

Bookworks as Networks: Feminist Artists' Book Projects of the 1980-90s

Caroline Fazzini

Recent trends in contemporary exhibition, academic, and artistic practices in the U.S. illuminate a persistent concentration of efforts to present more complete versions of the past, specifically regarding issues of diversity and representation. Some museums and art historians have responded to the call for inclusivity by supporting exhibitions that focus on artists who have been marginalized. *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985*, and *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*, which opened in 2017 at the Brooklyn Museum and the Hammer Museum, respectively, exemplify this corresponding surge of interest within the art and academic worlds of the Americas regarding women artists, and particularly women artists of color. My studies of these exhibitions, as well as my interest in artists' books, led me to identify two collaborative artists' book projects that emerged in the late 1980s, in the immediate aftermath of the time periods addressed in both *We Wanted a Revolution* and *Radical Women*. I aim to contribute to revisionist scholarly efforts by examining these two projects: *Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists' Book Project* (1987-1990) and *Connections project/Conexus* (1986-1989). Both were first and foremost, meant to initiate dialogues and relationships between women across borders through the making of art and artists' books. While neither project has received scholarly attention to date, they are important examples of feminist collaborations between women artists.

The projects, *Connections project/Conexus* (1986-1989), organized by Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore, and *Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists' Book Project* (1987-90), organized by Faith Ringgold and Clarissa Sligh, both took advantage of the accessibility of

artists' books in an effort to include and encourage the participation of women artists.

Introducing a different, farther-reaching form of feminist collaboration, these projects allowed organizers to engage with female artists across multiple states and countries through calls for artwork and artists' books. These collective projects and proposals led to the creation of multifaceted, individual works that manifested in multiple forms, ranging from artists' books to large-scale artworks, which were later brought together and shown in subsequent exhibitions. Through an examination of the projects' organizers, structures, and intentions, this thesis aims to place these projects within the history of feminist art collaborations. I will compare them to better-known examples from the period such as the installation projects *The Dinner Party* (1979) and *Womanhouse* (1972) in order to demonstrate the advantages of these book and mail-based methods of collaboration for women artists and women artists of color at the time.

Histories of Radical Women

A close friend of Faith Ringgold and a fellow artist, Curlee Raven Holton, wrote that though "[Ringgold] has been called a feminist...she is quick to remind us that the feminist movement did not naturally seek out faces that looked like hers."¹ This distinction between the usages of the term "feminist" is important to make because while I have chosen to refer to *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus* as "feminist collaborations," it should be noted that each project came out of different social circumstances. Ringgold, along with other artists involved in *Coast to Coast* such as Howardena Pindell and Adrian Piper were responding to the exclusion they faced not only from society at large but also from within the mainstream Women's Movement a decade earlier. The historical context presented by the 2017 exhibition

¹ Curlee Raven Holton and Faith Ringgold, *Faith Ringgold: A View from the Studio* (Boston: Bunker Hill Pub. in association with Allentown Art Museum, 2004), 9.

We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985, addresses the levels of exclusion faced by black women during this period. Curators Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley note in their introduction to the exhibition's sourcebook that for black women, "the work to identify, critique, and battle [sexism and gender-based] oppression could only happen in tandem with their urgent work against racism."² *Coast to Coast* exemplifies some of the complexities present within the Women's Movement, namely that the concerns of minorities were not always considered, which led to the need for such projects.³

Though *Connections project/Conexus* occurred around the same time as *Coast to Coast*, the organizers were more broadly interested in having the participants respond to their respective U.S. and Brazilian cultures' "sharply defined" expectations of women.⁴ In a similar manner to *We Wanted a Revolution*, the 2017 exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*, examines the political and social conditions in which Latin American and Latina women artists worked. The show features works by artists from over 15 countries, including Brazil, the birthplace of one of *Connections project/Conexus* organizers, Josely Carvalho. Partially due to the fact that Brazil was operating under an authoritarian political structure from 1964-1985 they did not have an established "feminist movement" comparable to the United States.⁵ *Radical Women* curator Andrea Giunta comments that regardless of this, "in their works [women artists]

² Catherine Morris, Rujeko Hockley, and Aruna DSouza, *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85; New Perspectives* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 2018), 18.

³ See Linda La Rue, "The Black Movement and Women's Liberation," *The Black Scholar* (1970): 36-42; Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), 125; Toni Morrison, "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib," *The New York Times*, 22 August 1971.

⁴ Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore, *Connections Project/Conexus: A Collaborative Exhibition between 32 Women Artists from Brazil & the United States* (New York, Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, 1987), 12.

⁵ Cecilia Fajardo-Hill et al., *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* (Los Angeles: Prestel, 2017), 29.

explored the repertoire of issues that feminism addressed. Though they did not call themselves feminists, they undertook intensive research into subjectivity and the problematic status of women in society and as biologically and culturally conditioned beings.”⁶ The specificities between Brazil’s and the U.S.’s treatment of gender served as the basis on which Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore began to conceptualize *Connections project/Conexus*, due to their mutual interests in comparing their cultural experiences. Overall, the life experiences of women artists of color were not sufficiently highlighted or acknowledged at this point in history, initiating efforts like that of *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*, which aimed to address issues of intersectionality by providing women artists from varying backgrounds with opportunities to create, discuss, and exhibit their work.⁷

Installation Art of the Mainstream Women’s Movement

Within discussions of seminal second-wave feminist art history, the installation works *Womanhouse* and *The Dinner Party*, connected by feminist artist Judy Chicago, are typically part of the conversations. These collaborative precursors represent a distinct set of perspectives from second-wave feminism, ones that were informed by similar, yet different sets of intentions than that of the organizers of *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*. These alternative approaches were in part due to the variations in the types of oppression that the women involved responded to.

⁶ Fajardo-Hill et al., *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*, 30.

⁷ Intersectionality is a framework that recognizes the interconnectedness and effects of categories such as race, class, and gender on the treatment and discrimination of marginalized groups of people. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* (1991): 1244-1245.

Begun in the fall of 1971, the house-sized installation project *Womanhouse* officially opened to the public for one month in January of 1972. The project was a collaborative effort between 23 members of an all-female class from the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, a program that was created and headed by prominent feminist artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro.⁸ *Womanhouse* included installation works and performance pieces that were exhibited inside an abandoned house near the CalArts campus, and explored gendered ideas surrounding domesticity as they related to women in contemporary culture at the time. The displayed works criticized, publicized, and investigated stereotypical roles and experiences associated with females such as menstruation, marriage, motherhood, makeup, duties related to the kitchen (Fig. 1), laundry (Fig. 2), and ironing.⁹ The installations and performances, which represented a culmination of the life experiences of the women involved, were meant to raise consciousness of the multitude of tasks that women were often expected to complete and in some cases expected to conceal.

Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (Fig. 3) dealt with related concerns of women's assumed associations to domestic roles and craft but additionally addressed the broader historical exclusion of women. *The Dinner Party* was begun a few years after *Womanhouse* in 1974 and completed in 1979. Chicago set out to show women's "long history of achievement" by creating *The Dinner Party*, a large triangular table with seats for 39 women who in some way had been forgotten or erased from accounts of the past.¹⁰ The table is set chronologically (beginning with a seat for the Primordial Goddess and ending with Georgia O'Keeffe) with a place setting for each represented woman comprised of individualized vaginal ceramic dishes, utensils, and hand-

⁸ Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, "Original Exhibition Essay," WOMANHOUSE, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://www.womanhouse.net/statement/>.

⁹ Jane F. Gerhard, *Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 46-47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

sewn/embroidered table runners (processes and media traditionally viewed as women's craft). The porcelain floor beneath the table displays 999 handwritten names of other notable, historically omitted women. This project, also a collaboration of sorts, involved 400 people over a four-year period.¹¹ Volunteers of *The Dinner Party* contributed in myriad ways, mainly through their skills in ceramics, needlework, research, photography, and graphics.¹²

Much in the way that the artists' book was the best-suited medium to the needs of *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*, Chicago and Schapiro's use of installation was tied directly to their goals for *Womanhouse* and *The Dinner Party*. Since the women involved in these projects were largely focused on issues related to domesticity and gender roles, their decision to produce works inside a house or at a dinner table was an appropriate one because these spaces were viewed as common locations of the oppression and stereotypes they faced. The issues addressed in these works were very much based on their experiences of domestic spaces, and the artists used installation and performance to present those experiences to viewers by creating experiential environments. Between these projects and *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*, there is some overlap in responses to subjects such as the body, birth, marriage, and motherhood; however, the main divergence in themes is the inclusion of topics dealing with race and racial discrimination. This further speaks to the need for different methods and material formats among these feminist projects because they each had varying end goals. *Womanhouse* and *The Dinner Party* were focused on exposing gender stereotypes and highlighting the exclusion of women throughout history, whereas *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus* were interested in connecting women artists and especially women artists of

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Acknowledgement Panels," Brooklyn Museum: Acknowledgement Panels, accessed March 28, 2018, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/acknowledgement_panels/.

color through collaborative art making, while simultaneously bringing visibility to their art. Artists' books supported these intentions from the outset due to the medium's open-ended physicality and concept.

Artists' Books and Agency

Artists' books are an extremely unrestricted medium with a very fluid definition.¹³ Johanna Drucker, a scholar who has written extensively on the subject of artists' books, concludes that they can best be understood as original works of art that are inspired in some way by the form or essence of a book.¹⁴ The term "artists' book" began to be used in the 1960s in conjunction with the conceptual and minimalist movements to describe publications with "identifiable formal, material, and intellectual characteristics."¹⁵ These types of characteristics continue to set artists' books apart from what are commonly regarded as regular "books." Artists' books can come in the form of multiples, taking advantage of democratic print-based media, or they can exist as unique, one-of-a-kind objects. Since the 1960s, the genre has widened in terms of the techniques and materials used, as can be seen in the aesthetic variety of the artists' books produced from both *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*.

Artists' books' open, flexible nature is well suited to collaborative efforts like *Coast to Coast's* and *Connections project/Conexus's* because it supports diversity of styles and gives

¹³ Johanna Drucker (2004), p. 11, 14, Drucker states that the history of artists' books has been tracked in multiple ways, and though scholars have tried to flesh out a particular distinction or set of criteria that categorizes artists' books, she believes that these efforts often end up being either too broad or too specific.

¹⁴ Johanna Drucker, "Artist's book," Grove Art Online, 28 Mar. 2018, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7002220480>, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

artists a great deal of creative agency. While the term provides a general category or connective point from which to start, artists can easily apply their own artistic preferences to the form of an artists' book since it has no pre-arranged end goal attached to it. Artists' books do not connote or require the use of any specific medium or technique, allowing for artists coming from a variety of specializations to engage in their creation. Additionally, artists' books reinforce elements of agency and accessibility when used in certain situations. In the cases of *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*, the mail-based structure of both projects benefitted from artists' books' portable capabilities. Participating artists were able to create their works at any location and then send them into the organizers with relative ease. This process would require more resources and planning had the projects' chosen media been sculpture or painting, for instance.

The most explicit connecting factor between the projects is the use of artists' books to facilitate collaboration. Both systems of artists' book-related collaborations enabled artists to be active agents in their responses to the various calls for exchange. The aforementioned characteristics of artists' books exemplify the purpose behind their use in *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*, specifically to support long-distance communication and networking among women from various parts of the United States and Brazil. These projects' aims to bring women artists together relate broadly to other collaborative feminist efforts to unite women artists through shared experiences from the 1970s on, but as was stated earlier, there are differences between their methods of doing so. The particular variations between the intentions of both projects will be discussed further in later sections. However, they are connected by their overall purpose; their use of artists' books as an accessible, far-reaching medium; and the overlap in artistic themes of the works produced.

Faith Ringgold and *Coast to Coast* (1987-1990)

Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists' Book Project was organized by Faith Ringgold in 1987 as an effort to connect women artists of color from across the United States through the production and exhibition of artists' books. Faith Ringgold's association with this project comes as little surprise due to her ongoing activism and involvement in feminist causes as well as her extensive artistic history of working within the mediums of bookmaking and narrative quilts.

Born in 1930 in Harlem, New York, Ringgold was heavily influenced by a multitude of social and cultural factors she encountered growing up – her post-Harlem Renaissance environment, racial and gender discrimination, exclusionary practices within the art world, and the legacy of slavery.¹⁶ Her initial artistic interest in narratives and themes related to gender can be traced back to 1972. Soon after an exhibition of her *America Black* painting series in 1970, Ringgold created a mural titled *For the Women's House* (Fig. 4) for the Women's House of Detention on Riker's Island.¹⁷ This work marked the first time she employed all-female imagery.¹⁸ In an interview with her daughter, Ringgold explains that she came to the idea of doing a mural for the prison after being rejected from several colleges to do a public piece, and deciding instead that she wanted her work “to be somewhere it is needed.”¹⁹ Based on her own ideas as well as input from the inmates of the prison, Ringgold settled on a design that focused on themes of justice, freedom, rehabilitation, and depicted women as equals.²⁰ The mural is

¹⁶ Holton and Ringgold, *Faith Ringgold: A View from the Studio*, 9.

