of incorporating subversive elements to construct a transformative experience. I used fruit as a metaphor for women's sexuality and fertility (reproductive though not necessarily bodily), water as a symbol for movement and transformation, and I revisited birds and jewelry as representations of potential freedom rather than symbols of excess and artifice. I suggest the futility of truly constraining women by drawing on water imagery, emphasizing the ability of women to subversively navigate their circumstances with flexibility and collective effort. This association of water with women's changeability and transformative capacity is seen in Etel Adnan's text *Sitt Marie-Rose: A Novel*, as Sitt Marie is characterized in contrast with the stratified, desert-like

dispositions of the militiamen who have kidnapped her. Following the murder of Sitt Marie, the narrator suggests that her death was not a successful act of mutilation, as "forever and ever the sea is beautiful... the sea, receiving [forces] in an advanced states of decomposition, reconciles them in the void." Haddad's speaker similarly represents her movement using water as the medium, declaring, "The desire is my way and the storm my compass/ And in love I do not drop anchor in any port," as she is "Twin of the high tide and the low/ Of the wave and its sands...." In "Fruit Unafraid," I integrated this imagery with that of fruit to voice the adaptive agency that is embedded in a woman's essence, asserting that "you can be shapeless, can flow with the current . . . in the pits of waste and rotting forms, you will open into the void to meet blackness with seed."

Ultimately, my collection of poems reflects three different perspectives, out of countless possible interpretations, of women's experience. Although I was inspired by the metaphorical representations employed in the works of Arab women, and was

informed by their perspectives, I would argue that the binary conflicts of confinement versus movement, submission versus subversion, and mutilation versus wholeness, are part of every woman's struggle with agency in her experience. The works by Arab women that I have cited resonate with me because they do give voice to tensions that have impacted my life and shaped my understanding of femininity, and while a situatedness within a specific nationality or nationalities certainly shapes a woman's sense of self, I believe that there is a shared condition of femininity that breaches physical location, and is found instead within a woman's person as her boundaries are influenced by, and exert influence on, an experience that resides within the global imagination of the concept "woman."

*Emily is a Junior double-majoring in History and English with a concentration in Creative Writing. Hollins' cross-listed GWS courses have served her well in the pursuit of bringing feminist perspectives to both her critical and creative work.*



The banner features a pink background with a white outline. On the left is a stylized illustration of the U.S. Capitol dome with white stars. The text "NATIONAL Young Feminist LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE" is prominently displayed in the center. On the right, the dates "March 12-14, 2011" and location "Washington, DC" are listed. Below that, a call to action reads: "Check out www.feministcampus.org/leadership or Hollins' FMLA for more information."



## Faculty News

**Julie Pfeiffer**, Associate Professor of English, presented her paper, "The Homesick Heroine in German Girl's Books," at the Modern Language Association Conference in January. This paper looks at homesickness as an antidote for nostalgic readings of girls' books.

**Susan Thomas**, Director, Gender and Women's Studies, Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies, and Political Science, will present her research paper, "Animal Bordellos, "Humane" Rape, and Prostitution: Saving Animals, One Woman at a Time," at the "Thinking About Animals Conference" Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. Professor Thomas has also been chosen to serve as guest editor of a forthcoming issue of *The Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, which will explore animals and prisons.

**Pauline Kaldas**, Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing, has a new book out: *The Time Between Places: Stories that Weave in and out of Egypt and America*. Recently published by the University of Arkansas Press, it is available at the Hollins University bookstore and on Amazon.

**LeeRay Costa**, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Gender & Women's Studies, presented comments on the following two roundtables at the National Women's Studies Association in Denver in November 2010: "Autoethnography in Feminist Pedagogy, Theory and Writing," which she also organized, and "Critiquing Hegemony, Creating Food, Crafting Justice: A Roundtable on Feminist Pedagogy and Food."

**Darla Schumm**, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, has just finished editing two new books: *Disability and Religious Diversity: Cross-Cultural Narratives and Inter-Religious Perspectives*, and *Disability and Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Sacred Texts, Historical Traditions and Social Analysis*. Both books were co-edited by Professor Schumm and Michael J. Stoltzfus, and are to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in the fall of 2011.

