

A SPIRAL RATHER THAN A LINE: Ree Morton's Artistic Cosmology

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If an artist's work appears radically singular in nature, solitary and unresponsive to a group context, what might this mean in terms of constructing counterarguments within the exhibition?

—Cornelia Butler,

"Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria"

Of the many terms hinged to the work of Ree Morton (1936–1977) in the four decades since her death—a lexicon of precarious, often explicitly gendered descriptors such as “esoteric,” “literary,” “joyful,” “sentimental,” or “maternal”—the word “prescient” provides a flexible and generous entry into her short decade of prolific artistic output. Morton’s prescience was manifest in nearly every stage of her career. She was an artist who *refracted* rather than *reflected* what was contemporaneous; her practice projected moods and materials forward at unexpected angles, anticipating the shifts toward installation, narrative, and performance that now define the 1970s. Conversant but wary of a too-comfortable alignment with Minimalism and then Postminimalism, not quite of the Pattern and Decoration (P&D) movement, and evasive of the all-women exhibitions of the decade, Morton has alluded a fixed position within this history precisely because of her unorthodox strategies. Refracted—being both of the time and skewed beyond—her work resists these aesthetic modes despite their many intersections and alliances.

As Morton cycled through the shaped canvases and drooping grids of graduate school, experimented with spatial configurations in her proto- and fully realized installations of the early 1970s, and insisted on the emotive potential of material via her work in the plastic-infused fabric of celastic, she left a legacy of “not quite,” a body of work that remains playfully evasive. Each move that Morton made—with materials, with form, with language—represents accumulation over progression, looping back through previous objects and gesturing to future projects, a spiral radiating outward rather than a relatively stable straight line. While Morton, like so many of her women peers, remains devastatingly underrecognized, her practice has been less receptive to art histories, particularly those of second-wave feminism.

Revisiting Morton’s legacy in a roundtable for the 2009 exhibition *Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World* at the Drawing Center in New York, Cornelia Butler admitted the difficulty in positioning the artist’s work both within and outside a feminist canon. When asked by curator João Ribas, “Is it one of those things that really breaks a particular dominant tendency and just veers off in another direction?,” Butler, who had included Morton in her 2007–9 survey exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, responded, “As you’ve said, I think it absolutely breaks it. It doesn’t look or act like anything else.”¹ Morton acknowledged this perceived

1. João Ribas: In that sense is it hard to position the work even outside of feminist narrative, just in the continuity of artistic practice of that time? Is it one of those things that really breaks a particular dominant tendency and just veers off in another direction?

Cornelia Butler: As you’ve said, I think it absolutely breaks it. It doesn’t look or act like anything else. It’s humble and yet very

ambitious in terms of her understanding of architecture and space. The work is also striking in terms of its very mature and personal iconography, and also because the career is cut short.

João Ribas and Cornelia Butler, “Cornelia Butler, João Ribas, and Allan Schwartzman in Conversation,” in *Ree Morton: At the Still Point of the Turning World*, ed. João Ribas and Lucy R. Lippard, exh. cat. (New York:

dissonance in a 1974 video interview with Kate Horsfield:

Horsfield: *Your work seems to me to have the quality of not being identified specifically with who you are. When you first started having people interested in your work, did they find it to be unusual in its difference from regular, mainstream work in New York?*

Morton: YEAH, I HAVE HAD THAT COMMENT, YOU KNOW. OR, THERE'VE BEEN ATTEMPTS TO PARALLEL IT WITH THINGS THAT ARE GOING ON IN NEW YORK, BUT I GUESS I JUST DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, YOU KNOW, IF IT FITS WITH THAT IT FITS AND IF IT DOESN'T, I MEAN, I'M JUST VERY CLEAR THAT IT'S WHAT I DO, AND I'M BUSY TRYING TO WORK OUT WHAT THAT IS AND WHAT THAT CAN BE, AND THE REST WILL JUST HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF ITSELF.²

The disobedience of Morton's practice certainly contributes to speculations on why there has not been a major retrospective of her work in the United States since the 1980–81 traveling exhibition organized by the New Museum in New York.³ The black-and-white images of the exhibition's long out-of-print catalogue served as the only substantial record of Morton's art for nearly three decades, its bright red cover a kind of talisman for several generations of artists who were able to increasingly glimpse her work in gallery and group shows mounted during the 1990s and 2000s.⁴

"Ree Morton: A Critical Overview," the essay by the New Museum's exhibition curators Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas, remained the primary source of information on Morton's life and work until 2008, when Sabine Folie, in collaboration with the artist's estate, amassed and updated the artist's archival record for the Morton show at the Generali Foundation in Vienna; in 2015, Folie, together with Ilse Lafer, further developed it for the more expansive presentation of the artist's work at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid.⁵ The accompanying catalogues for these two exhibitions, alongside Janie Cohen and Barbara Zucker's 2000 *The Mating Habits of Lines: Sketchbooks and Notebooks of Ree Morton*, invigorated scholarship and interest in Morton's practice, and provided a standard set of object information—as well as core biographical facts—that has proven invaluable to a new generation of art historians, including Roksana Filipowska and Abi Shapiro, both contributors to this publication.⁶ In her essay on Morton, Shapiro problematizes the role of biography in the reception and interpretation of women artists, asserting that an overreliance on biography continues to define and

Drawing Center, 2009), 32. For the *WACK!* exhibition catalogue, see Cornelia H. Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, eds., *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007).

2. Ree Morton, *Ree Morton: An Interview*, interview by Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield (Chicago: Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute, 1974), ½-in. open-reel video. This is one of two known taped

interviews with Morton, and provides a rare opportunity to hear the artist speak about her work.

3. *Ree Morton: Retrospective, 1971–1977* was presented at the New Museum (February 16–April 17, 1980); Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (May 16–June 29, 1980); University of Colorado Museum, Boulder (September 12–October 16, 1980); Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

limit their legacies.⁷ For this catalogue and the accompanying exhibition, *Ree Morton: The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*, the pejorative language that attaches—hinges—itsself to Morton’s practice through biography has consciously been deflected at each stage, from press releases and interviews to wall vinyls and gallery notes.

Yet, for this text—the lead essay of Morton’s first major American exhibition catalogue in almost forty years—a vulnerability to biographical overdetermination has proven necessary in framing Morton’s practice for a new generation of viewers. As Butler explained of Morton’s inclusion in *WACK!*, “I had a category called Family Stories, which was where she ended up because that’s the easiest access point.”⁸ My initial defiance toward reading Morton’s work through biography—and by this I mean primarily through her role as a mother—has softened under my developing awareness that rejecting these facts replicates exclusionary practices her work was subjected to during her lifetime. She unabashedly embraced motherhood, friendship, and heteronormative love throughout her work, in both her pre-celastick and celastick periods. While these intentional referents may be cleaved materially, formally, or symbolically, they share the axis of “family stories.” The core of Morton’s practice spiraled out from this subjectivity, though she moved (albeit slightly ahead and skewed) along the multiple trajectories of the 1970s art-historical narratives that have reified with time.

The decision to title this catalogue and the exhibition after Morton’s 1974 celastick work *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* (pp. 194–95) emerged from my fascination with how the relationship between motherhood and artistic production unfolded within and around her practice. In this work, the restless ambiguity that envelops her objects and installations has been petrified, hardened in the synthetic material of celastick, either painted a fleshy pale pink and smeared with gold glitter, or shaped into five colorful ribbons frozen mid-flutter. Five light bulbs, each mounted atop a ribbon, follow the pink celastick arc, their exposed wiring connecting them. This exposure is key. Morton never hid the electrical structures in her works; they were not meant to be installed with the intention of illusion. Their guts—the wiring and electrical cords—spill out, dangling downward toward an available energy source. The honesty and openness of these presentations of light strain against the kinetic deception of celastick and its rigid allusion to movement.

Morton’s original presentation of *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*, in a solo exhibition at the John Doyle Gallery in Chicago in December 1974, intensified this pressure. Her decision to mount the work on a store-bought children’s wallpaper featuring lions, giraffes, and tigers in a clustered, nearly woven pattern of browns, tans, and blacks circled back through the color

(January 16–March 1, 1981); and Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (March 15–April 19, 1981). For the exhibition catalogue, see Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas, eds., *Ree Morton: Retrospective, 1971–1977*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum, 1980).

4. Morton’s work has been increasingly exhibited since Carolyn Alexander and Ted Bonin began working with the Ree Morton

estate in 1992. Their first exhibition of Morton’s work was held at the Brooke Alexander Gallery in New York in May–June 1993. In 1995 they established their own gallery, Alexander and Bonin, in New York.

5. For the exhibition catalogues, see Sabine Folie, ed., *Ree Morton: Works, 1971–1977*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2009); and Sabine Folie and Ilse Lafer, eds., *Ree Morton: Be a Place, Place an Image*,

palette of her previous work, the earth tones and muddy browns of the years immediately following graduate school (see p. 156). The pattern's repeat is quite tight, and its slippage into gridding was exaggerated in its updated presentation for this catalogue's accompanying exhibition by its reduced size (to maintain image clarity, the wallpaper's imagery was reproduced at half its original size).⁹ The frankness of the title—one of many phrases Morton pulled from a 1917 horticultural book¹⁰—belies the work's enigmatic mood: the foreground a curve of brightly colored, shimmering three-dimensional space, like the wave of an arm above one's head; the background a gridded pattern that seems to gesture toward a past—one of the moralistic wallpapers of the Victorian era, of the artist's more rigid investigations into how space is constructed, of her earlier fascination with grids.