¹⁷ Faith Ringgold, "Faith Ringgold Biography and Chronology," Faith Ringgold - Biography, accessed February 11, 2018, <http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/bio.htm>, 2.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Catherine Morris, Rujeko Hockley, and Aruna DSouza, *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85*, 104.

²⁰ Ibid., 105.

large, 8x8 feet and made up of 8 triangular segments; the design is BaKuba and comes from an African tribe called the Kuba.²¹ Each section depicts women of multiple races and classes holding different professional and personal roles such as a basketball player, a bus driver, President of the United States, a doctor, a police officer, and a single mother. Included as a key work in *We Wanted a Revolution, For the Women's House* represents a thematic turning point in Ringgold's work in which she began to confront issues of race as well as gender, which would later act as the foundational subjects of *Coast to Coast*.

Ringgold's interests in subject matter pertaining to gender and race coincided with her involvement in activist efforts, which also began in the 1970s when she joined (and in some cases founded) various feminist and anti-racist groups such as the Ad Hoc Women's Art Group, Where We At, and the National Black Feminist Organization. From the 1970s on, the intersection between race and gender remained an integral part of Ringgold's artistic and political interests as evidenced by her participation in *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus*.

Ringgold originally conceived of the idea for *Coast to Coast* while serving as the Vice President for Minority Affairs in the Women's Caucus for Art (WCA),²² where she became part of a national network of artists, the majority of whom were white women. In her essay documenting the history of the project from *Coast to Coast's* catalog, Ringgold explains that the need for a national networking project for women artists of color emerged out of her inability to do so within the WCA and beyond.²³ Since the beginning of the Women's Movement, she had

²¹ Ibid.

²² Faith Ringgold (1990), p. 8 She was appointed Vice President of Minority Affairs in 1986.

²³ Ibid., Ringgold elaborates that it was difficult to connect with women visual artists of color at the time due to exclusionary practices within the art world against artists who were not "white and male."

“dream(t) of a network of women artists committed to bringing women of color into the mainstream of American art.”²⁴ *Coast to Coast* was Ringgold’s solution to provide visibility and connectivity to women artists of color from across the country.

The project itself was relatively simple in structure; Ringgold brought on artists Clarissa Sligh and Margaret Gallegos as the East and West Coast coordinators, and they collectively wrote an invitation to women artists of color to join the project by creating and submitting artists’ books. The letter, according to Ringgold, was sent out to “over 200 women from over 30 states whose bloodlines included Latino, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, African American and mixtures thereof.”²⁵ Many women across the nation responded, and by December 1987, a collection of around 120 books was ready to be exhibited. Ringgold, Sligh, and Gallegos worked together to organize the show’s opening in 1988, which occurred during the WCA national meeting at the Diverse Works Gallery in Houston, Texas.

The Houston show featured lesser-known artists of color alongside better-known ones such as Josely Carvalho (one of the organizers of *Connections Project/Conexus*), Maren Hassinger, Michi Itami, Emma Amos, Howardena Pindell, Zarina Hashmi, Adrian Piper, Senga Nengudi, Elizabeth Catlett, and many others. The 120 artists’ books exhibited at Houston ran the gamut of artistic techniques, materials, and themes. The materials and techniques used ranged from paper, paint, metal, and fabric to printmaking, photography, and Xerox. Ringgold summarizes the topics covered by the collection of books in the exhibition catalog, noting that the books explored a great number of themes including love, hate, food, family, friendship, childbirth, sex, marriage, motherhood, war, rape, incest, music, AIDS, and belonging to various

²⁴ Faith Ringgold, *Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists’ Book Project* (Radford, Va.: Flossie Martin Gallery, 1990), 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

ethnic identities.²⁶ She does, however, identify a common thread connecting each of the books, saying that “they all seemed to make the point: I am a woman, a woman of color, a serious being making a serious statement about my life and my work.”²⁷ *Coast to Coast* provided these women with the platform to make artistic statements about their identities while simultaneously encouraging relationships to be made and experiences to be shared. Opportunities such as these were rare for women of color both during and after the Women’s Movement, making *Coast to Coast* a significant source of inclusion among those who had likely faced issues with entering into, as Ringgold put it, “the mainstream of American art.”²⁸ After exhibiting in Houston, *Coast to Coast* traveled nationally to at least 10 institutions from 1988 into the 1990s.²⁹ It is worth noting that the books produced out of *Coast to Coast* as well as *Connections project/Conexus* were for the most part exhibited in relatively educational contexts in university art galleries that generally functioned outside of the larger art world. Ringgold and Sligh also coordinated a variety of lectures, panel discussions, meetings, and workshops in tandem with the project to sustainably increase its impact and participation.

The choice of medium for *Coast to Coast* was not an arbitrary one. In the catalog, Ringgold explains that during the initial planning stages of the project the idea of the artists’ book was brought up due to its ability to support the kinds of long-distance communication they

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 8.

²⁹ Clarissa Sligh (2006), Sligh’s chronology for the project lists the venue locations as follows: The College of Wooster Art Museum, Wooster, OH, DePauw University Art Museum, Greencastle, IN, The Center for Book Arts, New York, N.Y., The University of Michigan School of Art Museum, Ann Arbor, MI, The Radford University Flossie Martin Gallery, Radford, VA, The Eubie Blake Center and The Baltimore Museum, Baltimore, MD, Artemisia Gallery, Chicago, IL, and The Jamaica Arts Center, Queens, NY.

desired.³⁰ It was subsequently selected as the project's medium for this reason among others including the relative size consistency expected from artists' books. The majority of the 120 books included in *Coast to Coast's* catalog hover around the 9–12 inch long range. Among the larger works are the two belonging to Ringgold (48"x48") and Sligh (11"x36"). Ringgold's artists' book, *My Best Friend* (Fig. 5), was a collaboration with her assistant, Lisa Yi. The work is made of pieced fabric and acrylic paint on canvas, and depicts the artists as young girls lifting up their dresses to reveal blocks of text underneath, which Yi refers to as their "stories."³¹ Yi explains this gesture in her artist statement as one of defiance; she says that young girls are often told not to lift their dresses and instead to be quiet and submissive, yet here she and Ringgold do the opposite.³² In the context of this project and Ringgold's artistic practice at the time, this depicted action alludes to her own resolve when refusing to be silenced on issues of race or gender.

Sligh's artists' book, titled *What's Happening with Momma?* (Fig. 6) is a six-paneled vertical accordion book with silkscreened images and letterpress text. Once unfolded, the house-shaped artists' book becomes three-dimensional, exposing a collection of the artist's family photographs with accompanying text that explores the work's relationship to time and her own biography.³³ Though smaller in size (12"x9") compared to Sligh's and Ringgold's, Josely Carvalho's artists' book, *The Meal* (Fig. 7), further demonstrates the vast visual and physical differences between the works created for *Coast to Coast*. Her 12-page piece, which is hand

³⁰ Faith Ringgold (1990), p. 9 In the *Coast to Coast* catalog, Ringgold describes an early conversation she had with art historian and critic, Moira Roth, about "what would be the right first project for an artists of color collaboration." Together, they settled on the idea of the artists' book, which they viewed as allowing women to communicate and collaborate with each other from coast to coast.