**Michelle Abate**, Associate Professor of English & Creative Writing, has a new book out: *Raising Your Kids Right: Children's Literature and American Political Conservatism*, which was recently featured in *The Boston Globe*. Her book can be found online at Barnes & Noble as well as Amazon.

## Alumnae News

**Carrie Hart '06** is working through her last semester of her master's in Women's & Gender Studies at UNCG. The current title of her thesis, which she hopes to complete by April, is "Incomplete Visualities: The Politics of Spectatorship in Introduction to Women's Studies." She is also teaching an introduction to LGBTQIA studies course at UNCG and is currently waiting to hear back from PhD programs in Women's Studies.

**Hilary Dubose '05** graduated with her MA in Human Development and Food Security from Roma Tre University, and is currently working for the UN World Food Program in Rome in their HIV Nutrition Programme Design and Support division.

## Student News

**Morgan Barker '13** completed an internship at The Rescue Mission.

**Wendy Laumone '12** completed an internship this past January with the Battered Women's Shelter in San Antonio, TX, operated by Family Violence Prevention Services, Inc. (FVPS). Wendy will be spending her spring semester studying abroad in London!

## Student News

**Lauren Bakst '11** will be presenting her thesis, "The Bound Yet Persistently Moving Critical Distance Between My Body and Woman," at the Associated Colleges of the South's Women's and Gender Studies Conference, hosted by the University of Richmond.

**Jennifer Walton '11** completed an internship at Well Rounded Moms in Radford, VA.

## Emancipatory Knowledge: Women and Gender Studies NOW!

Ninth Biennial ACS Women's and Gender Studies Conference  
University of Richmond  
April 1-2, 2011

Featuring keynote speaker, Dr. Patricia Hill Collins, author of the iconic *Black Feminist Thought* and a session on Feminist Media led by Courtney Martin, co-editor of *Click: When We Became Feminists* and Samhita Mukhopadhyay, executive editor of *Feministing.com*.

See <http://will.richmond.edu/conference/> for more information or get in touch with FMLA.

## New Majors



My name is **Bethany O'Neil '13**, and I'm a sophomore declaring my double major this spring in Gender and Women's Studies as well as Communications Studies. I'm originally from Bethel, Maine. I plan on working for a non profit organization that promotes equality for the LGBTQ community after I graduate from Hollins.



My name is **Bivishika Bhandari, '14**, pronounced like Bee.v.she.ka (ka as in the 'ca' incar :) My name means something big/ powerful/dangerous and I still do not know why my grandad wanted to name me this:) I am from Nepal. It is a landlocked South Asian country and is sandwiched between India and China. It has the world's largest mountain, the Everest. I am a first year and my major is GWS. I am in the process of deciding between either a major or minor in Psychology. I think I am an outgoing and fun loving person. Dance and music are things I can't live without. In my spare time I also enjoy creative/designing works. One crazy adventure I have done is Bungy, from the world's second largest Bungy spot which is in Nepal itself. In the future I see myself working in projects empowering women in my country. I will also never let go of my creative outlets, be they dance or designing.

# Just One of the Guys: How Blending in Makes Me Unique

by Parker Gard '06

For most of my life, my identity has been something I've worn on my sleeve, a first impression, a constant explanation. For most of my life, I have been a female bodied transgender male.

After coming out as trans, learning how to introduce my identity took me a while. At first glance, I was easily lumped into the boyish lesbian category; it was clear that I was not feminine, but often, it required an awkward conversation to explain that I was not lesbian or woman. Soon, however, practice made perfect, and after being questioned or challenged on my moral reasoning, my biological makeup, and my mental stability, I got better at explaining my trans identity. Much better. Given enough time, I could even gain the support and understanding of some of the most conservative, hetero-normative individuals I have ever met. But the conversation and explanation was always necessary and thus, became an exhausting ritual in forming friendships or work relationships. For those other people in the world, those people I interacted with on a non-repetitive basis, an explanation was pointless. There's nothing I can say to the girl in the checkout line who keeps calling me "mam" that is gonna make this make sense. It's not her fault. So I was stuck, between listening to the world call me "she" and spending the rest of my time explaining why that was not correct. I received a lot of encouragement from my friends, saying that, just by going out into the world each day, I was challenging gender norms and changing the way

people think. It's hard but think of the impact you have every day. It started to feel martyr-ish.