Installing *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* on its (approximate) original wallpaper mount was critical to more fully comprehending the double entendres of Morton's practice: esoteric and generous, serious and humorous, joyful and poignant, personal and universal—each often operating at simultaneous registers. The frisson generated by these seeming impasses was known to and even sought by the artist, who confronted them in the richly personal notebooks she kept during her lifetime. *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* reveals an artist grappling with these contradictions. In viewing the exhibition's titular work as a marker of time—in both the frozen movement and happy-times-ahead color of the elastic banner and the way-back-when aesthetic of the wallpaper—past, present, and future are collapsed in one move. Her rapidly evolving material and formal explorations are literally framed and grounded by the wallpaper, a symbolic stand-in for a previous era of her practice. The cautionary “too-much-of-a-good-thing” lesson of the found text braces one for the future, and yet cannot be visually extracted from the past. To see one is to see the other. A spiral rather than a line.

Morton's own narrative of “feminist classic: out of the kitchen, into the studio,” quoted from an autobiographical letter written about 1976, is magnetic.¹¹ The story is sticky, an emotional litmus of one's own political agenda and personal traumas. As Jacqueline Rose opines in the opening page of her recent book, motherhood “is the ultimate scapegoat for our personal and political failings, for everything that is wrong with the world.”¹² Morton was not simply a mother by the time she attended graduate school and produced the body of work presented in this exhibition: she was a single mother. This fact has both negatively obscured and joyously expanded interpretations of her work in the decades since her death. She herself certainly mobilized a complex visual and verbal language that both directly and indirectly addresses the clichés she was to have embodied.

Imagine a Poem, exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2015).

6. Abi Shapiro has cited Helen Molesworth's essay in the 2009 Generali Foundation catalogue as inspiring her dissertation on Morton. Molesworth, “Sentiment and Sentimentality: Ree Morton and Installation Art,” in *Folie, Ree Morton*, 12–21.

7. Abi Shapiro, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Installation Artists? Ree

Morton and Feminist Art History,” in this volume, 132–37.

8. Butler, “Cornelia Butler, João Ribas,” 32.

9. Artist and designer Tim Eads was able to replicate the wallpaper via a scanned slide of the work's presentation at the John Doyle Gallery in 1974, which was found in Morton's slide archive.

10. Neltje Blanchan, *Wildflowers Worth Knowing* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,

The Plant That Heals May Also Poison subversively winks with its tongue in its cheek (the lightbulbs blinked in the work's original presentations). Why not speak of the work in cliché? Meet the language pun to pun, dive into Morton's metonymic waters. The attraction of reading "art" with a capital A into this piece is strong. It was this "Art" that propelled Morton out of the kitchen. Or perhaps motherhood beckoned, and the balance was of caretaking, not art-making. Or both or neither.

WHAT I CAN SPECIFICALLY SAY IS THAT THERE IS NOT A WAY THAT THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO RESPOND, AND THAT'S A VERY EMPHATIC THING. I MEAN, THAT'S PROBABLY THE ONLY THING THAT I INSIST ON, IS THAT YOU CAN'T SEE IT WRONG. AND I GUESS IT'S FROM BEING OPPOSED TO LOOKING AT WORK AND READING ABOUT SO MUCH WORK WHERE YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND, YOU HAVE TO READ AND YOU HAVE TO GET INVOLVED IN A KIND OF VISUAL ANALYSIS WHERE THE VISUALS ARE VERY SLIM AROUND ALL THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL OR WHATEVER IMPLICATIONS OF THE PIECE AND THAT'S WHERE IT EXISTS MUCH MORE AS IDEA THAN AS OBJECT. WHEREAS, I THINK I REALLY AM ALSO DEALING WITH IDEAS. I'M ALSO INVOLVED IN A VERY IMMEDIATE TACTILE, SENSUAL, EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO WHAT'S THERE. I MEAN, IT SHOULD TRIGGER ASSOCIATIONS THAT YOU HAVE, BECAUSE OF WHO YOU ARE AND WHERE YOU CAME FROM, BUT I WOULD HAVE NO IDEA ABOUT, AND, YOU KNOW, THAT'S COOL, THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WANT TO ALLOW, I DON'T WANT IT CLOSED, BUT I WANT IT OPEN.

—Ree Morton¹³

The desire for Morton to be freed from biography, to avoid encasing her—plasticized—within it, often chafes against what her art is actually doing. The emotional rawness of her work, when fully yielded to, is nearly haptic, an affective amplification that swings erratically to positive and negative receptions. Too saccharine, too feminine, too melodramatic. Contrary, unyielding, defiant. Of course, her work performs this with or without prior knowledge of the artist, just as Morton intended—her desire for an "immediate, tactile, sensual, emotional response" in the viewer. In an equally confessional move, I admit my own reception of Morton's work has evolved over the past fifteen years. What I thought her work did or did not do, as a young feminist curator, has been significantly altered, and my enthusiastic puzzlement over

Page, 1917), 13.

11. Morton to unknown recipient, draft letter thought to be for her application for the Guggenheim Fellowship, [c. 1976], Estate of Ree Morton, Alexander and Bonin, New York.

12. Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 1.

13. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

her oeuvre via her more widely known celastic works was expanded—blown open—when I encountered her 1973 work *Sister Perpetua's Lie* (pp. 116–17), commissioned by the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), in the museum's photographic archives. Within this institutional and regional context, Morton's practice became luminous.

Feminism's reliance on narratives of "leaving home,"...has meant that "feminine" desires for home as safety, connectedness and continuity have received little attention in academic scholarship.

—Judy Giles¹⁴

The duality of *place* and *home* was integral to Morton's work. She was an "itinerant artist" long before that terminology was introduced; in the last decade of her life—and possibly during her entire adulthood—Philadelphia served as her longest lived-in place. There she created a home for her three children following her separation and divorce from her husband in 1968. The language of many reviews and essays pivots around this moment and her move to New York City five years later as narratives of escape. Her amicable separation from her husband and her four school semesters spent without her children in New York have morphed, for many critics, into Friedanian refusals that allowed Morton to fully focus on her practice: she "abandoned a secure middle-class existence as a nurse, wife and mother" or "left her husband and children at 30 to pursue a career in art."¹⁵ Heretical as these moves were in the late 1960s and early 1970s, contemporary receptions to them remain polarized, employing terminology that veers from a form of desertion to the heroic, and ignore the many ways that Morton's life and work centered on her children and the paradoxes of "home."

In a 1996 interview for the exhibition catalogue *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70's*, critic Lucy Lippard described how women artists in the early 1970s were reluctant to divulge personal information: "When they presented their work, some of them were scared to say they were married, or had children, because it would make them look like dilettantes, not 'serious artists.'"¹⁶ Lippard, whose chronicles of the United States—based art world of the 1960s and 1970s serve as an on-the-ground primary source for feminist scholars, grappled with issues of the domestic and personal in various essays. In "Household Images in Art" (1973), her language reveals a binary approach, in that the household serves as either a source of confinement or critique: "Many women artists...are shedding their shackles, proudly untying the apron strings—and, in some cases, keeping the apron on, flaunting it, turning it into art."¹⁷ Womanhouse, the feminist art project organized in 1972 by artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in Los Angeles, was known to Lippard, who

14. Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 159.

15. For these quotations, see, respectively, Mai-Thu Perret, "Ree Morton," *Frieze Magazine*, April 4, 2001, <https://frieze.com/article/ree-morton>; and Karin Bellman, review of *Ree Morton*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, *Art in America*, September 21, 2015, <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/ree-morton>.

artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/ree-morton.

16. Lucy Lippard, "From Eccentric to Sensuous Abstraction: An Interview with Lucy Lippard," interview by Susan L. Stoops, *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70's*, ed. Susan L. Stoops, exh. cat. (Waltham, MA: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1996), 27.

17. Lucy Lippard, "Household Images in Art"

reviewed the Woman's Building, the form the project had evolved into by 1973, in an issue of *Art in America*.¹⁸ As the site of Chicago and Schapiro's inaugural women's art program at the California Institute of the Arts, Womanhouse presented a series of workshops, performances, and immersive environments that often focused on the (coded suburban) home as a site of conflict.

The popularity of Womanhouse publicly and the primacy of the project art historically defined certain parameters of domesticity, specifically in regard to race, class, and sexuality, that have trailed legacies of feminist art-making—and of feminisms in general—in the decades since, reflecting what Marsha Meskimmon has described as the “tendency for a certain kind of United States—based feminist art practice and discourse to be taken as an unmarked normative category.”¹⁹ Morton (white, middle-class, straight) upset presumptions of “household images” precisely because her practice is *not* one of negative critique or outright refusal, but rather one of ambiguity—what Helen Molesworth has acutely described as “a complicated suite of emotions regarding motherhood, loneliness, and place” and what Abi Shapiro thoroughly unpacked in her 2017 dissertation as “the production of a kind of ambiguity and ambivalence to domesticity as an embodied space and as a site of gendered identity.”²⁰ Morton's approach to domesticity is at times ambivalent, with moments both contemplative and celebratory. She was familiar with Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1958), which posits the house as a space of refuge and safety rather than confinement, or, as Rachel Bowlby has written, which “lyrically evokes the peace and dreaminess of the home as a place of corners and nests, with its secret and private spaces. Houses are associated with primitiveness and childhood, and thence with a capacity for maintaining throughout life the qualities of stability, habit and restfulness in which it begins.”²¹

Morton was a suburban resident for much of her life, including for the entirety of her graduate-school experience at the Tyler School of Art in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia. Suburbia, for Morton, served as the site for the homes she fashioned again and again for her three children as they moved, first with their father as a nuclear family, then as a unit of four. As the suburbs, with their front porches and wood-paneled recreation rooms, gave way to teaching positions in urban or rural locations (Chicago; Bozeman, Montana; San Diego), their symbolic traces proved fraught yet productive for Morton as she worked through and around the inchoate feminist art movement(s).

Feminist scholar Judy Giles has described suburbia as “a product of modernity and a space in which the dilemmas and contradictions of modernity can be articulated.”²² She argues that the pop-cultural narrative of escaping the home that defined second-wave feminism, primarily via Betty Friedan's *Feminine*

(1973), in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company Limited, 1976), 57.