³¹ Ibid., 50.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 72.

silkscreened and accordion shaped, includes text and images of fish and human bodies printed in varying gradients of red tones. In her artist statement from *Coast to Coast*'s catalog, Carvalho identifies herself as a Brazilian woman residing in New York who often "incorporates the conflicts of culture in [her] works."³⁴ She describes *The Meal* as addressing "prejudices, values and false myths imposed upon women" as well as recollections of her childhood and instances of pleasure.³⁵

Though visually variable, the books from *Coast to Coast* all incorporate some aspect of portability in the forms of cases and various book binding techniques, allowing them to be folded, tied, or reduced in a way that permits travel through mailing. Additionally, the wide spectrum on which artists' books exist allowed participating artists a great amount of creative freedom. They could create works based on their own interpretations of what constitutes an artists' book in order to choose the form that best fit their ideas and experiences. *Connections project/Conexus* similarly took advantage of the agency and accessibility promoted by the use of artists' books to initiate another distinctive form of far-reaching collaboration between women.

Connections project/Conexus (1986-1989)

While Ringgold and her collaborators were planning *Coast to Coast*, artists Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore were organizing *Connections project/Conexus*, an international exhibition project between women artists from Brazil and North America. Carvalho is Brazilian-born, but spent much of her life working in both New York and Rio de Janeiro.³⁶ Her work ranges from paintings, book art, and sculptures to printmaking, and video and sound

³⁴ Ibid., 46.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Josely Carvalho, "Bio," Josely Carvalho, accessed April 01, 2018, <http://www.joselycarvalho.net/bio.htm>.

installations. Moore, originally from Texas, also spent time working and making in New York while contributing to activist efforts of the Women's Movement. Her works vary in form from sculpture to painting to bookmaking. The two artists were likely introduced through their involvement with the *Heresies Collective*, a feminist publication on art and politics, which was published from 1977-1993.³⁷ Both artists' work dealt thematically with ideas surrounding the personal and the political, which led them to begin comparing their own experiences' relationship to cultural traditions and expectations.³⁸ Much in the same way that Ringgold's *Coast to Coast* was responding to the need for a national network of women artists of color in the United States, *Connections project/Conexus* was an attempt to initiate dialogues between women artists from the U.S. and Brazil about their personal experiences related to a variety of topics, which were shaped by their respective cultures' treatment of gender.³⁹

Like *Coast to Coast*, Carvalho and Moore started *Connections project/Conexus* by mailing out letters to invite their desired participants to join the project. The letters each contained a list of categories of interest with themes related to women's lives (such as abortion, rape, child-rearing, sexuality, shelter, birth) and more generally to society (censorship, sexual and racial discrimination, environmental exploitation) from which the recipients were expected to choose five in order of preference.⁴⁰ The organizers collected this information and narrowed their choices down to eight possible themes: environment, war/death, race, food, birth, spirit, shelter, and body. Then, each of the 32 participating artists (16 from the U.S. and 16 from Brazil)

³⁷ Sabra Moore (2016), p. 100 In 1984, Moore invited nineteen artists to work on a project with her titled *Reconstructed Codex*. She lists a participating group of artists, which includes Carvalho, and designates her as having worked with *Heresies*.

³⁸ Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore, *Connections Project/Conexus: A Collaborative Exhibition between 32 Women Artists from Brazil & the United States* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, 1987), Documentation booklet, 12.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Documentation booklet, 10.

picked one theme to respond to in the form of a large-scale artwork, which would later be exhibited. These 32 core artists were split into 16 pairs and matched with an artist from the opposite country who had expressed interest in similar themes.

The core artist group was made up of many significant artists, one of whom was Ringgold. Also included were the organizers (Carvalho and Moore), Liliana Porter, Lygia Pape, Nancy Spero, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and Howardena Pindell, to name a few. After the matching, the pairs collaborated to varying degrees while producing their individual works, but “all were asked to exchange materials, an image and a word.”⁴¹ This prompt supported the initial impetus for the project, which as stated by Carvalho and Moore, was to “explore the artistic, social, and political connections among women in these two locations.”⁴² By initiating these relationships, the organizers hoped (similarly to Ringgold’s expectations for *Coast to Coast*) to form enduring networks between the women involved. The last three intentions of the project, “to expand these connections, to create a network of information, and to produce art out of this process,” were fulfilled by the second component of the *Connections project/Conexus* project, the *150 Artists’ Book*.⁴³

Connections project/Conexus and the 150 Artists’ Book

The *150 Artists’ Book* was an extension of the original exhibition-based concept for the project, and was conceived by Carvalho and Moore as a way to expand the original circle of participating artists to the project. The artists’ book required each of the 32 core artists to produce an 8”x7” book page and then invite up to four other women artists to make their own

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.

⁴² Ibid., 10.

⁴³ Ibid.

pages on the same theme. Made possible through the accessibility of graphic arts, the *150 Artists' Book* manifested as a composite bookwork that enabled additional long-distance exchange and collaboration between women artists.

Though the name suggests singularity, the *150 Artists' Book* (Fig. 8) is a small collection of nine books, which are contained within a tan paper case held together by a red ribbon. The case is silkscreened with images of red postage stamps from Los Angeles and Brazil meant to immediately signify the project's international scope. It holds nine saddle-stitched books of the same size (5"x8.5") and style, which correspond to the eight chosen themes of the project along with a supplementary ninth book titled "Documentation" containing essays and planning documents written by the organizers. The book covers are photocopied on tan paper with black ink. The Xeroxed covers display a variety of imagery including the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, postage stamps, shells, and fish, again pointing to the ways in which the artists' ideas were spread and received across borders. Additionally, any text used in the books such as titles or essays appears in both English and Portuguese.