This whole time, I was considering hormone therapy. I always had, but despite my struggle with everyday challenges, I took my time deciding because I believe it's the biggest commitment of my life. Marriages end, people die, laws changes, hell you can even get your tattoos removed. But for me to seek physical change, I knew that would be a lifetime commitment. And when I did decide to start hormone therapy, nearly 10 years after realizing my trans identity, there were those who had their doubts and saw me as a sell out, ditching feminist sisterhood to get my hands on some of that male privilege. I get it, I **am** a feminist after all. And I also won't lie and tell you I haven't had some of that privilege first hand. But just as I wasn't going to let traditional binary notions of gender prescribe my identity, I wasn't going to let feminism or any other ideology keep me from it either. All in all, it was the only choice I have ever made in my entire life that was 100% about me, and it has been the only decision that I have been 100% sure of.

Two years in, and I am still having that conversation, except now, I get to choose when and how to have it. I still get those same challenging questions; I want to be clear, hormones did not un-do the web of gender history. But now, the urgency to declare myself as something other than what I look like isn't pressing on me.

**Ditching feminist sisterhood to get my hands on some of that male privilege. I get it, I am a feminist after all.**

I am openly trans while still enjoying the most overlooked and simpering rights, like being able to go to the restroom in public fear free. It seems so simple and small, but there are tons of little everyday things like that that I can enjoy now, and I'll never take that for granted.

And what of my political agenda and feminist ideals? You might wonder how I challenge gender now as someone who seemingly just blends in? My answer; the same way I did before, by getting to know people, talking to them, establishing myself as a worthy worker, friend, companion, teacher. And in that way, I continue to challenge notions of "normal" just by being me. The big difference is that now, more people let me in, especially men. I am no longer dismissible as different therefore dangerous by my looks. Those men who would have categorized me as "butch feminist man hating lesbian" before now befriend me, talk to me. I am able to share my ideals, identify inequalities where I see them, and ultimately share my journey with them.

*Continued on pg. 9*



*Parker Gard graduated from Hollins in 2006 with a B.A. in Gender Studies. He currently lives in Philadelphia, PA where he is a Creative Trainer at Apple, Inc.*

These men of men respect me, even hug me...other men around us see that and it's contagious. I am a different type of man, one who I'd like to think inspires men to think differently.

My politics and ideals are my choice; they are woven into my lifestyle and the choices I make, not my physical appearance. I am a feminist empowered not by my maleness but by my me-ness. The impact that I make may be small, but it's genuine and it's me, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

## The Bound Yet Persistently Moving Critical Distance Between My Body and “Woman” By Lauren Bakst, '11

This fall, senior GWS major Lauren Bakst undertook a thesis project that explores the meeting points of “Woman” and visual representation. Through an analysis of the documentary film *Paris Is Burning*, Lauren deconstructs the disembodied White Male Gaze that frames much of visual representation. She then shifts to an analysis of the work of artist Ana Mendieta in order to theorize the possibilities for new epistemologies of subjectivity to emerge from within the realm of the visual. What follows is an excerpt from her conclusion. Those wishing to read more can find her thesis in the Wyndham Robertson Library.

### Openings (at the shoreline)

Reflecting back on the journey of this writing, I am beginning to realize that it has ultimately been about (dis)locating my own instability, the instability that hides around and in between the identity signifiers that pretend to constitute and encapsulate my embodied experience of subjectivity. In writing alongside and through Ana Mendieta's work, I have come to realize the ways in which haunting, both conceptually and aesthetically, can be understood as a feminist response to the violent objectification of the

female body in visual representation. In her discussion of haunting as a structure of feeling, Avery Gordon writes, “A structure of feeling is precisely that conception, or sensuous knowledge, of a historical materialism characterized constitutively by the tangle of the subjective and the objective, experience and belief, feeling and thought, the immediate and the general, the personal and the social. A structure of feeling ‘articulates presence’ as the tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences. Such a tangle--as object and experience--

is haunting.” As object and experience. As re-presentation and presence. Inside my marked body, I am forever negotiating the space between these dualities; inside the simulacrum; stuck in the *mise en abyme*. In upholding “Woman” as the foundation of feminism, a coherent subject is presumed where none in fact exists. Rather than continuing to function under a framework of Identity Politics, feminism must come to acknowledge the impossibility of “Woman” as a stable ground from which to battle patriarchy.