18. Lucy Lippard, “The L.A. Woman's Building,” *Art in America* 62, no. 3 (May–June 1974): 85–86.

19. Marsha Meskimmon, “Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally,” in Butler and Mark, *WACK!*, 324.

20. Molesworth, “Sentiment and

Sentimentality,” 15; Abi Shapiro, “Ree Morton and Feminist Installation Art: 1968–1977” (PhD diss., McGill University, Montreal, 2018), 36, http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=150674.

21. Rachel Bowlby, “Domestication,” in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995), 76.

Mystique (1963), “continues to reproduce the gendered dichotomies that see the value of home as modernism’s other—comfort, ordinariness and dependency.”²³ Morton, who grew up with four sisters and a brother in the New York City suburb of Ossining, cited her middle-classness at various points in her notebooks as something to cunningly embrace rather than camouflage (“I am a middle-class person”).²⁴ Her physician father and nurse mother noted her early interest in nature and encouraged her to pursue a nursing degree. As Morton wrote around 1976, “My career probably began at the age of three, when I took up watching ant hills and protecting lady bugs. This caused a long interruption in my artistic progress, because my family read it as an interest in science and directed me to nursing. These days, almost anyone would be able to say that keen perceptual skills are a sure sign of an artist, but in 1939 the mistake was easily made.”²⁵ From 1953 to 1956, she attended Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, and even the cellular images from her biology-based nursing education would find their way into her work in the series of “line” drawings she revisited throughout her practice (see, for example, pp. 128–29, 148). She left nothing behind.

I COULDN'T HAVE BECOME AN ARTIST WITHOUT
GOING TO SCHOOL—COMING FROM A MIDDLE CLASS
HOME, LIVING A MIDDLE CLASS LIFE, I HAD NO
ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT ARTISTS, EXCEPT
AS MYTH.

—Ree Morton²⁶

When Helen Marie (“Ree”) Reilly, married naval officer Ted Morton in 1956 at the age of twenty, she quit her studies at Skidmore to join her husband at various stations throughout the United States and for a brief European tour. Daughters Linda and Sally were born in 1957 and 1961, respectively, and son Scott in 1962.²⁷ While stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1960, Morton, supposedly while ironing, heard a radio announcement for free drawing classes at the Jacksonville Art Museum (now the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville). She enrolled in the course, and she continued her artistic education over the next six years, often completing assignments at the dining-room table in the evenings, as recalled by her eldest daughter, or painting in an unfinished bathroom, according to her friend Janis Porter.²⁸ When the family moved to East Greenwich, Rhode Island, in 1965, Morton transferred her credits from Skidmore and enrolled in the bachelor of fine arts program at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston, where she met and took classes with artist Robert Rohm and art historians Marcia Tucker and Eunice Lipton: “very serious, intelligent woman, that were very involved in what they were doing, and that was kind of a revelation.”²⁹ Although she maintained friendships with these and many other professors and peers from her undergraduate

22. Giles, *Parlour and the Suburb*, 32.

23. Giles, *Parlour and the Suburb*, 154.

24. Ree Morton, 1975 Record Notebook (black + maroon), Sketchbooks of Ree Morton, RM-17, [p. 67], Franklin Furnace, Brooklyn, NY (hereafter cited as Sketchbooks). While Morton’s sketchbooks are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Franklin Furnace, an artist-run space in Brooklyn, digitized them

and created a searchable database, which can be accessed at http://franklinfurnace.org/ree_morton_sketchbooks/index.php.

In citations and captions throughout this catalogue, we have used Franklin Furnace’s descriptive names and identifying numbers for the notebooks.

25. Morton to unknown recipient, draft letter, [c. 1976], Estate of Ree Morton.

26. Ree Morton, “Notebook, 1975,” quoted

and graduate periods, her relationship with Tucker was particularly generative. Tucker—who was a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York from 1969 through 1976, when she left to found the New Museum—provided much of Morton’s biographical information in the New Museum’s 1980 catalogue. Her recollections relay personal anecdotes that have helped shape the interpretation of Morton’s work and define an educational arc that includes the conflict Morton faced in her unwillingness to choose between painting and sculpture.

In the summer of 1968, after completing her bachelor’s degree and separating from her husband, Morton and her children moved to Horsham, Pennsylvania. Tucker recalled that Morton, while enrolled in the master of fine arts program at Tyler, “was working literally behind the washer/dryer in the basement of this suburban house in Philadelphia.”³⁰ Just over ten miles from Philadelphia’s downtown, Tyler’s Elkins Park campus remained the outpost of Temple University’s visual-arts program through 2009, and its isolation from the city’s many art schools and museums produced a specific structure of insularity and support. Morton’s classmates included artists Bill Beckley and Heidi Nivling; Dennis Adams and Morton overlapped for a year. Undergraduates at the time included artists William Larson and Laurie Simmons, artist and gallerist Larry Becker, and curator Sid Sachs, who, through his diligent scholarship, continues to contribute to an understanding of Philadelphia’s arts ecosystems.³¹ Italo Scanga, who from 1964 to 1966 taught at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, where Morton had taken a night class, was a professor there. Repeatedly cited as one of the most influential teachers at the school (at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where Scanga had previously taught, Bruce Nauman was a protégé of his), Scanga was known for using found objects, particularly various forms of wood, in his sculptures. His flexible approach to sculptural materials is evident in Morton’s practice of the early 1970s.

What work remains from Morton’s graduate-school period, dating from 1968 to 1970, includes variously shaped Masonite objects in muted pastels. Mounted on the wall or placed on the floor, these modular sculptures announce a focus on space as a material and assert Morton’s reluctance to commit to sculpture or painting at a time when many artists were grappling with the constrictions of medium specificity. In works on paper and canvas from this period, gray washes of oil, ink, or graphite exhibit seriality and loose gridding. The dashes and borders that appear throughout her work in the following years are here methodically drafted in pencil, while ovoid forms of erasure hover across paper and canvas. Morton is hollowing in these two-dimensional pieces, performing a kind of rule-based excavation using negative space. Geometric in origin, her repertoire of shapes melts into sagging, fluid lines

in Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 8.
27. As mentioned above, much of Morton’s biographical information was first published in the New Museum’s 1980 exhibition catalogue (see Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*).

28. Linda Morton, interview by the author, December 20, 2018; Janis Porter, “Reminiscences,” in Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 81.

29. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

30. Marcia Tucker, quoted in Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 10.

31. Sachs is currently organizing *Invisible City: Philadelphia and the Vernacular Avant-Garde*, a project focusing on Philadelphia’s visual-arts scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s. A related exhibition is scheduled to open in 2020. See *Invisible*

and dissolving squares. Although her use of graphite and oil belies an experimental urge in slow-going materials, Morton soon moved to a series of sculptural works that utilize both the floor and wall that was more aligned to the temporality of her practice.

I ABANDONED MAKING THREE-DIMENSIONAL CANVASES AND WENT THROUGH A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD OF USING SOFT MATERIALS, ANYTHING THAT I COULD THINK OF TO USE, FELT, INSULATING MATERIAL, FIBER-GLASS, PLASTIC SHEETING, GRAPHITE, OIL, ANYTHING THAT JUST SEEMED TO BE DIRECT. I'D NEVER BEEN INTERESTED IN THE SECONDARY SCULPTURAL PROCESS, CASTING OR...WELL EVEN THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL PROCESS: PRINTMAKING. THOSE INDIRECT, SECONDARY WAYS REALLY SLOW ME DOWN AND I JUST DON'T LIKE TO DO THEM. SO IT WAS ANY MATERIAL THAT I COULD JUST DEAL, AND ALSO FAST, IT HAD TO BE FAST, BECAUSE I WAS WORKING THROUGH A WHOLE LOT OF IDEAS, AND DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO BE DOING, YOU KNOW, LIKE SIX COATS OF PAINT AND LONG TEDIOUS THINGS.

—Ree Morton³²

In 1971, following her graduation from Tyler the year before, Morton was hired as an instructor in three-dimensional methods at the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts). As she and her children were then living in their second Philadelphia-area home, in Cheltenham, she decided to rent her first independent studio space, located above a Philadelphia garage. (Although Tyler did not provide studios for its graduate students, they often collectively rented spaces to work and exhibit in the city.³³) As Abi Shapiro notes in her essay, having a studio outside her home allowed Morton to use power tools and expand the scale of her pieces—though one of the few remaining works from this period is *Wood Drawings* (1971; pp. 96–97), comprising sixteen small, intricately crafted sculptures.³⁴ As the earliest object in the exhibition accompanying this catalogue, this work is considered a major piece from Morton's postgraduate period. Initially displayed in Morton's home as discrete works of art, the sculptures, according to friend and artist Cynthia Carlson, were placed in corners throughout the house; Morton's daughter Linda recalls that several of them were left freestanding on the mantle and end tables.³⁵

Currently grouped as a singular work, the sculptures likely were first installed together on a wall for a 1974 young collectors' event at the Museum of Modern Art's Members' Penthouse in New York. The sculptures' collective

City (website), accessed March 31, 2019, <http://invisibilitycity.arts.edu/>. Much of the information in this essay relating to the intricacies of the region's visual-arts community is based on Sachs's scholarship, and I thank him for so generously sharing it with me. The list of Morton's fellow students at Tyler was compiled during a conversation I had with Sachs on February 25, 2019.

32. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

33. Sid Sachs, conversation with the author, February 25, 2019.

34. Shapiro, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Installation Artists?," 134–35.

35. Cynthia Carlson, conversation with the author, October 20, 2017; Linda Morton, conversation with the author, December 30,

configuration, despite their initial individual treatment, has remained static over the past decade, though they had previously been installed in a vertical rather than a horizontal formation. Kate Abercrombie, registrar at the ICA, noted during installation that the lowest center piece is dated 1969, yet due to Morton's reuse of materials this cannot be definitively confirmed as the date of the object's creation. The short slice of log painted white across the cut, for example, could be one of the many similar cylindrical pieces Morton used in installations during this period, including a corner piece featured in documentary footage of the artist in her studio in 1972. Upon seeing the work for the first time in decades, Linda Morton revealed that her mother had kept one of the painted log cuts flat on her desk for many years.³⁶

Wood Drawings reflects the looseness in line and material of Morton's graduate-school work. Installation photographs tend to overemphasize the work's linearity and hard edges; the wood objects are, in fact, quite free-form in construction and detail—not quite parallel or perpendicular, and carefully but playfully constructed. Felt-tip pen markings in red, green, and blue gesture at measurement but are intentionally imprecise. Lines, squares, and dashes are wobbly, clearly drawn freehand. Hinges and loop hooks are ornamental, illogical. A large circular slab of naturally hued clay slumps against a wood shelf, and Morton's finger impressions are clearly visible in the material (pp. 94–95), as if she simply pressed it into place. Traces of her hand remain in subsequent works, with celastic being particularly receptive to the prods of fingers and thumbs.



Christina Ramberg, *Gray Day*, 1969, acrylic on Masonite.

The natural grain of the wood in these early pieces is similarly altered by hand, colored in with pen as if to appear faux. Morton acknowledged in a 1974 lecture to being aware of and influenced by the Chicago Imagists (see p. 58), and she likely saw the work of Edward Flood and Christina Ramberg (see p. 29) as early as 1969, when many of these artists were featured in the ICA's exhibition *The Spirit of the Comics*.³⁷ The intentionally artificial dimensions and textures—often wooden—of these artists' works, along with those of H. C. Westermann, who had a solo show at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia in 1972, resonated with Morton and many other artists in Philadelphia and beyond who were using wood as a primary material: "It was in the air," as Cynthia Carlson stated.³⁸ Sid Sachs has noted that the William T. Wiley exhibition that the ICA hosted from the University Art Museum, Berkeley, in 1971 also was quite influential for many young Philadelphia artists.³⁹ Wiley's use of wood branches and planks to create floor and wall pieces that hover between painting and sculpture likely strengthened Morton's intuitive resistance toward adhering to either medium.

NO, NO. I STILL WASN'T ABLE TO CALL MYSELF AN ARTIST. I MEAN, IT WAS A VERY LONG TIME BEFORE I WAS ABLE TO USE THAT WORD. I MEAN, I WAS A HOUSEWIFE, RIGHT? I WAS A MOTHER, I HAD CHILDREN, AND I HAD A FAMILY TO TAKE CARE OF. AND THIS WAS SOMETHING THAT I DID WITH MY EXTRA TIME. IT WAS TAKING UP A LOT OF TIME BY THEN, BUT IT STILL, YOU KNOW, I NEVER...THE TEACHERS WOULD ALWAYS TALK A LOT ABOUT COMMITMENT, TO BE COMMITTED TO YOUR WORK, AND SOMEHOW THAT WORD HAD A LOT OF IMPLICATIONS THAT I COULDN'T ACCEPT, THE KIND OF LIFESTYLE THAT I DIDN'T THINK THAT I WANTED, THAT SOMEHOW IF YOU WERE AN ARTIST YOU NEEDED TO BEHAVE A CERTAIN WAY OR HAVE A CERTAIN WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD THAT I DIDN'T THINK HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH ME, SO I JUST WOULD NEVER BE COMMITTED, YOU KNOW I WOULD NEVER SAY I WAS AN ARTIST. YOU KNOW, I WOULD SAY THAT I DID PAINTINGS, YOU KNOW, THAT I WAS A HOUSEWIFE AND THAT THIS IS WHAT MY INTEREST WAS, AND I WAS GOING TO SCHOOL, I WOULD CALL MYSELF A STUDENT, BUT IT WAS A LONG TIME BEFORE I WOULD SAY I WAS AN ARTIST.

—Ree Morton⁴⁰

author, September 14, 2018.

37. Excerpts from Morton's lecture at the Artemisia Gallery in Chicago on November 7, 1974, are published in Carol Squiers, "Ree Morton: Antidotes for Madness," *New Art Examiner* (Chicago), January 1975, 4. Richard Artschwager's use of wood-patterned Formica since the mid-1960s may have also been known to Morton.

38. Cynthia Carlson, "Remarks on Friendship"

(lecture presented at the symposium "Using the Self to Imagine the World": Conversations on Ree Morton," ICA, Philadelphia, March 17, 2018).

39. Sid Sachs, "Ree Morton and the Philadelphia School" (lecture at the symposium "Using the Self to Imagine the World": Conversations on Ree Morton," ICA, Philadelphia, March 17, 2018).

40. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview



Rafael Ferrer, *MOMA Ice Piece*, 1970.

Installation view in *Information*,
July 2–September 20, 1970, Museum
of Modern Art, New York. Morton
and Ferrer are visible at upper right

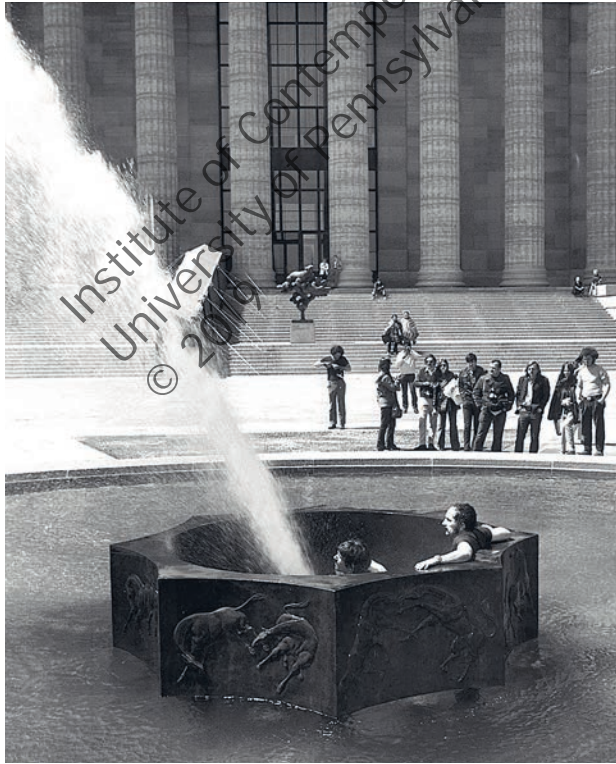
During this period, the ICA's innovative exhibition programming served as both a platform for Philadelphia artists and a paradigmatic, shifting source of art-historical propositions. Artists such as Rafael Ferrer, a colleague of Morton's at the Philadelphia College of Art, were given early solo shows and were featured in group exhibitions that provided them with opportunities to connect with artists from across the country. A core figure in what was slowly becoming Postminimalism, Ferrer used tree branches and other unconventional materials, such as fallen leaves and blocks of ice (see above), in his work of the late 1960s and early 1970s. His inclusion in the ICA's 1969 exhibition *Between Object and Environment: Sculpture in an Extended Format* predated his presence in subsequent and more widely known Postminimal or Conceptual shows: *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle in Bern, Switzerland, both in 1969; and *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970.⁴¹

Then located in the atrium of the University of Pennsylvania's Meyerson Hall, also the home of the School of Design, the ICA was part of a network of university galleries and museums that played integral roles in the development of contemporary art in the 1960s and 1970s. Schools such as Oberlin in Ohio; Sarah Lawrence in Bronxville, New York; and Vassar in Poughkeepsie, New York, are frequently cited venues in the exhibition histories of artists such as Morton and Ferrer, and their shows often grouped artists into movements and moods years before larger institutions. Gene Swenson's 1966

by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

41. Rosalind Krauss's highly influential essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" was not published until 1979 (October 8

ICA exhibition *The Other Tradition* remains one of these radical curatorial gestures. Swenson proposed a surrealist origin to Pop art, repositioning works by George Brecht, André Breton, Salvador Dalí, and Marcel Duchamp as precursors to this newly forming canon of American artists. The legacy of Swenson's call for a post-Freudian sexuality has been cited by curator Manuela Ammer as a harbinger to the embodied painting practices of feminist artists in the 1970s, such as Morton.⁴² *The Other Tradition* further emphasized Duchamp's Philadelphia presence, already established via the Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. For Ferrer's 1970 performance piece *Deflected Fountain 1970, for Marcel Duchamp* (see below), the artist redirected the flow of the fountain at the Philadelphia Museum of Art's main entrance, and thus changed the window view through Duchamp's *Large Glass* in the museum's east wing. The following year, Ferrer had solo exhibitions at both the ICA and the Whitney, and was, alongside Italo Scanga, one of the most prominent contemporary artists living in Philadelphia at the time.⁴³ Morton was included in several exhibitions alongside her friend Ferrer during this period, including the Whitney Annual in 1970; *Depth and Presence* at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, in 1971; and the Whitney Biennial in 1973.



Rafael Ferrer, *Deflected Fountain 1970, for Marcel Duchamp*, 1970.

[Spring 1979]: 30–44).

42. Manuela Ammer, in her essay for the 2015 exhibition catalogue *Painting 2.0*—which includes a section on Morton—cites Swenson as having introduced affect to the discussion of painting in the late 1960s: “the collective feeling that, having been reified as an object or image, has become cliché.” Morton’s *Signs of Love* (1976; pp. 232–33) was shown in the exhibition. Ammer, “How’s

My Painting?’ (Judge Me, Please, Don’t Judge Me),” *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age; Gesture and Spectacle, Eccentric Figuration, Social Networks*, ed. Manuela Ammer, Achim Hochdörfer, and David Joselit, exh. cat. (Munich: Delmonico Books / Prestel, 2015), 91.