Each of the eight themed books begins with an ordered list of the contributing artists to that particular book. The following pages are comprised of Xeroxed scans of the original page works created by the artists who responded to their chosen theme. The methods of Xeroxing and silkscreening are directly related to the organizers' interest in accessibility as both provide the option for creating large editions of the books, which could be widely disseminated by mail. While these techniques share a close relationship with mass-reproducibility, this association should not minimize the amount of effort that went into hand-editioning each book, a process

carried out by Moore, Carvalho, and a few hired assistants.⁴⁴ In her memoir, Moore recalls having made an edition of 600 copies of the original pages.⁴⁵

The Xeroxed pages are printed in high contrast black and white, which results in the flattening of the imagery and in some cases the masking of the original media that was used. The commonality of having been Xeroxed, however, works to create a graphic unity among them. Though in reality the mediums and techniques used by the artists were extremely diverse, ranging from collage and photo cutouts to watercolor, printmaking, and ink drawings, the effects of Xerox reinforce the idea of collaboration by subverting the idea of the individual and disallowing certain works to outshine others. This encourages viewers to instead focus on the subject matter of each piece, rather than on the artist who produced it. Artist names are not displayed with their respective page (with the exception of artists' signatures on some pages); instead, the list of names at the beginning of each book acts as an index.

The lack of individual information combined with the effects of scanning also serves to initiate interesting dialogues between page spreads like that of the images pictured from the *Environment* (Fig. 9), *War/Death* (Fig. 10), and *Birth* (Fig. 11) books. Subtle visual and thematic patterns often emerge upon viewing them, as can be seen in the repetition of shape in the fingerprints and the dark circles on the flower from the *Environment* pages created by Maria Moreira and Sumiko Arimori, and in the similar compositions and subject matter of the pages from *War/Death* by Laurabeatriz and Karen Shaw. In other spreads, the sheer juxtaposition of one image with another seems to illuminate the extreme differences between them as seen in the pages shown from *Birth* by Mirtes Zweirzynski and Judite dos Santos, where the violent mark-

⁴⁴ Sabra Moore, *Openings: a memoir from the womens art movement, New York City 1970-1992* (New York, NY: New Village Press, 2016), 183.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

making in the work on the left page seems all the more intense against the quieter, softer image of the written word “Birth” to its right. Faith Ringgold’s page appears at the end of *Food* (Fig. 12). Along with what appears to be scanned, handwritten text at the top of the page that reads “Change: Faith Ringgold in 1984 & 1986,” the page shows two Xeroxed photographs of the artist, one smaller photograph superimposed on the larger one, in which she is smiling and holding up her dress. The context of this image in relation to the book’s theme, food, is unclear, but the relevance of this gesture could be tied to its meaning in Ringgold’s *Coast to Coast* artists’ book; the refusal to submit or be silenced.

The variations and similarities in artists’ interpretations of the themes reflect not only their own experiences with the topic but also the forms of exchange (letter-writing and gift sending) that were encouraged by their participation in the project. Much like *Coast to Coast*, the *150 Artists’ Book* provided over one hundred women artists with an immediate audience with which they were able to connect and network through the means of print culture, artists’ books, and graphic arts.⁴⁶ In her essay from the *Documentation* booklet of the *150 Artists’ Book* titled “Following the Dots,” writer, activist, and art critic, Lucy Lippard explains the significance of the notion of collaboration in the context of this project as it relates more broadly to women artists. She explains that collaborative works function in several ways; they challenge the emphasis placed on the idea of the individual genius in art, which is fostered by “patriarchal capitalism”; they provide participants with support systems in “hostile circumstances”; and they involve an instant audience and therefore, an instant source of feedback.⁴⁷ She adds that the last, but most important result of collaboration among women is that it “enriches individual insights

⁴⁶ Josely Carvalho and Sabra Moore, *Connections Project/Conexus: A Collaborative Exhibition between 32 Women Artists from Brazil & the United States* (New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, 1987), *Documentation* booklet, p. 24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

in areas unexplored by men.”⁴⁸ Lippard’s insights on collaboration, while written with the goals of *Connections project/Conexus* in mind, apply to *Coast to Coast*’s purpose just as well. Both projects functioned as vehicles for cooperative artistic making, exchange, support, and feedback at a time when the opportunities to do so were few and far between for women artists.⁴⁹

The entire *Connections project/Conexus* project was shown at locations in the United States and Brazil. The original pages of the *150 Artists’ Book* and the large-scale artworks by the 32 core artists were brought together and exhibited at the (now defunct) Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (MoCHA) in New York City in 1987 (Fig. 13), and the Southeastern Massachusetts University Art Gallery in North Dartmouth in 1988.⁵⁰ Also in 1988, the artists’ book traveled to the University Gallery of Fine Art at Ohio State University in Columbus and was included in *Committed To Print: Social & Political Theme in Recent American Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.⁵¹ The complete project was shown again in 1989 in São Paulo, Brazil at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.⁵²

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On examining the goals and methods of *Connections project/Conexus* and *Coast to Coast*, it becomes clear that they accomplished similar things. Both projects triggered the formation of national and international networks among women artists by mobilizing them

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Lippard notes that there was a clear need for insights related to women’s experiences at the time of *Connections project/Conexus*’s conception, citing the Guerrilla Girls’ posters and “report cards” as well as a recent São Paulo Biennial. The theme of the Biennial was “life,” but only one woman artist was included. “That’s “half life,” and it omits the “better half,” Lippard remarks.

⁵⁰ Shannon O’Neill, “Connections project/Conexus Archive List” (Archive Inventory, Barnard Archives and Special Collections; New York, 2017), 11.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

through the call for artworks and artists' books. They did so, however, in slightly different ways. Ringgold's approach in *Coast to Coast* was to keep things relatively open-ended by simply inviting women of color to make artists' books related to the topic of their choosing. In contrast, Carvalho and Moore set a few more rules, identifying eight possible themes for artists to respond to from the outset.

The broad scope of issues addressed by the national and international artists' book projects *Coast to Coast* and *Connections project/Conexus* called for a method and structure that supported multiple actions: it had to provide a platform on which artists could circulate and present their ideas as well as facilitate long-distance collaborations in order to foster relationships between women artists. Indeed, through the frameworks of these projects the women involved were able to network with each other by exploring their shared and differing experiences, leading to the expansion of their artistic circles and longstanding connections. Occurring in the wake of the Women's Movement, these projects built on the legacies left by women artists a decade earlier by moving issues of race, class, and accessibility to the forefront. Artists like Faith Ringgold, Clarissa Sligh, Josely Carvalho, and Sabra Moore recognized artists' books capabilities to support these objectives and took advantage of this unique medium in ways that brought women artists together across borders through the process of exchange.

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Figure 1, Vicki Hodgetts, *Womanhouse: Eggs to Breast*, mixed media, 1972.



Figure 2, Sandy Orgel, *Womanhouse: Linen Closet*, mixed media, 1972.



Figure 3, Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974 - 1979, mixed media, 48 x 48 ft., Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Collection of the Brooklyn Museum. © Judy Chicago



Figure 4, Faith Ringgold, *For the Women's House*, 1971, oil on canvas, 96"x96",
<http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/d87.htm>.