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## The Bound Yet Persistently Moving Critical Distance Between My Body and “Woman” by Lauren Bakst, ‘11

*continued from pg. 9*

In order for feminism to embody a politics that is resistant to the Patriarchal, Heteronormative Hegemony, feminism must re-imagine the terms by which our subjectivity is understood in a way that subverts the very systems by which the hegemony is sustained. If we can begin to understand our subjectivity differently, then we can begin to shake the ground on which the very constructions of “Man” and “Woman” stand. In this process, we will come to realize that the ground has been shaking all along.

This thesis began with a discussion of the bound, yet simultaneously mobile, critical distance between my body and the sign, “Woman.” In enlivening the “tangle of the subjective and objective,” haunting enables a recognition of the intertwining, moving, coiling space between my body, my subjectivity and the objectivity of the sign, “Woman.” Haunting allows us to destabilize the false coherence of what we may perceive as, or have been told is, our Identity, and thus forces us to acknowledge the space between our bodies and the identifications to which they are adhered. In doing so, it is possible that my/our relationship(s) to “Woman” can be transformed through a reconciliation with that critical distance, and the multiplicity of crossing identifications, negotiations of difference, and personal/social histories that shape, move, and persistently (re)contextualize that in-between space.

With *Paris Is Burning* as my example, I have attempted to reveal that hegemonic constructions of visual representation sustain the notion of a coherent subject (the I/eye) and thus, the binary of Self/Other. This binary of Self/Other is forever constituted by “broken symmetries,” persistent negotiations of hierarchies of difference. It is within visual representation that these negotiations are so often masked through the disembodied, colonizing White Male Gaze that structures the regime of the visual and therefore, the image of “Woman.” In privileging multiple ways of knowing, haunting, as a conceptual and aesthetic framework for visual representation, creates space for phantasms within the image. As evidenced by Ana Mendieta’s work, sight can no longer be wholly trusted. Sensory and psychic histories are drawn upon to inform the knowledge of the self and other. As we come to recognize embodied and haptic knowledge as a way of sensing subjectivity, we can begin to acknowledge the blind spots inherent to the “I/eye.” The binary of Self/Other can no longer be maintained, and webs of mobile relationality begin to form.

This thesis calls for an epistemology of subjectivity that refuses to rely on the presumed coherence of “Identity” and the relationship between Seeing and Knowing through which it is constituted. It calls for an epistemology in which

the visual is understood as just one way of knowing, recognized for its partiality. As demonstrated within Ana Mendieta’s images, by trusting in the multiple ways of knowing that constitute our subjectivity, it is possible to produce a realm of visual representation that accounts not only for the visible, but also for the invisible. In acknowledging embodied feeling as a way of knowing, we can begin to come to terms with the absent presences that haunt and structure our lives. In disrupting the epistemology of sight that maintains the male gaze and the image of “Woman,” it becomes possible to reconcile with and transform our relationships to “her,” opening possibilities for a collective resignification of the very terms of our subjectivity. This shift in how we understand and conceptualize the identificatory process of “being a woman” has important implications for feminist theory and practice.

**If we can begin to understand our subjectivity differently, then we can begin to shake the ground on which the very constructions of “Man” and “Woman” stand. In this process, we will come to realize that the ground has been shaking all along.**

In this contemporary moment, what it means to “be a woman” is dispersing and multiplying, yet if hegemonic discourse continues to maintain the phantasmatic identification of Woman as that which we are compelled to embody, then no matter how much discrimination morphs its appearance, it will continue to persist and to thrive. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes, “For, there is no space really untouched by the vicissitudes of history, and emancipatory projects never begin nor end properly. They are constantly hampered in their activities by the closure-effect repeatedly brought about when a group within a movement becomes invested in the exercise of power, when it takes license to legislate what it means ‘to be a woman,’ to ascertain the ‘truth’ of the feminine, and to reject other women whose immediate agenda may differ from their own.”