43. The online chronology for Sid Sachs’s Invisible City project cites the 1971 exhibition *Rafael Ferrer: Enclosures* at the ICA as the

A SPIRAL RATHER
THAN A LINE

The 1972 ICA exhibition *The Topography of Nature: The Microcosm and Macrocosm* presented works of art through themes of landscape and mapping. Self-taught artist Joseph Yoakum was featured, a rather forward-thinking—if traceable—gesture of inclusion for the institution, as Scanga had organized Yoakum's first solo show on the East Coast four years earlier at the museum of the Pennsylvania State University in University Park. Yoakum's inclusion in the ICA exhibition appears to have been a precursor to the influential role that the Janet Fleisher Gallery (now Fleisher/Ollman Gallery) and the young gallerist John Ollman would play in the Philadelphia art scene in the decades to come. Ollman, who joined the gallery in 1970 and became its director by 1971, developed one of the earliest programs of folk, self-taught, and ethnographic artists in the country.⁴⁴ In dialogue with the Phyllis Kind Gallery in Chicago, the two spaces formed an exchange of influence, and Ollman began to show works by the Imagists at the Janet Fleisher Gallery by the late 1970s. If Morton was not aware of the Imagists via the ICA's 1969 exhibition *The Spirit of the Comics*, she is known to have attended a talk in Chicago by Jim Nutt, a member of the so-called Hairy Who group of Imagists, most likely in 1974 when she was a visiting artist at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Nutt was a proponent of Yoakum and other self-taught artists, such as Martín Ramírez, and would include images of their works in his free-form lectures.

Cynthia Carlson, a fellow teacher at the Philadelphia College of Art who had studied in Chicago and knew many Imagist and affiliated artists, championed folk and self-taught artists in her teaching and introduced Yoakum's work to Morton (slides of which are in Morton's archives). Morton, alongside Carlson (see p. 34), purchased several drawings directly from Yoakum's Chicago studio. In a 1974 interview, she referred to him as a "grassroots artist," who inspired her to think beyond the strictures of institutions: "it's a kind of affirmation of the act of making something that seems important outside of any knowledge of what a whole art system involves."⁴⁵ New York-based Carlson began to stay at Morton's home during the weekdays when she taught in Philadelphia, and the two became close friends. Like Marcia Tucker, Carlson has served as one of the primary sources of information on Morton's life and work, particularly for the two-year period after Morton completed graduate school, a time when she was balancing childcare, teaching, and her studio practice. Carlson has generously attributed a great deal of influence to Morton in her own development of an installation-based painting practice during the 1970s, and her oil paintings became increasingly impastoed in rich hues and patterns simultaneous to Morton's experiments with celastic and color (see p. 34).⁴⁶ They were clearly riffing off each other, as roommates, friends, and colleagues. Yet, although Carlson is now considered a core member of the Pattern and Decoration movement, Morton's work has evaded

first solo show for a Philadelphia-based artist at the institution. See "Chronology," Invisible City (website), accessed March 31, 2019, <http://invisiblecity.uarts.edu/>.

44. The terms "self-taught," "outsider art," and "art brut" have increasingly been questioned within a framework of inside/outside traditional arts-educational lineages. Lynne Cooke proposed the term "outliers" in

her 2018–19 exhibition *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*. For the related catalogue, see Cooke, *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2018).

45. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

46. Cynthia Carlson, conversation with the

this categorization. Most significantly, however, Carlson and other friends of Morton’s such as Micaela Amato and Barbara Zucker became important advocates for one another as they navigated male-dominated fields as teachers and artists.



Image from a slide in Morton’s archive showing a drawing by Joseph Yoakum that is owned by Cynthia Carlson.



Cynthia Carlson, *Triple Bulges*, 1975, acrylic and oil on canvas with woven canvas bulges. Private collection, New York.

Beyond the axis of male influence that has shaped narratives around Morton’s Philadelphia years—with Ferrer and Scanga maintaining the heaviest gravitational pull—there was a lineage of women artists with whom she was increasingly in conversation. Abi Shapiro elaborates on this history in her catalogue essay, in which she presents an alternative to the patrilineage of

installation art via Morton's practice.⁴⁷ And during her time in Philadelphia, the city emerged as an important site for women art-makers and workers alike, and for developing forms of feminism in the visual arts. Although New York City is only a two-hour drive north, the presence of women artists in exhibitions at the ICA and at other Philadelphia institutions while Morton was living there is notable. At the ICA, Eva Hesse and Louise Nevelson were included in the 1969 exhibition *Plastics and New Art*, and Hélène Aylon and Helen Frankenthaler in *Two Generations of Color Painting* in 1970. Moore College of Art and Design, the only women's visual-arts college in the United States, presented a solo exhibition on Marisol (Marisol Escobar) in 1970, and the influence of her wood figures of families and social groupings is evident in Morton's work for the next several years.



Nancy Graves, *Variability of Similar Forms*, 1970, steel, wax, marble dust, and acrylic. Installation view in *Nancy Graves: Sculpture and Drawing, 1970–1972*, September 22–November 1, 1972, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

In 1972, Nancy Graves became the first woman to receive a solo exhibition at the ICA, which presented work from her *Camel* series, such as *Variability of Similar Forms* (1970; see above). Not only did Graves's explorations in materials (fabricated bones of steel and plaster) and display (scattered, mounted, and propped) potentially affect Morton's own experiments with space, mass, and weight, they may have encouraged a conversation with methods of scientific study, particularly archaeology, that had become increasingly evident in Morton's practice. Graves's colorful topographical maps, inspired by images that NASA had published of the lunar surface, may have been similarly generative for Morton. She was likely aware of Graves's

work years earlier by way of Marcia Tucker, who organized Graves's 1969 solo exhibition at the Whitney. In 1973, Graves selected Morton for a solo show at Artists Space in New York, and by this moment Morton was deeply invested in the topographical as method of enshrinement.

The path, therefore, represents a basic property of human existence, and it is one of the great original symbols.... Man's ways, however, also lead back home, and the path, therefore, always contains a tension between the known and the unknown.

—Christian Norberg-Schulz⁴⁸

In the New Museum's 1980 exhibition catalogue, Tucker described that, following her graduation from Tyler, Morton became fascinated with the construction sites on its campus.⁴⁹ Not the digging or building of them, but their coding—the dashes and lines in various colors of spray paint that workers used to communicate unseen pipes or electrical wires. These pictographic forms of language signal imminent change, or even warning. They were directions that Morton could not quite decipher, and their enigmatic nature delighted her. Arrows pointing seemingly nowhere, connections made across grassy surfaces. As notebooks of Morton's from this period reveal, she was deeply immersed in Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Existence, Space and Architecture*.⁵⁰ In their essay for the 1980 New Museum catalogue, Allan Schwartzman and Kathleen Thomas devoted a page to quotations by Norberg-Schulz that appear in one of Morton's 1973 notebooks, and texts by Diana Baldon and Ilse Lafer in the Generali Foundation and Reina Sofía exhibition catalogues explore more fully Morton's relationship to this and other theories of architecture and phenomenology.⁵¹ Through her practice, Morton was increasingly processing ideas of home—of Martin Heidegger's "dwellings" and of Jean Piaget's conceptions of space—theoretical texts inextricably linked to her own family situation.⁵²

In photographs and sketches made between 1971 and 1972, Morton documented what are believed to be twenty-five works in her studios in Philadelphia and New York, where she moved in 1972:

I NEVER DID PRELIMINARY DRAWINGS, ALMOST NEVER, IT USUALLY INVOLVED IN A KIND OF MATERIAL SPONTANEITY. YOU CAN SEE HOW I COLLECT, JUST, JUNK OVER THERE. I JUST HAVE THINGS AROUND AND THEN AS I WORK IT'S ALMOST A KIND OF DRAWING PROCESS, I MEAN, IT INVOLVES PICKING SOMETHING UP, PLACING IT OVER THERE, LOOKING AT IT, PUTTING

Great Women Installation Artists?," 136.

48. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 21–22.

49. Marcia Tucker, quoted in Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 17.

50. Morton, 1973, Strathmore Shelburne Sketchbook, RM-09, [p. 5]; Morton, 1974 Large Black Hard Bound Sketchbook, Sketchbooks, RM-12, [p. 92].

51. Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 20; Diana Baldon, "Toward the Temple of Artifice and Naturalism," in Folie, *Ree Morton*, 42–55; Ilse Lafer, "Frame 1, 2, 3," in Folie and Lafer, *Ree Morton*, 52–80.

52. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1951), in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); and Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Child's Conception of*

SOMETHING ELSE WITH IT, SEEING HOW THEY RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER, BRINGING A THIRD THING IN, TAKING IT OUT, SO THAT IT'S A KIND OF...THE PHYSICAL MANIPULATION OF THOSE THINGS AS LINE OR AS AREA OR ZONES OR WHATEVER THEY DO, AND THEN WORKING FROM THERE. AND USUALLY THE SKELETON OF THE PIECE WILL SIT AROUND FOR QUITE A WHILE WHILE I WORK IT OUT. I REALIZE THAT THE WORK LOOKS FAIRLY OFFHAND AND QUICK, BUT IT'S REALLY VERY SLOW PROCESS OF GETTING THOSE THINGS TO COME TOGETHER.

—Ree Morton⁵³

Many of these works were rotated into exhibitions and modified over time, such as *Untitled* (1971–73; p. 80), now in the collection of the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College. One of Morton's few remaining works from this period, the Oberlin piece was initially photographed against a gray cement wall at, as artist Joan Watson believes, the University of Rhode Island in 1971 (p. 70).⁵⁴ The work was reconfigured for Oberlin's 1973 exhibition *Four Young Americans: Ann McCoy, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Jacqueline Winsor* and acquired for the school's collection. This and several other concurrent sculptural works gesture toward loosely developing forms of enclosure. The reference Tucker made to construction coding is echoed in Morton's visual research, in slides depicting this esoteric form of mapping. Images of Morton's installations in her Philadelphia studio reveal dashes of paint and chalk alongside the use and reuse of large tree branches, brick, and stone.

