

BIO/ BACKGROUND/INTERESTS OF MOIRA ROTH

(7/22/09)

I was born in 1933 in England, and grew up there. I attended first Vienna University and then the London School of Economics before moving to live in the U.S. where I received my B.A. from New York University (1959) and M.A. (a thesis on Francis Bacon, 1966) and Ph.D. ("Duchamp and America") from the University of California, Berkeley (1974).

After teaching at the University of California (Irvine, 1970-1972, Santa Cruz 1973-1974, and then U.C. San Diego, 1974-1985), I came to Mills in 1985, and hold an endowed chair here—the Trefethen Professorship of Art History. I have traveled extensively around Europe (am currently especially interested in Prague, Germany and Spain), and to Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Asia (Burma, Cambodia, China, Japan and Thailand)—and this has greatly influenced my writing and thinking, especially in the last ten years or so.

In addition to many articles in journals, catalogues and books on Marcel Duchamp, performance art, feminist art practice, photography, multiculturalism, etc., I've edited several books including *The Amazing Decade: Women & Performance Art in America, 1970-1980* (1983), *Connecting Conversations: Interviews with 28 Bay Area Women Artists* (1988), *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (1995), *Abraham's Daughter: The Life and Times of Rose Hacker* (1996), and *Rachel Rosenthal* (1997).

Since the early 1970s I have been involved in feminism, and from the early 1980s onward I have worked increasingly cross-culturally, including an intense involvement in Asian-American art history. In 1994, Yolanda Lopez and I contributed an essay, "Social Protest: Racism and Sexism," to *The Power of Feminist Art* anthology and in 1998 I wrote "Afterword, Parts of a Puzzle" for Phoebe Farris's *Women Artists of Color: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook to 20th Century Artists in the Americas*.

In 1998, my first volume of collected essays appeared, accompanied by commentary by Jonathan D Katz: *Difference/Indifference: Musings on Postmodernism, Marcel Duchamp and John Cage*.

That year I began a series of new essays that shortly acquired the collective title of *Traveling Companions/Fractured Worlds*. There are thirteen of these texts so far (all but one published), my responses to a wide range of individual artists and writers (from Linda Nochlin and Faith Ringgold to Flo Oy Wong and Sutapa Biswas) and geographic locations (from the U.S. to England, Ireland and Cambodia). The most recent *Traveling Companions* text was on art and the Vietnam War: "Remnants & Reverberations: Drawing(s) in Time & Space," in *Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War*, Drawing Center, NY, 2006 catalogue.

Another current art history project, in collaboration with Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, is *Beyond Duchamp*, a selection of my interviews concerning Marcel Duchamp that I conducted with some 36 artists in the late 1960s-early 1970s. Sawelson has retranscribed several of these, together with extensive footnotes. So far re-published are the interviews with Robert Smithson (MOCA *Smithson* catalogue, 2004) and John Cage (*Etant Donnes*, the Paris-based journal, 2005), and, published for the first time, is my interview with John Baldessari (in *X-tra*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 2005).

Among my other current projects are fictional narratives, a series of plays, and poem cycles, including:

1. "Through the Eyes of Rachel Marker "

Begun in 2001, this is a fragmented narrative about a fictional Czech Jew, a poet and playwright, who lives through the 20th century. After the 1924 death of the Czech writer Franz Kafka, Rachel Marker writes to him daily about her own writings, experiences and thoughts, and describes to him events in current European history, especially the rise of fascism. In the fall of 1939, she flees to Paris after the German invasion of Prague, and finally turns up in Berlin after World War II, where she takes photographs every day of the city's shadows. While in Spain in the winter of 2008, I began to sketch out a new episode of this narrative, one in which Rachel Marker visits the country at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

(See texts in *Art Journal*, Fall 2003, *n. paradoxa*, Vol. 17, 2006 and *Camerawork; A Journal of Photographic Arts*, Spring/Summer 2006.)

I have also written several plays about Rachel Marker: "Rachel Marker, Franz Kafka and Alice Sommer" (University of Hawaii, Manoa, 2005), "Through the Eyes of Rachel Marker" (Berkeley, CA and Potsdam, Germany, 2005-2006), and in May 2008 directed and performed in "Through the Eyes of Rachel Marker: a three-part presentation" (Right Window Gallery, San Francisco, CA).

2. "The Library of Maps"

Begun in 2001, these texts (forty-one so far), about a fictional library, its map collections, inhabitants and spaces, can be found on <http://www.pictureprojects.com/between/essay.html>. (Note: some of the links here are now out of date).

Among the Maps' characters are the Chief Librarian, the Hermit, the Cartographer, the Thread Collectors, the Mute Woman, the Blind Child, the Twins, the Sound Maker, the Singer, the Star Dwellers, the Astronomer, the Children, the Stone-Collectors, the Stone-Readers and the Gazers.

The time frames of the Maps range from a single night to a span of many centuries, and they are set in a variety of different spaces. In addition to

the Library's rooms, courtyards, and garden, these spaces include the Sandstorm Desert, the Lake of the Heart, the Valley of Songs, the Village of Handmaps, the City of Maps, the Island of Tenderness, the Library of Alexandria, the Land of the Star Dwellers, and the Observatory. Some of them are based poetically in actual locations, notably in Japan, Czechoslovakia and Greece.

Since 2001, Pauline Oliveros and I have been involved in an ongoing project entitled "The Library of Maps: An Opera in Many Parts" (sections of which have performed in Berlin, Oakland and Troy, NY).

In the spring of 2009, Slobodan Dan Paich and I collaborated on an exhibition, "The Library of Maps," at the Bonnafont Gallery in San Francisco. The exhibition consisted of large broadsheets of three of my Library of Maps texts, some 90 small drawings by Paich, a group of Dennis Letbetter's photographs, plus a collection of stones and a weaving. We also gave out at the openings a printout of the three poems "illustrated" by a selection of Paich's drawings.

Note: this "Library of Maps" exhibition will be reinstalled at the Porter College Faculty Gallery, University of California, Santa Cruz, January 20-March 5, 2010.

3. Plays & Multimedia Theater.

In the Fall of 2002 I began to work in theater: "The Cyber Theater of Mneme (Memory) and Melete (Meditation)," 2002-2003; "From Vietnam to Hollywood," a collaboration with Dinh Q. Lê, San Francisco, 2003; and two dance-dramas with Mary Sano, "Dancing/Dreaming, Izanami and Amaterasu" (San Francisco and Tokyo, Fall 2003), and "Amaterasu, The Blind Woman and Hiroshima" (Concert Hall, Kyoto, Summer 2004).

4. "From Far Away"

Begun in 2003, this is an ongoing series of texts (now numbering fifty-eight) that started as my response to the Iraq War. I have written them sporadically ever since then on a wide range of subjects (from AIDS in Africa, and the Burmese 2007 monks uprising, to the life and death of my 101-year old adopted mother in early 2008). In the fall of 2008, a selection of these texts were presented in a large illustrated book in an installation, "An Atlas of War & Peace," a collaboration with Ginger Wolfe-Suarez and Primitivo Suarez-Wolfe, in the "Bay Area Now" exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

5. Exchanges with Slobodan Dan Paich

For the last 12 months, I have been involved in a daily email exchange of images and texts with Slobodan Dan Paich--a Serbian theater director and artist, now based in San Francisco--that have covered a wide range of subjects, ideas and moods.