Figure 5, Faith Ringgold and Lisa Yi, *My Best Friend*, ca. 1987, acrylic paint on canvas and pieced fabric, 48"x48", <http://clarissasligh.com/artists-books/coast-coast/>.



Figure 6, Clarissa Sligh, *What's Happening with Momma?*, 1988, silkscreen and letterpress, 11"x36", <http://clarissasligh.com/artists-books/coast-coast/>.

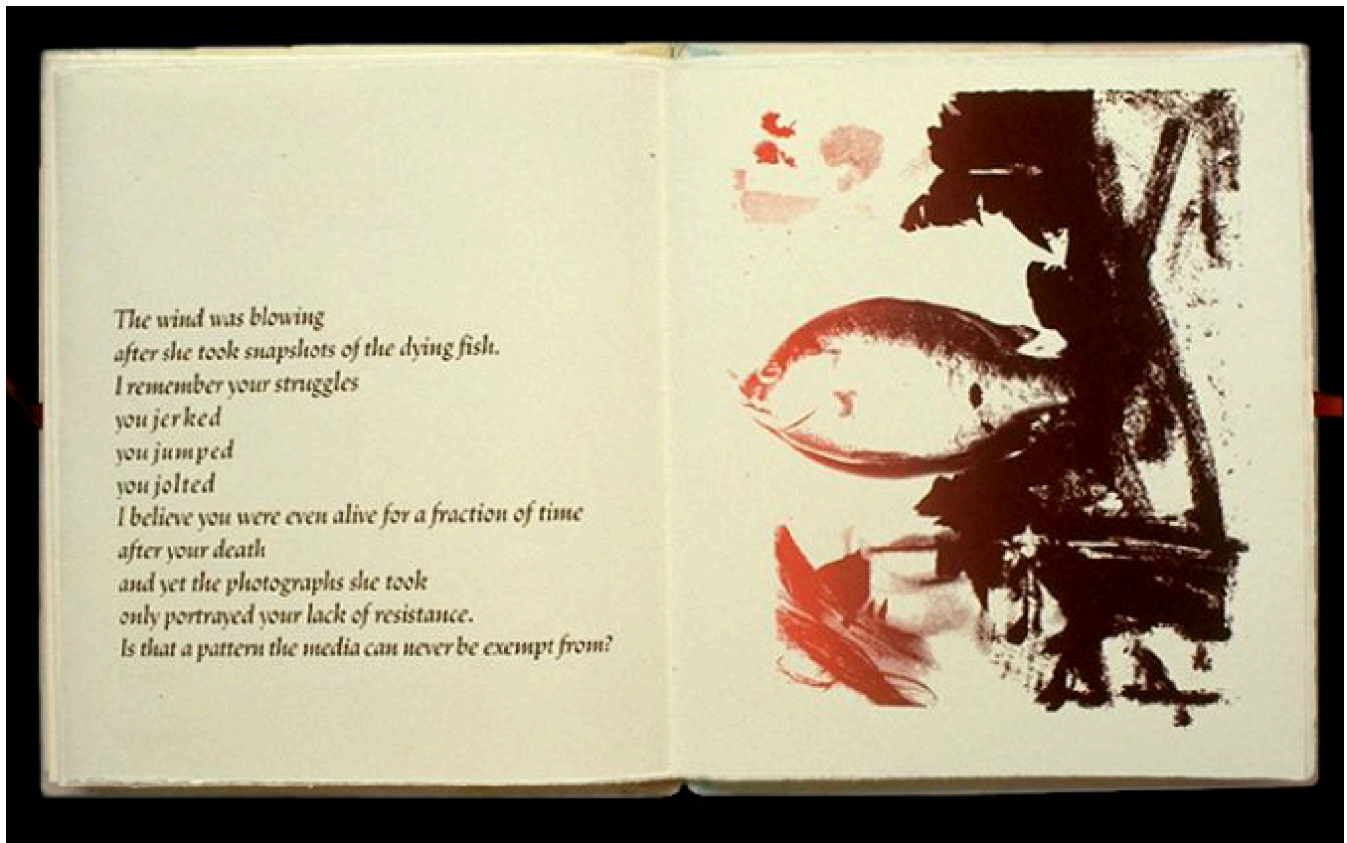


Figure 7, Josely Carvalho, page spread from *The Meal*, 1985, silkscreen, 12"x9",
http://www.joselycarvalho.net/work_books.htm.



Figure 8, *Connections Project/Conexus: A Collaborative Exhibition between 32 Women Artists from Brazil & the United States, 1987*, silkscreen and photocopies, each booklet 5"x8.5".