In my “Survey of Feminist Thought” class, we have spent a lot of time discussing if feminism can and should include transwomen, transmen, gender queers, and the multiplicity of other possible non-normative gender identifications. The extent to which many of my peers feel the desire to hold onto the direct connection between “Woman” and feminism was surprising to me. “Can feminism exist without women?” This question seems troubling and misguided to me. It is predicated on the idea of a universal and stable “Woman,” a

category under which all “women” will fall. Does defining who gets to be called a “woman” carry us forward and through? As Judith Butler wrote twenty years ago, “Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from ‘women’ whom feminism claims to represent sug-



Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* (Silueta Series, Mexico), 1976.

gest the necessary limits of identity politics.” If feminism continues to adhere to a hegemonic, and therefore patriarchal and heteronormative conception of Woman, it will always be a White, Upper-Middle Class, Heterosexual Woman’s movement, and there will never be room for the multiplicity of experiences that necessitate a range of

responses and actions. As I have demonstrated, this kind of feminist politics will continue to fail even the most privileged of women.

In one of Mendieta’s *Siluetas*, her body is imprinted at the shoreline, the blurred edge where the land is persistently shifting. Becoming water, becoming land, becoming something in between, becoming. As the water rushes back and forth over her ghostly double, she is there but not there, present in her disappearance. I remember the feeling of my feet in the water as it pulled to and fro, rushing over and pulling back, elastic, an undefinable border manifested. Thinking of Mendieta’s *Silueta* at the shoreline helps me to think through my own subjectivity, my unfixity, my persistent moving through and around my identifications. The image, the experience, the sensing of the shoreline is where this thesis will end, but also where new points of departure can hopefully emerge in moving through the space between

my body writing and your  
body reading

in the space between

“Woman” and “women”

in the space between....

# The Importance of Clothes

by Cat Bass, '11

Every day I wake up thinking about what I'm going to wear for the day. Most people do. They get up, go to their closets, and pick out a shirt, pants, shoes, whatever strikes their fancy for the day. For me, it's a little harder.

I have to account for the multiple layers of shirts I will be putting on, whether my binder is dirty or not, if I have enough larger men's shirts to hide my chest if my binder is out of commission. I have one binder, one because I spent \$80 on this one, and when what you make goes towards two horses, \$80 is almost a month's board for one. Now, I might not know how to define my gender identity, but I do know I feel much more comfortable with myself with my binder on and a more masculine chest. So in the morning, I might have to come up with a way to compensate, to make myself feel more comfortable with who I am.

But this process, it's about to get harder. I'm about to leave college and go out into the real world, where clothes can help you make the right impression to get that job or where you must wear clothes within a dress code each day to make that money you need to get by. How does gender identity fit into those constraints?

If I go to a job interview wearing my binder and men's clothes and they read the name Mary on the

application, what will the interviewer think? The reaction could range from *"This person obviously does not care about her appearance or how she is seen,"* to *"Why is she wearing men's clothes? That's weird,"* to maybe *"Oh. She's genderqueer. That's cool."* And honestly, I would be very surprised if it was the last reaction.

The truth is: the job market is bad. It's going to be hard for me to come in to interview for any position and get it, no matter my qualifications. So the sad reality is that I face a choice, a choice to be able to make money and work toward my dreams while denying who I am or to be who I am proudly and perhaps lose the dreams I have been chasing since middle school.

This choice is horrible even to contemplate, but what's worse is that society forces me to choose. Most businesses publish a statement saying that in hiring they do not discriminate against people based on their sex, race, or religion. There are certain workplaces where gender identity and sexual orientation are protected within a corporation. But they are not protected under federal law, meaning an employer can choose to fire or not to hire someone based on those factors. Some states, however, have laws

**This choice is horrible even to contemplate, but what's worse is that society forces me to choose.**

protecting potential employees and employees regarding discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, but Virginia is not one of them.

