

ART

Women's Views on Women

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

A NEW BRUNSWICK COUPLE of years ago, it was "Bad Girls" at Aljira; now, it is "Designing Women" here at Rutgers, and once again there are no grounds for alarm. A Rutgers Summerfest exhibition displayed in Douglass College's Walters Hall Gallery, it was sponsored by the Mason Gross School of the Arts and organized by the print-maker Judith Brodsky, who is also a professor in the school's visual arts department.

The women are seven, and the designs they have are not on men, of course, but on the image of woman-kind. Most have had them since the 1970's, when women in the arts generally began taking up arms against male supremacy.

Miriam Schapiro's is the feistiest contribution to the show — a pseudo-art history diploma in black and yellow that pours scorn on the academy for omitting women from the art pantheon. A version of this lithograph was in the artist's recent show at the Rothman Gallery, as were the lithographs with fabric and papier collé that pay homage to Mary Cassatt and Frida Kahlo.

New to this observer, though, is the variation on her silhouettes of Punch and Judy at war, with Judy identified as Kahlo and Punch as her wayward husband, Diego Rivera. Ms. Schapiro may be onto something, relegating the world's longest-running dispute to the level of farce.

In a show by seven artists, a feisty contribution and a collective lament.

Otherwise, the impression given by the show is of a collective lament. May Stevens's painting, which illustrates this article, features the artist's mother, Alice, sitting with Rosa Luxemburg in a grass-green void. The figures remain as separate as the photographs from which they were presumably taken, for the young Polish-born revolutionary is an elegant if spectral presence, while the bespectacled wife and mother is very much flesh and blood and showing signs of age and infirmity.

Ms. Stevens implies that neither the radical nor the drudge made a dent in history because they were women and hence held back. But in fact it is only her mother who is the martyr (one of billions), for Red Rosa, as she was called, has had a lot more than the 15 minutes of fame that is now considered the measure of human worth.

With her ostentatiously unglamorous nudes, Joan Semmel is, in effect,

attacking the shamanistic power of the media. Willem de Kooning did the same thing (if not for the same reasons) 50 years ago; Ivan Albright even earlier, with his celebrations of cellulite.

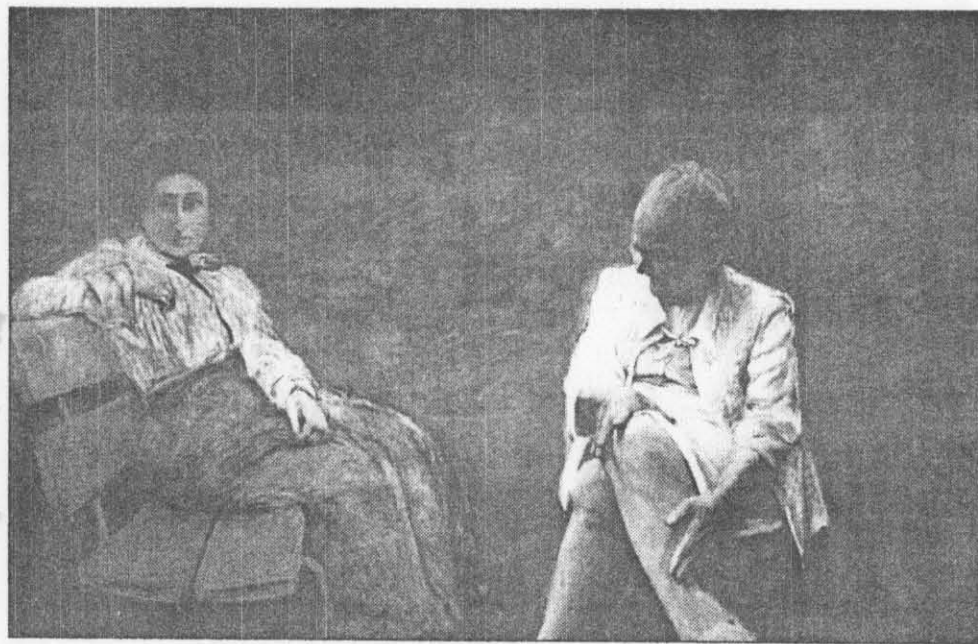
Ms. Semmel doesn't caricature her women disrobing in locker rooms, but she makes them as unlovely as possible, picking on sagging breasts and rumps, heightening the yellow tones in flesh to correspond with yellow lockers and accenting knobby knees with sludgy impasto.

The result is bodies that are just as much objects as silicone-assisted nudes in centerfolds, except that they are safe from the invasive "gaze" of construction workers. This must be progress.

It seems that Emma Amos, the painter, is an entirely different proposition from Emma Amos, the print-maker. The prints of bathers seen by the reviewer in other shows have been suave, nearly monochromatic compositions with emphasis on drawing and contrasting textures. In the two unstretched canvases here, the figures are expressionistically painted swimmers in black water streaked with bright color, and the temperature is anything but cool.

A man and woman struggle upward as a spotted dog tumbles down; a lone, agitated woman wearing a red robe sinks in company with a striped cat. The pictures are partly curtained by fabrics with African patterns, and the figures, as well as the borders, are ornamented with fabric collage.

Faith Ringgold's "South African Love Story" is not as easily followed



"The Forming of the Fifth International," acrylic on canvas by May Stevens.

as other sagas told by her quilts. The lovers, Sheba and Batu, are together in bliss until Batu is arrested in connection with the Soweto uprisings and "swallowed up in the big jaws of apartheid." Sheba makes her way first to London, then New York, becoming a fashion model and ultimately meeting up with her lover again.

It is a tale of black versus white, of black passing for white, of incest and deception, courage and kindness, and it ends with Batu's proclaiming She-

ba and South Africa to be the "only women" in his life. But it doesn't make as strong an impact as the artist's less heroic tales, perhaps because the illustrations are abstract instead of figurative.

Marina Gutierrez's series of small paintings framed in weathered wood pays tribute to the short life of the Cuban-born sculptor Ana Mendieta. Naive images, they begin with a scene of a red airliner flying over a green sea filled with fish, continue

with a standing woman bound with twigs and end with a view of the ground between tall buildings, where reposes a collage of crumpled blue paper rimmed in scarlet. Initiated viewers will know that this conceals the fallen body of the artist.

Visitors with sympathy to spare will find plenty to expend it on in this show. The gallery is close to the campus entrance on Chapel Drive, and it is open Tuesday through Sunday from 6 to 8 P.M. ■