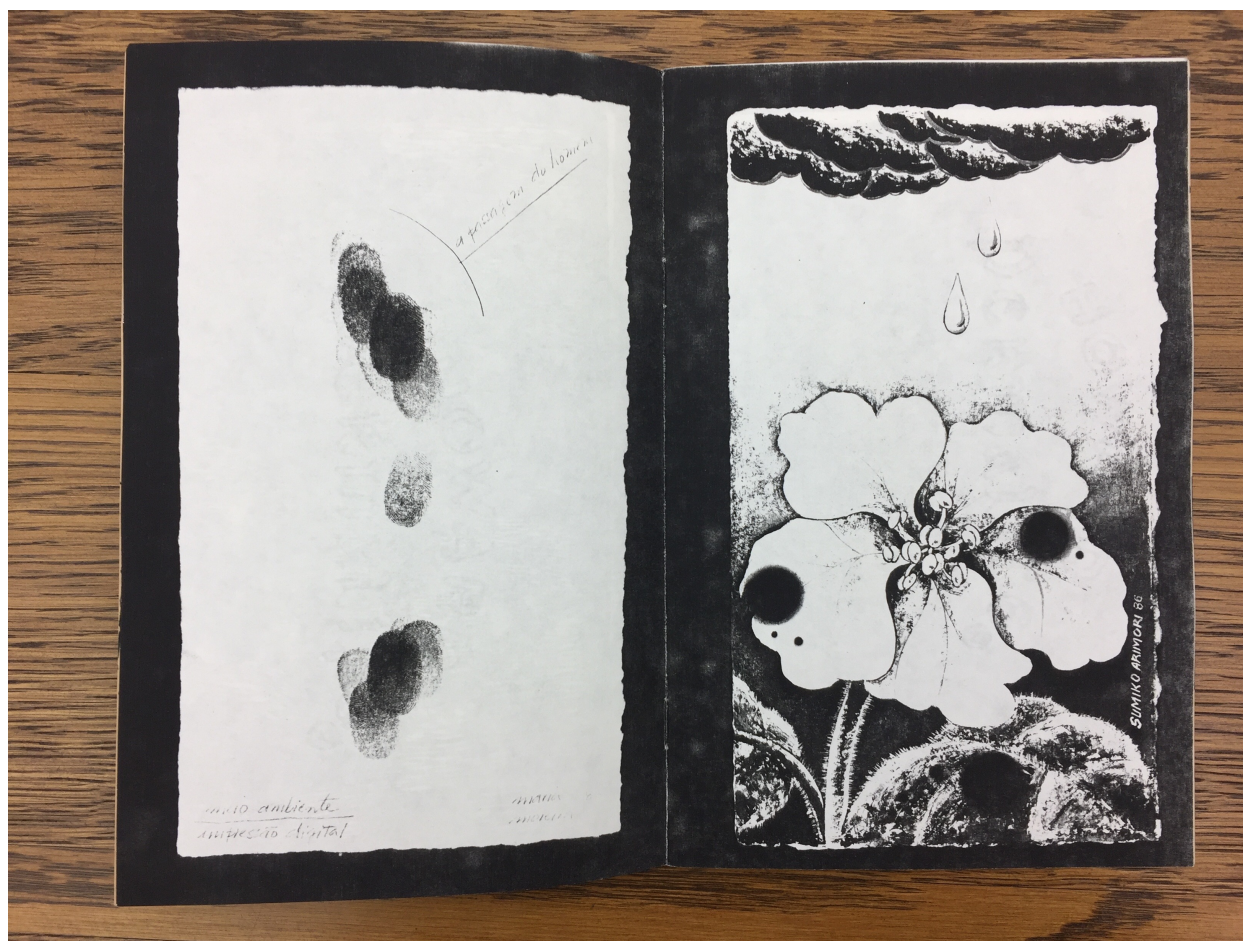


Figure 9, *Connections Project/Conexus: Environment*, 1987, watercolor paper, photocopy, 5x8.5."



Figure 10, *Connections Project/Conexus: War/Death*, 1987, watercolor paper, photocopy, 5x8.5.”

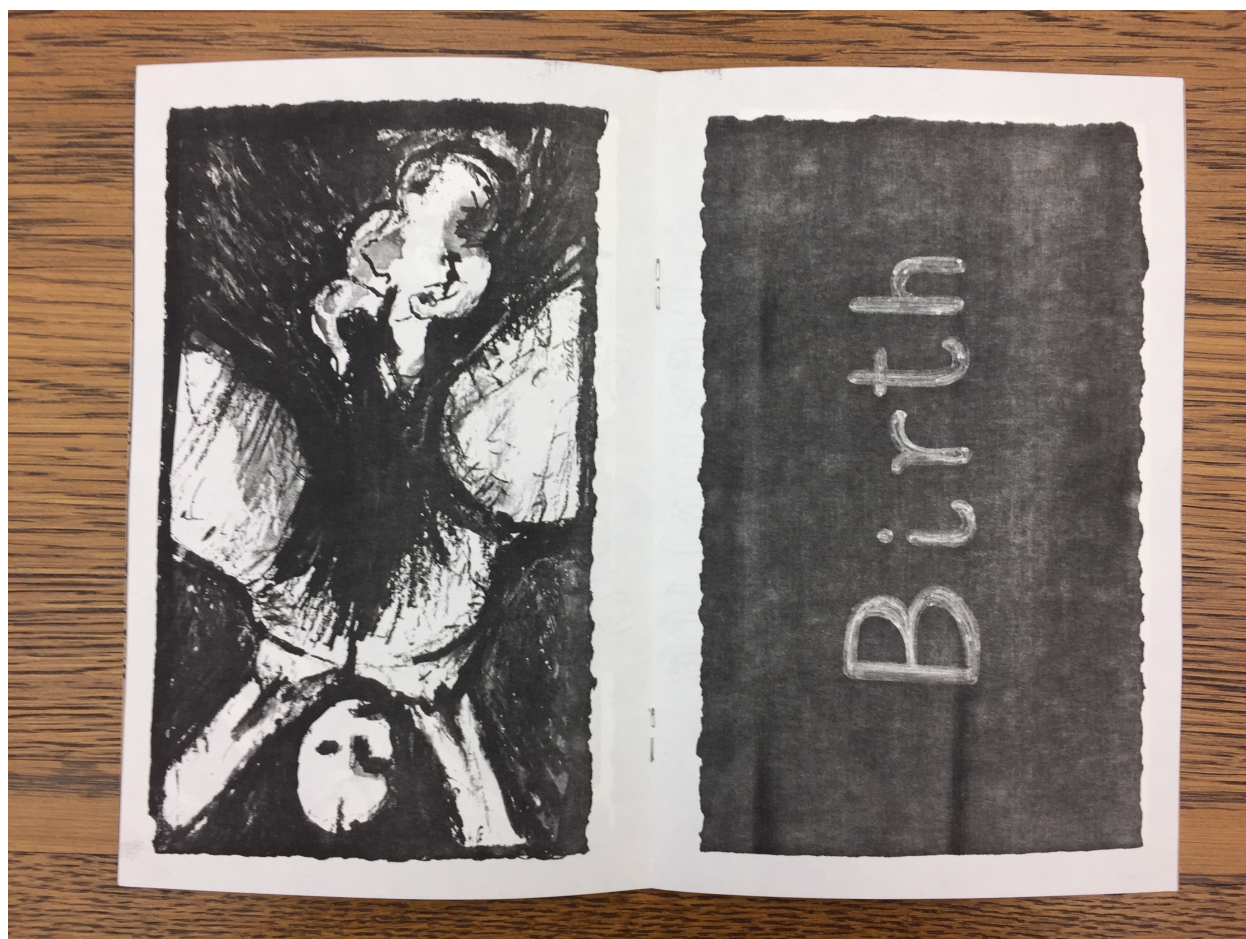


Figure 11, *Connections Project/Conexus: Birth*, 1987, watercolor paper, photocopy, 5x8.5.”