So I am stuck with a choice, knowing either way, I will lose something, be that my dreams or this self with which I am slowly coming to terms. I will continue to look for workplaces which will be open to the genderqueer me, knowing those places will be limited. No matter my choice or what I find, I must confront the reality of being genderqueer in this society, hoping I will find compassion in places I might not expect.

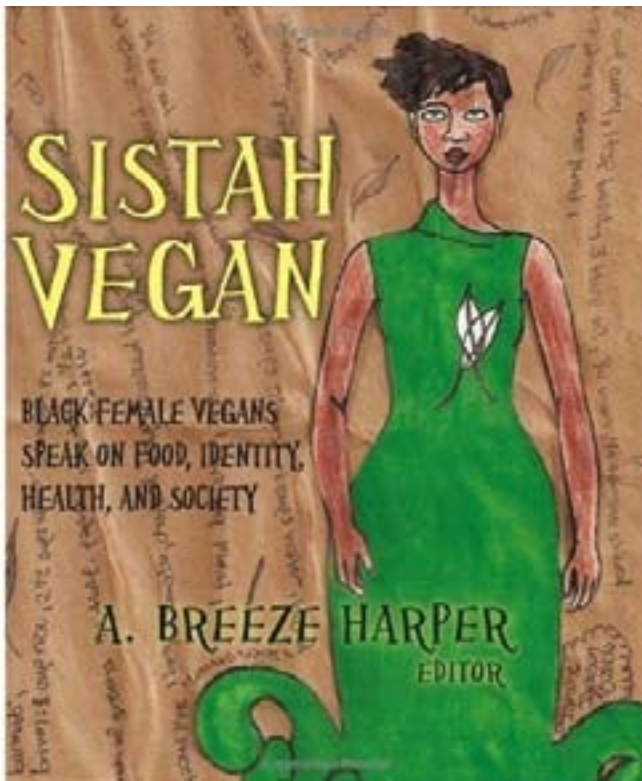
*Cat Bass is a senior English and Classical Studies major at Hollins University. She is a poet and an avid reader with a love of horses. Her weekly article series entitled Exploring Gender is posted every Wednesday at [lezbelib.com](http://lezbelib.com).*

## Book Review:

# *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*

by Victoria Crump, '06

*Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, edited by A. Breeze Harper is a collection of narratives, poetry, critical essays and personal reflections of Black identified females and females of the African Diaspora living in North America. In the introduction, Harper reflects on her own path to (ahimsa-based) veganism, citing how racism and speciesism led her to a life of practicing “non injury or harmlessness to all living beings”. The contributions to this book are refreshingly diverse, reflecting the reality that Black women are not a monolithic group. At times, many women included in this anthology personally define “veganism” in very different terms from one another, however, all of these women share a critical engagement with racism, classism, colonialism, and intra-racial discords that occur in combination with issues of identity politics, health, and food.



***Sistah Vegan*, a book written about Black female vegans in North America, is certainly the first of its kind, but hopefully it is not the last.**

Hearing the women of *Sistah Vegan* speak their truths is what all readers can benefit from. As Thea Moore states in the final lines of her poem “To Eat or Not to Eat”:

I’m not here to try to scorn ya  
Just don’t say I didn’t warn ya  
You may laugh at what I’m eatin’  
But hear the truth in what I’m speakin’

From Ma’at Sincere Earth’s “Black-A-Tarian” narrative in which she states, “Yes, I’m a vegan but I’m not an animal activist” to Ain Drew’s essay on “Being a Sistah at PETA” to conversations between Black women on body image, “thinness” and veganism to informative works on diet and nutrition, this book covers the gambit, leaving no stone unturned. *Sistah Vegan*, a book written about Black female vegans in North America, is certainly the first of its kind, but hopefully it is not the last.

Victoria Crump graduated with a BA in Women’s Studies from Hollins University in 2006. She completed her MALS in 2008 and a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Gender and the Arts in 2009. She is currently working on her PhD in Gender Studies with a concentration in Sexualities, Desires, and Identities at Indiana University Bloomington.

## Save The Date

### February 23rd @ 7pm in the VAC

A screening of the documentary film, "Ingredients," followed by a q&a with producer and cinematographer, Brian Kimmel and reception with local foods!