Drawing as a form of propping and leaning evolved into more solid forms of shelter by late 1972: fences and roofs are alluded to, as is the wood framing of walls. When Morton moved to New York City in the summer of 1972, her children went to Norfolk, Virginia, to live with their father (and soon with their stepmother). In Morton's live/work studio at 12 Waverly Place in Greenwich Village, she continued to construct wall- and floor-based works. Gone are many of the large tree branches that were so easily acquired in suburban Philadelphia, and the organic tone of her materials altered accordingly. Morton began harvesting processed-wood beams and two-by-fours, wooden slats that appear shingle-like in her installations, and crates and pallets from the city's streets. She also mentioned acquiring logs from a Pennsylvania sawmill.⁵⁵ Many of the works from this period, such as *Untitled (Germantown)* (1972; p. 75), are depicted in a series of notebook sketches, each labeled with its corresponding title.⁵⁶ Together with her slide archive, these sketches provide the sole documentation for much of this body of work.

Space, trans. F. J. Langdon and J. L. Lunzer (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1956).

Piaget is heavily quoted in Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*.

53. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

54. Joan Watson's work appeared in the same space and on the same contact sheet as Morton's for the exhibition *Three Former*

Students (September 13–October 1, 1971) at the University of Rhode Island's Fine Arts Center. Joan Watson, e-mail message to author, January 27, 2019.

55. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

56. Morton, 1974 Large Black Hard Bound Sketchbook, Sketchbooks, RM-12,

Throughout her studio experiments and early exhibitions, Morton maintained a rigorous drawing practice. Series such as *Game Map Drawing I–VI* (c. 1972–73; pp. 100–101) prompt a more nuanced understanding of her research into phenomenological theories of space and their existential tenets. Supposedly begun during her son’s baseball season, the *Game Map Drawings* emulate the arrows, dashes, and borders of Norberg–Schulz’s illustrations. Initially playful in mood, Morton’s six maps to nowhere are more angst-ridden when read against Norberg–Schulz’s *Existence, Space and Architecture*. The book focuses on the primal concept of “home,” that understanding one’s physical place in the world is essential to psychological well-being. Summarizing Piaget’s theories around childhood development in relation to space, Norberg–Schulz wrote: “we may say that the elementary organizational schemata consist in the establishment of *centres* or places (proximity), *directions* or paths (continuity) and *areas* or domains (enclosure).”⁵⁷ For Norberg–Schulz, place is defined against non-place; place “needs a pronounced limit or border. The place is experienced as an inside in contrast to the surrounding outside.” Morton’s notebooks during this period reveal a preoccupation with forms of mapping. As she navigated her and her children’s new lives several states apart, she proposed new forms of placemaking in her notebooks and studio practice. And are these not newly defined notions of home, of family?

The fire-place, for instance, has since ancient times been the very centre of the dwelling, and the table was the “place” where the family joined to form a “ring.” [Otto Friedrich] Bollnow points out that the bed represents the centre even more convincingly, being the place from where man starts his day, and to which he returns in the evening. In bed, the circle of the day, and of life, is closed.

—Christian Norberg–Schulz⁵⁸

Silhouettes or tracings of objects both present and absent begin to enter Morton’s work at this time, often in groups of three and four. In January 1973, a work by Morton was included in the Whitney Biennial: an armature of wood supported by a three-pronged base, leaning against a large drawing featuring four outlines of the wooden support painted in brown watercolor (p. 75). Morton’s three-part series *Paintings and Objects* is analogous to the Whitney piece: wood objects and shaped canvas are outlined and then used as sculptural elements. The single surviving work from the series, *Paintings and Objects* (1973; pp. 90–91), features four wooden armatures that prop and push at a double-layered canvas pinned to the wall.⁵⁹ In this and other surviving work from this proto-installation period, including *Untitled* (1973; p. 88), Morton was creating symbolic forms of dwelling, propositions

[pp. 14–16].

57. This and the following quotation are from Norberg–Schulz, *Existence*, 18 and 20, respectively (italics in original).

58. Norberg–Schulz, *Existence*, 32.

59. An image of this work, with the title *Untitled*, is published among Morton’s contributions to Alan Sondheim’s book *Individuals: Post–Movement Art in America*

about objects (people?) that are both there and not there. In *Untitled* she traced—mapped, even—the paths of three wood blocks as they slid down the canvas toward their resting place on the floor.

Paintings and Objects, however, initially precludes any allusion to movement. This hearth-like piece creates an enclosed space for its three static figures, wooden armatures reaching out as if in embrace.⁶⁰ The silhouettes of the taller two figures appear to have been created using a folded and stapled small canvas that is methodically outlined in yellow dashes, suggesting markers of time. Two small wooden sticks painted yellow lean, limblike, against the smaller canvas. The top surfaces of the two larger wooden beams are painted white with yellow dashes, which form lines toward and up the wall to border the canvas. Yellow, as well as white, dashes had appeared in Morton's studio practice previously, visually resonating or even punning codes of construction, and in this work they veer into a subtle highway motif.⁶¹ Her dashed border operates as a form of placemaking, of demarcated space for the figures, yet is reminiscent of the yellow and white symbols painted on roadways. As Morton began commuting from New York to see her children in Virginia, the paths and borders of her work take on deeper autobiographical connotations, what Norberg-Schultz would describe as an existential dilemma through the conflation of "psychic and physical mobility."⁶²

Allusions to presence and absence, and coming and going define the several major works Morton completed over the next year for exhibitions in Philadelphia and New York. Invited by ICA director Suzanne Delehanty to participate in the inaugural show for the exhibition series *Made in Philadelphia*, Morton turned to writer Raymond Roussel's 1910 surrealist novel *Impressions of Africa* as source material. The resulting project, *Sister Perpetua's Lie* (1973; pp. 82–83), is Morton's first fully formed installation, a site-specific work that responds directly to the corner space she was given in the ICA's Meyerson galleries. In 1973 the word "installation" was not as commonly used to describe the more immersive works that Morton made for the ICA and subsequently for Artists Space. At that time, the term "environment" of the late 1950s and 1960s was gradually being replaced by "installation," which did not appear in *The Art Index* until 1978, and only as a referent to "Environmental Art."⁶³ Still of nebulous definition, "installation" in proximity to Morton's work can be understood as an organization of space, utilizing objects, that is experienced over time. The movement of the viewer, then, is a necessary component of these works.

Mobilization is the operative term in the constellation of immersive artworks with which Morton is in conversation, including those by Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Robert Smithson, of course, but also examples by Nancy

(New York: Dutton, 1977).

60. Gallerist Ted Bonin initially described the work as a "hug" in a conversation with the author, September 14, 2018.

61. In 1970, the ICA presented *The Highway*, a traveling exhibition exploring the highway

as a motif in contemporary art.

62. Norberg-Schulz, *Existence*, 35.

63. See Anne Ring Peterson, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of

Holt, Rosemary Mayer, and Judy Pfaff. In her 1996 essay for the exhibition catalogue *More than Minimal*, Whitney Chadwick linked Morton's practice to artists Jackie Ferrara, Mary Miss, and Michelle Stuart through their use of natural materials, such as wood, and their gradual shift to sites beyond the studio-gallery-museum matrix. Her description of Mary Miss's *Stake Fence* (1970; see below), now in the collection of the Rose Art Museum in Waltham, Massachusetts, a piece that was triggered by the artist's memories of traveling through the fenced spaces of the American West, effortlessly drifts toward an understanding of Morton's work during this period: "Rather than imposing monumental forms on nature, as many of her male colleagues did in the early seventies, she instead emphasized a complex layering of visual, experiential, and psychological data, working between perceptions of space and her conceptions of remembered images."⁶⁴ Morton employed personal memory in much the same way, choosing to present tableau's rather than monolithic objects. In this her work provokes intimacy. Despite her often-esoteric references, Morton continued to unleash a canny arsenal of symbolic forms: cages and huts, shelters and roadways, belonging and isolation.



Mary Miss, *Stake Fence*, 1970, wood.

As the archives surrounding Morton's practice continue to accrue, recalibrations are made. In the case of *Sister Perpetua's Lie*, newly discovered images of the ICA exhibition taken from the second level of Meyerson Hall reveal an additional vantage (p. 82). Rather than the singular entry point to the left of the gallery entrance, these photographs present an encounter that may have

initially occurred from a raised perspective, a view that encompasses the entirety of the work. Assuming Morton understood this variable, the temporality—what has been referred to as the narrative—of *Sister Perpetua's Lie* is doubled. The work appears instantaneously from the second floor gallery. From the main entrance, the piece unfolds in a series of dioramic groupings. Depending on one's proximity to the piece, one either is folded within an embrace or observes from afar.

The multi-segmented *Sister Perpetua's Lie* features twelve diagrammatic works on paper that quote the language Roussel used to describe a series of drawings within the narrative of *Impressions of Africa*. Included early in the novel, the drawings introduce the reader to the fantastical performances, machines, beheadings, sculptures, and dioramas that will unfold in minute detail over the course of the text. The titles Roussel gave the drawings—*The Sergeant-Major's Jealousy*, *The Guilty Man Dies*, *The Morgue*, *The Fatal Blow*, and *The Consultation*—appear in Morton's twelve drawings for *Sister Perpetua's Lie*, which are arranged around a large work on paper on which Morton inscribed a quotation about Sister Perpetua. The title of Morton's ambitious project in fact is drawn from a brief story in Roussel's novel related to one of the small statues installed along an esplanade of sycamore trees, its base engraved with the title *Sister Perpetua's Lie* and the text "To the question: 'Is this where the fugitives are hiding?' the nun, posted before her convent, persistently replied 'No,' shaking her head from right to left after each deep peck of the winged creature."⁶⁵ Two logs painted black provide a foreshortened entry point to the installation of drawings, and a large rectangular black wooden frame encloses the thirteen works on paper. The space is marked as one to be navigated physically, much like an esplanade, and contemplated as a single section of what is ultimately a three-part installation. To the right of this segment, a continuation of painted black wooden sticks forms a horizontal line along the base of the wall and corner, connecting the drawings to a guillotine-like object. Based on imagery that appears in *Impressions of Africa*, this vertical structure is composed of an upright log and a black wooden support from which hangs a wooden "blade." An additional line of black wood sticks connects the vertical structure to a low, caged space with three rounded shapes. Sketched in deep pink on a large sheet of paper covering the floor, the forms surround a cut tree trunk, the top of which is painted gray. Its circumference is outlined in white, and the pink circular forms are approximate to its dimensions. Pink and white chalk markings cover the remaining area. Another black frame of dimensions identical to those of the cage extends outward along the floor and includes three similarly sized circular forms drawn with chalk directly onto the gallery floor. A large canvas painted in a wash of grey with a central circular form and a small white circle in each corner is mounted on the wall directly above.