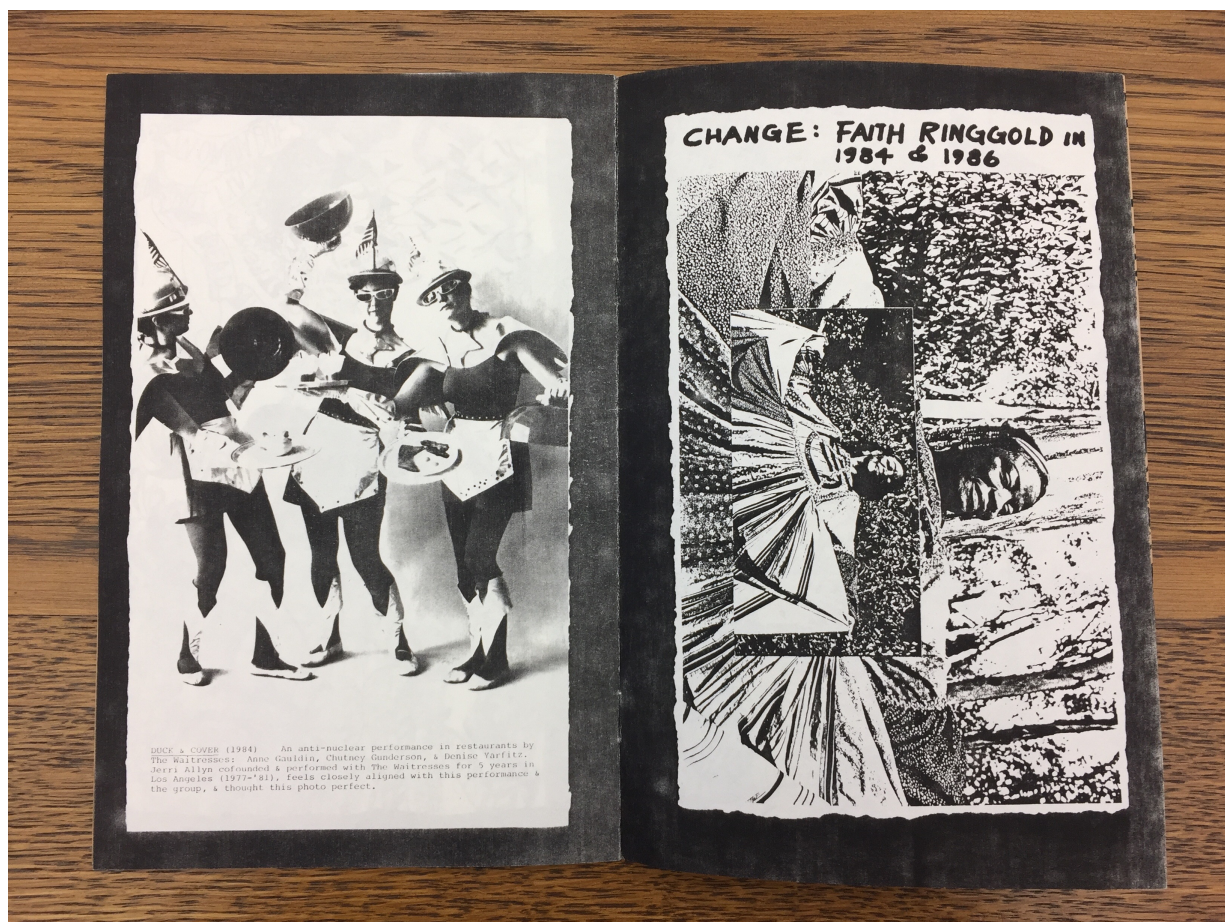


Figure 12, *Connections Project/Conexus: Food*, 1987, watercolor paper, photocopy, 5x8.5.”

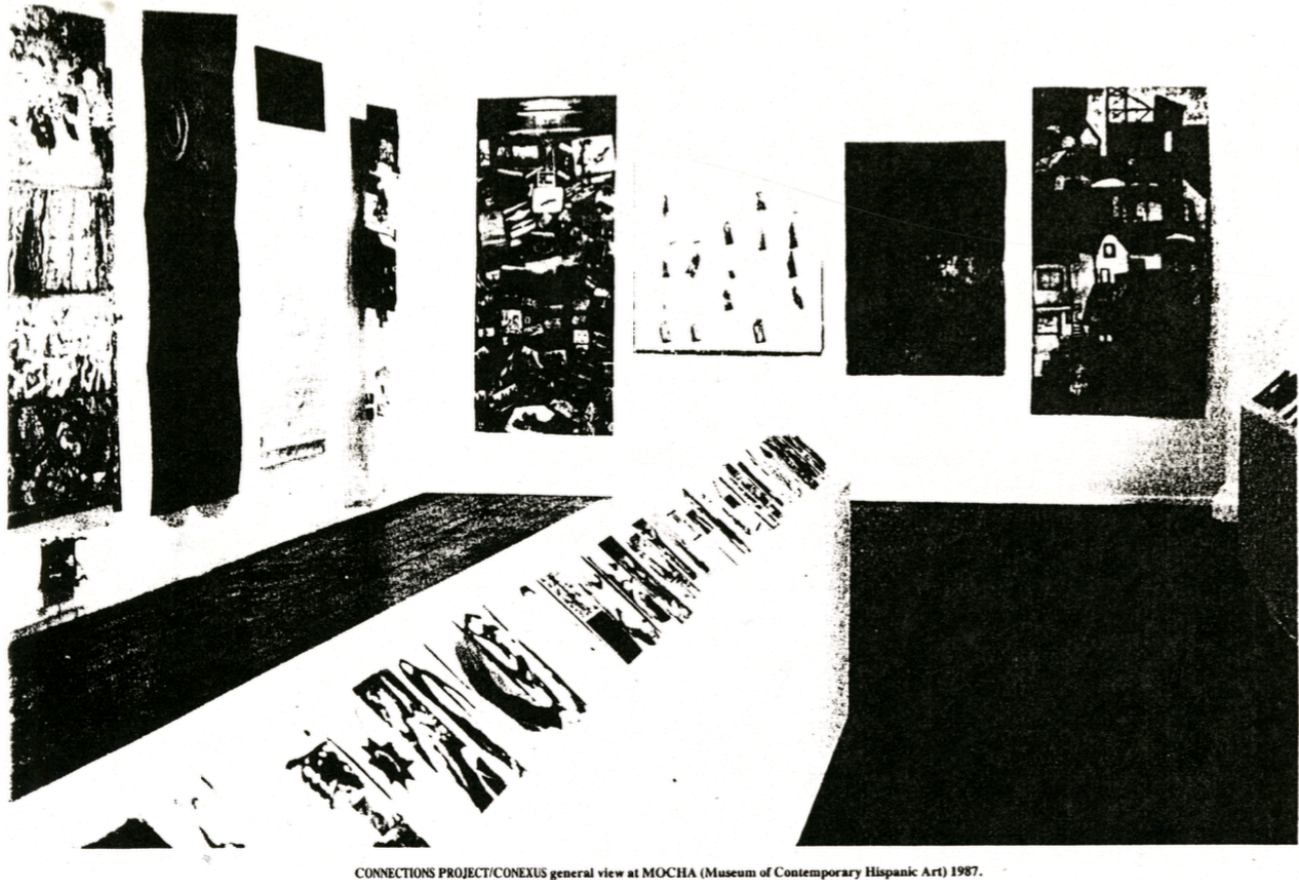


Figure 13, *Connections Project/Conexus* Installation view at MoCHA, 1987, Courtesy of Barnard Archives and Special Collections.