### February 28th @ 4:30pm in the Green Drawing Room

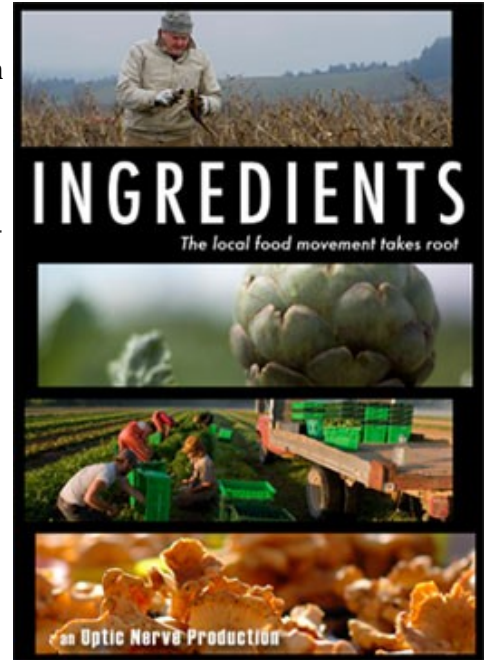
A lecture by Mary Louise Roberts: "Rape Hysteria and the Sexual Economy of Race: French Accusations of Sexual Assault against African American G.I.s, 1944-1946"

### March 3rd @ 8:15pm in the Green Drawing Room

A Lecture by Jennifer Camden, '99, the author of "Secondary Heroines in Nineteenth-Century British and American Novels"

### March 7th @ 6pm in the VAC

Art=Community Symposium, a lively discussion with 2011 Frances Niederer Artist-in-Residence, Helen Frederick; Fluxus Curator, artist, and community activist Keith Buchholz; and UK Based Performance Artists and Live Art Curators Alexandra Zierle and Paul Carter



### March 7th @ 7:30pm in the Main Gymnasium

Bread and Puppet Theatre: This internationally renowned company champions a visually rich, street-theater brand of performance art that is filled with music, dance, and slapstick. Its shows are political and spectacular. The Decapitalization Circus demonstrates in numerous death-defying stunts the phantastic effects of the capitalization of life in the U.S. and citizens' courageous efforts of decapitalization.

## Save The Date

### March 8th @ 7pm in the Green Drawing Room

International Women's Day: "Some of those Pelicans Were Gay! Coming Out for the Environment on International Women's Day," by guest lecturer, pattrice jones

### March 10th @ 8:15pm in the Green Drawing Room

Reading by Arthur Sze, Author of the "Ginkgo Light"



Image from "Monday's Girls"

### March 13th @ 2pm in the Jackson Screening Room, Wyndham Robertson Library

A screening of the documentary film, "Monday's Girls," introduced by Professor LeeRay Costa

### March 28th @ 7pm in the VAC

A lecture by Lisa Dodson, Author of "The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert an Unfair Economy"

### April 10th @ 2pm in the Jackson Screening Room, Wyndham Robertson Library

A Screening of the documentary film, "Tomboys: Feisty Girls and Spirited Women," introduced by Professor Michelle Abate

### April 13th in the Career Center (Time TBA)

Start Smart (see the article on pg. 2 for more information)

### April 23rd in Moody @ 9pm

The Drag King Show  
Auditions TBD!

### May 6 @ 3pm in the Hollins Room

GWS Student Colloquium

*Kristen Debrukeyer, '07 performing in  
The Drag King Show, 2009.  
Photo by Brett Denfeld.*



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Gender & Women's Studies is an interdisciplinary program that examines how systems of oppression/resistance and privilege operate. It is designed to provide students with an understanding of the importance of gender as a category of analysis, and its intersections with race/ethnicity, class, age, sexual identity, and (dis)ability.

The Gender & Women's Studies faculty are dedicated to creating an environment that fosters critical thinking, supports student activism, and emphasizes faculty/student and peer mentoring. Students are encouraged to question conventional wisdom and to participate actively in their education. Gender & Women's Studies has been an active department since 1998.

For more information visit the department website at:  
<http://www.hollins.edu/academics/womenstudies/>



The views expressed by individual contributors to bra.zen do not necessarily reflect the views of the Gender & Women's Studies program or Hollins University.

