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This Land Is Her Land (And Her Artwork, Too)

To judge from the museum calendars of the last few seasons, the '70s were segregated by gender: large surveys of Robert Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark at the Whitney and Richard Serra at the Museum of Modern Art; equally hefty exhibitions of feminist art across the river at P.S. 1 and the Brooklyn Museum. What's missing is a sense of the decade as radical for male and female sculptors alike.

"Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s" at SculptureCenter in Long Island City, Queens, highlights female artists who overlapped with the movements of Land Art and Post-Minimalism. That's "Feminism and Land Art," not "Feminist Land Art"; many of the women in this show preferred not to be identified as "feminist" artists. Their work bears a closer resemblance to that of Smithson, Mr. Serra, et al., than to most of the body- and craft-centric art in surveys like "Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution" at P.S. 1.

Organized by a guest curator, Catherine Morris, the show includes about 50 works by 10 artists. There's a good chance that you've never heard of any of them (with the possible exceptions of Nancy Holt, who was married to and often collaborated with Smithson, and Lynda Benglis, who exhibits regularly in Chelsea). All were working with the same raw materials and exploring the same unorthodox sites as their better-known male contemporaries.

Presenting Land Art in a gallery is always a problem. (A catalog would have helped.) At SculptureCenter large-scale projects like "Wheatfield — A Confrontation" (1982), in which Agnes Denes planted and harvested a two-acre wheat field in what is now Battery Park City, are given a nod in photographs and other

"Decoys, Complexes, and Triggers: Feminism and Land Art in the 1970s" continues through July 28 at SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves Street, Long Island City, Queens, (718) 361-1750, sculpture-center.org.



JASON MANDELLA/SCULPTURECENTER

Jackie Ferrara's "Wave Hill Project" is on display in the courtyard at SculptureCenter.

documentation.

The sole outdoor work, in the SculptureCenter's small gravel courtyard, is a reconstruction of Jackie Ferrara's "Wave Hill Project." This cluster of slotted, stepped platforms resembling Aztec pyramids was originally installed in Wave Hill, the public garden in the Bronx. Here it looks more precarious than pre-Columbian (perhaps because of the high-rise under construction next door).

Still, photographs are better than nothing — especially in the case of important works like Ms. Holt's "Sun Tunnels" (1973-76), a site-specific sculpture executed on land purchased by the artist in northwestern Utah. The four concrete tunnels, laid out in the form of an open X, are aligned with the rising and setting sun on the days of the solstices. (The effect is also documented in a time-lapse video.)

"I wanted to bring the vast space of the desert back down to human scale," Ms. Holt wrote about "Sun Tunnels." That idea distinguishes her from male contemporaries like Michael Heizer, whose immense voids in the desert reduce the human body to puny insignificance. You might

Decoys, Complexes and Triggers SculptureCenter

think of "Sun Tunnels" as a more feminine Stonehenge, although Ms. Holt would probably object to that description.

Proving that her art is not totally dependent on the beauty of the landscape, Ms. Holt's public project "Dark Star Park" occupies a blighted urban intersection in Rosslyn, Va. A video at SculptureCenter, "Art in the Public Eye: The Making of Dark Star Park, 1979-1988," illuminates the complex negotiations (with real-estate developers, architects, public officials and a swimming pool construction company) behind Ms. Holt's triangular field of granite spheres.

In a less epic version of Land Art several women bring natural materials into the gallery. Highlights include Jackie Winsor's "Coil Piece" (1969), a ring of twisted hemp fibers, and Michelle Stuart's "Sayerville Strata Quartet," a series of four monochrome paintings made with different strata of earth from a New Jersey site.

Architecture trumps nature in a fascinating group of large-scale

works installed in the main gallery. A 1975 sculpture by Alice Adams consists of three vaulted arches made from laminated wood and wood lath; rising only to waist height, they bring the Gothic experience down to earth. Alice Aycock's floor-to-ceiling "Stairs (These Stairs Can Be Climbed)" (1974), takes full advantage of the SculptureCenter's narrow, high-ceilinged space. Viewers will find it surprisingly difficult to resist the impulse to climb until their heads bump the ceiling.

Spirited rejoinders to the minimalist vocabulary are on display in SculptureCenter's smaller gallery: a Lynda Benglis floor sculpture of pigmented polyurethane foam, "Night Sherbet A" (1968), and photographs of Ms. Winsor's destroyed-cube sculptures "Exploded Piece" (1980-82) and "Burned Piece" (1978). These works deserve a place in any survey of post-minimal sculpture.

"Decoys, Complexes and Triggers" suggests that the '70s are far from exhausted, especially where works by women are concerned. An exhibition that placed Ms. Holt side by side with Smithson, or united Ms. Aycock with her mentor Robert Morris, would go even further.