Roussel's *Impressions of Africa*, a self-published novel that was first translated to English in 1966, became an infatuation of Morton's, a work that "just sort of invaded my life, and I couldn't think about anything else for a period of maybe nine months and finally I just incorporated it into a piece."⁶⁶ Obsessively descriptive, the novel is essentially the story of shipwrecked captives on the coast of Africa who must create elaborate displays to impress a king as they wait for ransom to be sent from their home countries. Although much wordplay is lost in the translation from French, an English translation of Roussel's self-penned methodology was published in 1975. This essay, "How I Wrote Certain of My Books," displays a writing strategy propelled by puns, homonyms, and metagrams, what Michel Foucault referred to in *Death and the Labyrinth* as a "muffled phonetic explosion of arbitrary sentences."⁶⁷ Morton, who did not read French, may have first encountered Roussel in Lucy Lippard's 1970 compilation of essays and interviews *Dadas on Art*.⁶⁸ She also included a reference to Rayner Heppenstall's 1967 book *Raymond Roussel: A Critical Study* in a 1974 notebook.⁶⁹ Morton was clearly thinking about Roussel for many months leading to *Sister Perpetua's Lie*, possibly through an increasing consciousness around the work of Marcel Duchamp. Although the Museum of Modern Art's Duchamp retrospective did not open until December 1973, his presence in Philadelphia had reached a series of crescendos as he installed, first, *The Large Glass* (1915–23) in 1954, followed fifteen years later by *Étant donnés* (1946–66), in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Three sculptures similar to the guillotine segment of *Sister Perpetua's Lie* were part of the offsite exhibition *In Urban Sites* that accompanied *Made in Philadelphia* at the ICA. In documentary images, metal plaques with the phrase "Is this where the fugitives are hiding?" are attached to slabs of stone hanging from metal armatures (see pp. 82–83). These were installed at several locations in the city of Philadelphia—along the Delaware River, at the corner of Seventeenth and Market Streets, and, quite tactically, in the sculpture garden adjacent to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Morton was a graduate student at Tyler when *Étant donnés* was unveiled to the public on July 7, 1969, nine months after Duchamp's death. At the museum, the site-specific piece joined *The Large Glass* and his works in the Arensberg Collection, which Duchamp had personally overseen the accumulation of and its subsequent installation in the museum's galleries. In May 1912, Duchamp had attended the stage version of *Impressions of Africa* in Paris, and he made several references to Roussel as inspiring *The Large Glass* in correspondence with friends, including André Breton.⁷⁰ Duchamp's death in 1968 and the debut of his secret final work—now permanently installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art—further provoked the reconsideration of his role in twentieth-century art that had gained momentum in the 1960s. The influence of

(London: Calder and Boyards, 1966), 27.

66. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

67. Michel Foucault, "The Threshold and the Key," in *Death and the Labyrinth* (London: Continuum, 2004), 9.

68. Lucy Lippard, *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp and Others* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971).

69. Morton, 1974 Large Black Hard Bound

Sketchbook, Sketchbooks, RM-12, [p. 25].

70. Duchamp elaborated most fully on Roussel in a 1955 interview by James Johnson Sweeney ("Interview with Marcel Duchamp" [1955], by James Johnson Sweeney, in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973], 126):
Roussel was another great enthusiasm

Duchamp's and Roussel's use of language, their permissive approach to words—as slippery, playful, tangible—would emerge more fully in Morton's celastic work. Before she made this dramatic material shift, she first completed a project for Artists Space that formalized play as a ritual, as a literal making of memories.

THEY TAKE UP A LOT MORE SPACE THAN THEIR
PHYSICAL SPACE. THEY NEED A WHOLE LOT OF AIR
AROUND THEM.

—Ree Morton⁷¹

Morton spent the summer of 1973 with her children in Newfoundland, Canada. The family camped along the way to the island, meandering through the landscape of New England and Nova Scotia before settling in a house on Bonne Bay. The six works on paper created that fall, known as the *Newfoundland Drawings* (1973; pp. 104–5), continued her concerns with landscape, limitations, and organic shapes, their cartological references rooted in the knobby texture of logs and branches sketched in the notebook she kept during that vacation (“bark portraits” in her notebook).⁷² *Souvenir Piece* (1973; pp. 123 and 124–25) was similarly inspired by that time—what Morton considered, according to Marcia Tucker, the “happiest summer of her life.”⁷³ The two remaining sections of the project, which had been created as an immersive environment for her fall 1973 solo exhibition at Artists Space, were separated and acquired by the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven and the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in Porto, Portugal. The original installation featured additional elements, including a freestanding white log surrounded by a circle of small brick-shaped objects; and a fence of white rectangular forms and sticks that ran along the base of the gallery's three windows. Two small platforms on shortened legs also appear in photographic documentation of the show.

Rather than being confined to the L-shaped parameter of the ICA's gallery, Morton's *Souvenir Piece* as installed at Artists Space was fully immersive. Viewers there were able to walk into and around her suite of constructions. Once again, the number four could be counted among the objects—four split logs on the low green platform, for example. The wood and stones collected on the table (or island) structure may have alluded to the accumulation of mementos from that summer. The two surviving platforms of this work are low to the ground, at child's height. While the Serralves piece has a noted playroom quality, a diorama of objects arranged in architectural or even figurative forms, the Yale piece suggests a bed more than a table, with four sleeping “figures” lying across a brightly painted green ground: “In bed, the circle of the day, and of life, is closed.” Installed within the same gallery for

of mine in the early days. The reason I admired him was because he produced something I had never seen. That is the only thing that brings admiration from my innermost being—something completely independent—nothing to do with the great names or influences. Apollinaire first showed Roussel's work to me. It was poetry. Roussel thought he was a philologist, a philosopher and metaphysician. But he remains a great poet.

It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Even from his Impressions d'Afrique I got the general approach. This play of his which I saw with Apollinaire helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once that I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed

the presentation of *Ree Morton: The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* at the ICA, the figurative weight of these logs, as familial bodies, resonated with the caged imprints of the adjacent *Sister Perpetua's Lie* and the hovering circle of its canvas.

Morton's use of flocking in *Souvenir Piece* is especially subtle; it is a work that rewards careful observation. The undersides of the cut logs are flocked in green, as are the surfaces of the four green circles on the corresponding painting. To see the fibered texture, the viewer must kneel on the floor, like a child inspecting the underside of rocks, or move prohibitively close to the canvas. By 1972, Morton had read and was making reference to the catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art's 1964–65 exhibition *Architecture without Architects*, organized by Bernard Rudofsky, which featured “non-pedigreed” architecture from around the world, in the spirit of Newfoundland's sod-covered housing.⁷⁴ The island is dotted with these vernacular homes, gently rolling forms of bright green grass with minimal doors and windows. Linda Morton remembers driving several hours north across this verdant landscape to visit an archaeological excavation, possibly at a site at Gros Morne National Park that was active that summer.⁷⁵ Morton was involved at this time with the Anarchitecture group, whose loose membership included Laurie Anderson, Tina Girouard, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Richard Nonas, who, as Cynthia Carlson has noted, was trained in archaeology.⁷⁶ Morton was also using archaeological language to define her own work: she had described the smaller elements of her larger installations, deconstructed and stored in her studio or repurposed into future work, as “artifacts.” Her demarcation of space in the original *Souvenir Piece*, her segmentation along the windows using poles of varied heights, conjures archaeological methodology, as do the five maplike paintings of the Serralves piece. Their fluid, cell-like forms strain against their box-like wooden frames, compartmentalized and rendered inert, like crates shipped to a museum from the Newfoundland coast.

Rather than approach *Souvenir Piece* as a mnemonic success, in that Morton somehow captured the joy and communal experience of the summer with her children, I want to propose the installation as intentionally failed in this regard. Morton was quite aware of the chasm between experience and memory, and that attempts to capture experiences risked immobilizing them. They become markers of time, but devitalized: in *Souvenir Piece* the eerie impossibility of balance that the low table of stones and sticks betrays, and the deadened slumber of the split logs. Nowhere is such immobility more potent than in her work *See-Saw* (1974; p. 80), in which a wooden plank is balanced across a truncated log surrounded by a ring of small white rectangular forms. The kinetic potential of this object as a structure for childhood play is apparent in the title, yet the object's impotence reaches beyond this

me the way.

71. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

72. Morton, Ju '73–Feb 74 artist sketchbook, Sketchbooks, RM-07, [p. 11].

73. Tucker's frequently cited quotation first appears in Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 32.

74. For the exhibition catalogue, see Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects*:

A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture, exh. cat. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964).

75. There were active excavations in the summer of 1973 at Norris Point in Gros Morne National Park, just across the water from Bonne Bay.

76. Carlson, “Remarks on Friendship” (lecture). “Anarchitecture” was malleable term used by Matta-Clarke, and was used for the

A SPIRAL RATHER
THAN A LINE

visual cue. Motionless, the piece reads as a demagnetized compass or a sundial rendered useless in the artificial light of the studio. Her next major project, *To Each Concrete Man* (1974; pp. 86–87), produced for the solo exhibition organized by Marcia Tucker at the Whitney, furthers the investigation into the animistic potential of objects and their autobiographical residues.

