



Harmony Hammond in 2005. Photograph by Elizabeth Hess, courtesy Harmony Hammond. Copyright © Elizabeth Hess.

Hammond, Harmony Lynn (b. 1944)

by Marian Evans

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Harmony Hammond is a significant artist whose lesbian feminism is integrated into her painting and sculpture, teaching, writing, and curatorial work.

She arrived in New York in August of 1969, shortly after the Stonewall riots. Born in Chicago in 1944, she had a B.F.A. in painting from the University of Minnesota and a gay artist husband whom she had married at the age of nineteen. She had also spent time in France and Belgium, where she was influenced by collections of African, Oceanic, and Native American art.

In New York Hammond divorced her husband and had a daughter. She came out as a lesbian in 1973.

In 1972 she helped found the A.I.R. feminist co-op gallery, where she held her first solo show. After this exhibition, she was invited to lecture as a visiting artist in schools and universities. She began publishing essays on art and began to talk with other lesbian artists and to collect slides of their work. Since the 1970s, Hammond has maintained a multidimensional career as artist, teacher, writer, and curator.

Hammond's early political influences included Sagaris, an educational institute for radical feminist thought where she taught along with such lesbian leaders as Rita Mae Brown, Mary Daly, Dorothy Allison, Charlotte Bunch, Ti-Grace Atkinson, and Marilyn Webb.

She was also influenced by lesbian theorist Monique Wittig and by her experience as a co-founder of *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* (1976). Hammond co-edited the "Lesbian art and artists" issue of *Heresies* in 1977.

In 1984, Hammond moved to New Mexico. From 1988 to 2005, she taught at the University of Arizona, where she was Professor of Art.

Hammond's voice is a powerful and affirming one for lesbians. Since the time she supported herself and her daughter by storytelling in Brooklyn daycare centers, she has written about feminism and the martial arts and about lesbian art and art history.

Her *Lesbian Art in America: A Contemporary History* (2000) is the first history of lesbian art in the United States. Including profiles of eighteen prominent lesbian artists, *Lesbian Art in America* was the recipient of a Lambda Literary Award in the category of Lesbian Studies.

In the early 1990s she described herself in *New Feminist Criticism* as "an artist, a feminist, a lesbian, middle-class, white. When I'm good, I'm an artist. When I'm bad I'm a feminist. And when I'm horrid, I'm a goddam dyke. I feel like being horrid these days. Given the current political climate around art and the threat of being artistically silenced for being queer and female, I can't afford to be quiet or to let others define who I am and what kind of art I may or may not make."

Throughout her career Hammond has expressed her artistic and political sensibility within the boundaries of modernist and abstract forms. Her works tend to be substantial, intensely colored, and ambiguous.

From *Braided Floorpiece No. 1* (1972), one of her circular paintings that are placed on the floor and reference braided rugs, to her abstract painting *Untitled (Buckets)* (1995), which incorporates found objects that refer to rural women, she has consistently challenged art historical hierarchies that divide art from craft and achievement identified as male from that identified as female.

Hammond has stated that her wrapped rag sculptures of the late 1970s and early 1980s were intended to create a lesbian sensual/sexual presence in the world, where the body is "referenced from a combination of abstract form, and the associations and physical manipulations of the materials themselves."

Kudzu (1981), for example, is 7½ x 7½ feet and looks like a giant, partial, padded ribcage, rife with associations of breathing, breathlessness, and staunch presence. It may also refer to martial arts concepts of *chi* and to oriental script. The materials include cloth, acrylic, gesso, wood, rhoplex, wire, wax, glitter, and charcoal, each with its own visual and tactile associations with the erotic.

Hammond's curatorial work began with an early and significant lesbian exhibition, *A Lesbian Show*, at the 112 Greene Street Workshop in New York City (1978). Her 1999 exhibit *Out West* for Plan B Evolving Arts, Santa Fe, was very well received.

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About the Author

Marian Evans, artist, lawyer, academic, and activist, curated *I Am: KO AHAU*, the only lesbian and gay exhibition ever hosted by a New Zealand municipal gallery. She is currently making documentaries and a website about lesbian-made landscapes.