Although constructing a visual language that centralized female experience (as it was understood from a mostly white, hetero-sexualized perspective) was the primary aim of the feminist art movement in the United States during the seventies, the disruptive implications such a focus brought to bear on the organizing principles of traditional Euro-American fine art practice prompted many women to investigate prehistoric and non-European cultures in an attempt to examine the apparent cross-cultural connection between male supremacist societies as well as to search out the possibility that patriarchal political formations had an originary moment of historical inception.

—Laura Cottingham⁷⁷

The word “ritual” continues to emerge in criticism, at varying points around *See-Saw*, *To Each Concrete Man*, and other works by Morton, one of a suite of words used to describe women-produced sculpture and installation that looked to archaeological and non-Western sources in the early 1970s. But also to the personal: neolithic and non-Western visual references entwined with those of the autobiographical, the latter understood by Morton as being propelled by women. The fascination with non-Western sources that defined much of twentieth-century Western art—from the Cubists to the Surrealists to then-burgeoning feminists—swings from muted to overt in Morton’s practice. Lucy Lippard specifically referenced the ritualistic aspect of Morton’s 1976 performance *Maid of the Mist* (pp. 180–81), and in 1975 two of Morton’s recent works were published as illustrations to essays in *Artforum*: *See-Saw* in Carter Ratcliff’s “On Contemporary Primitivism” and *To Each Concrete Man* in Robert Morris’s “Aligned with the Nazca,” in which he used the two-thousand-year-old geoglyphs of Peru to theorize phenomenological concerns.⁷⁸ Although Morton mentioned Stonehenge alongside other “primitive” structures in many of her notebooks, she did not question the sourcing of this imagery, and her fascination with Native American culture complicates several major projects, such as *Maid of the Mist*, in the following years.

The colonial core of Roussel’s *Impressions of Africa*—which seems to have visually inspired the theatrical elements of *To Each Concrete Man* in addition to the structuring of *Sister Perpetua’s Lie*—similarly remains unaddressed by

title of a group exhibition in March 1974 at 112 Greene Street in New York and for the name of the Anarchitecture group. See James Attlee, “Towards Anarchitecture: Gordon Matta-Clark and Le Corbusier,” *Tate Papers*, no. 7 (Spring 2007), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/07/towards-anarchitecture-gordon-matta-clark-and-le-corbusier>. For a more detailed discussion of Morton’s relationship to the Anarchitecture group, see

Shapiro, “Ree Morton and Feminist Installation Art,” 138–53.

77. Laura Cottingham, *Seeing through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 38.

78. Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 189; Carter Ratcliff, “On Contemporary Primitivism,” *Artforum* 14 (November 1975): 61; Robert Morris,

the artist. The novel's racist implications haunts both installations, darkening whatever autobiographical information can be gleaned. For *To Each Concrete Man*, Morton took advantage of the glossy stone floor of the Whitney's atrium gallery, heightening its sheen and weight through a series of light sources. The walls, barely coated in gray paint, were covered in small primary-colored pieces of paper. The space was divided into two groupings of four figures. To the left are truncated logs on stilted legs covered—drum-like—in leather across their cuts. Each is haloed by a leather lampshade and a single light bulb that hangs just feet above the log's surface.⁷⁹ To the right is a stagelike setting with four variously sized plaques, each supported by two armatures. Their surfaces are blank, though Morton covered the proscenium floor in linoleum with an absurdly fake stone pattern. A string of light sockets sans bulbs stretches loosely above the figures, framing the whitewashed set space behind the stage. Although the log figures opposite are grouped in a formation of three with the fourth placed at a significant distance from the rest, a spotlight illuminates these four intimately spaced figures of the theater tableau in an invasive, nearly oppressive manner. The implications of public scrutiny in *To Each Concrete Man*, the brightly lit stage as a metaphor for vulnerability and judgment, would soon be recalibrated through Morton's radical discovery of celastic after the Whitney opening.

I KNOW THAT WHOLE RAP ABOUT FEMALE IMAGERY—I'M ALMOST INVOLVED BECAUSE I DON'T BELIEVE IT. I THINK IT'S QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THERE IS (A FEMALE IMAGE) AND I THINK IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT I SEE IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE IMAGERY AT THIS TIME.
—Ree Morton⁸⁰

In 1972, Morton, who continued to live in New York while teaching in Philadelphia, joined one of the many newly forming feminist consciousness-raising groups in New York, though she later jokingly recalled that she “for the selfish purpose of meeting people.”⁸¹ Morton and Carlson were friends with Barbara Zucker and other founding members of New York's A.I.R. Gallery, the first art space in the United States run exclusively by women artists. They both were offered but collectively refused an exhibition opportunity soon after the gallery's founding in 1972. Carlson, who by the late 1970s proclaimed herself a feminist, explained that she and Morton were still uncertain of the term “feminist” as well as of all-women galleries and shows. As Jenni Sorkin has noted, among the more radical arguments against all-women exhibitions and spaces was that they focused on the “formation of a separate and distinctive women's culture grounded in artistic

“Aligned with the Nazca,” *Artforum* 14 (October 1975): 38.

79. Morton allowed three of these tables and lamps to be extracted from *To Each Concrete Man* and shown separately in

the ICA exhibition *Improbable Furniture* (March 10–April 10, 1977).

80. Ree Morton, quoted in Squiers, “Ree Morton,” 4.

81. Ree Morton, quoted in Schwartzman

production and alternative institution-building rather than the radical feminist commitment to political change.”⁸² Morton and Carlson, however, reflected the wider, and less radical, conversation within and around second-wave feminist artistic practice at the time; that is, whether or not participation in these shows permanently labeled one a “woman artist” as opposed to an “artist.” As Eva Hesse pithily stated in 1970, “Excellence has no sex.”⁸³ The goal was simply to be shown, to be given the same exhibition and teaching opportunities as men, not to dismantle what was then an increasingly expanding contemporary art market. Although Morton’s relationship to mainstream feminism in the art world continues to be fraught with uncertainty, thereby disallowing a definitive answer to the question “Was she or wasn’t she?,” the word “feminism” looms over her practice like the empty light sockets of *To Each Concrete Man*, a potential source of energy but refusing illumination.

In April and May 1974, a festival focusing on women in the visual arts was mounted at institutions throughout Philadelphia, prompting the Philadelphia College of Art to organize a women’s faculty show, for which Morton produced the work *Untitled (Bake Sale)* (1974; p. 139). Carlson, who insists on the accuracy of this story, recalls that the piece originated in response to a male colleague’s snide remark that women should instead stick to bake sales.⁸⁴ Although this narrative is nearly too perfect, its roots in the spiteful superiority of white male artists faced with the encroaching politics that questioned their positions in both the academy and society at large, Morton’s humorous one-off response in *Untitled (Bake Sale)* unexpectedly kindled a seismic shift in her preferred materials.

For the project, Morton, who first had learned about celastic from a set designer, used the synthetic material to create a series of bows and a pink drapery to decorate the wall behind a short platform—a counter or display table, but also a kind of miniaturized stage or even vanity—decorated with sprinkles and on which she and her students displayed cookies and cakes that they had baked.⁸⁵ Not only did Morton employ baking materials in this piece—“out of the kitchen, into the studio”—she used nail polish for paint. In 1971, Eleanor Antin had “painted” her face with makeup for the video work *Representational Painting*, and, around this time, Womanhouse had presented several works that critiqued the lacquers and pigments women use to coat parts of their bodies, including Camille Grey’s *Lipstick Bathroom* (1972) and Karen LeCoq’s *Lea’s Room* (1972) (see pp. 48–9). Martha Wilson, founder of the Franklin Furnace in Brooklyn, where Morton’s notebooks were housed until 2009 and have been fully digitized, produced the piece *Deformation* in 1974 (p. 50), a video in which she aged her face several decades through the application of theatrical makeup.

and Thomas, “Ree Morton,” 23.

82. Jenni Sorkin, “The Feminist Nomad: The All-Women Group Show,” in Butler and Mark, *WACK!*, 468. This essay includes an interview with the ICA’s founding director Ti-Grace Atkinson, who after being unceremoniously fired from the museum and replaced by a man, became one of the leading figures in early New York consciousness-raising groups, an early member of the National

Organization for Women, and a founder of the radical feminist group the Feminists.
83. Eva Hesse, quoted in Ann Wagner, “Another Hesse,” *October* 69 (Summer 1994): 83.

84. Carlson, “Remarks on Friendship” (lecture).

85. For more on Morton’s use of celastic, see Roksana Filipowska, “Ree Morton’s

Women were also deconstructing the “semiotics of the kitchen”—the title of a 1975 video by Martha Rosler—and many other domestic themes that Lippard had addressed in her “Household Images” essay, in which she noted works such as Mierle Ukeles’s *Maintenance Art* (1969—present; p. 51); Marjorie Strider’s *Brooms* (1972); and Sylvia Plimack Mangold’s *Floor, Floor Mirror, Wall* (1973; p. 50). Ukeles’s conceptual project is particularly generative when thinking through Morton’s practice. While pregnant, Ukeles was told by a male art professor that she could not be both an artist and a mother. In defiance, she proclaimed the labor of mothering as “maintenance art,” refusing to divide her subjectivity into dual roles. As she described in an interview in 2009, “I am this maintenance worker, I am this artist—I mean this is early feminism, very rigid, I literally was divided in two. Half of my week I was the mother, and the other half the artist. But, I thought to myself, ‘this is ridiculous, I am the one.’ It is the artist, not art history and not the critics and not anybody—it is the artist that invents what is art, and that is why it is important to write a manifesto.”⁸⁶ Carlson insists that Morton’s approach to motherhood and art-making, as well as teaching, was intentionally conflated, that she did not see them as separate enterprises.⁸⁷ In her notebooks, grocery lists and classroom grades appear alongside sketches. Considered a gifted educator, Morton accepted a series of temporary teaching positions across the United States in the mid-1970s, and during this time she produced a body of work that diverges formally yet maintains a focus on the multivalence of placemaking and home.



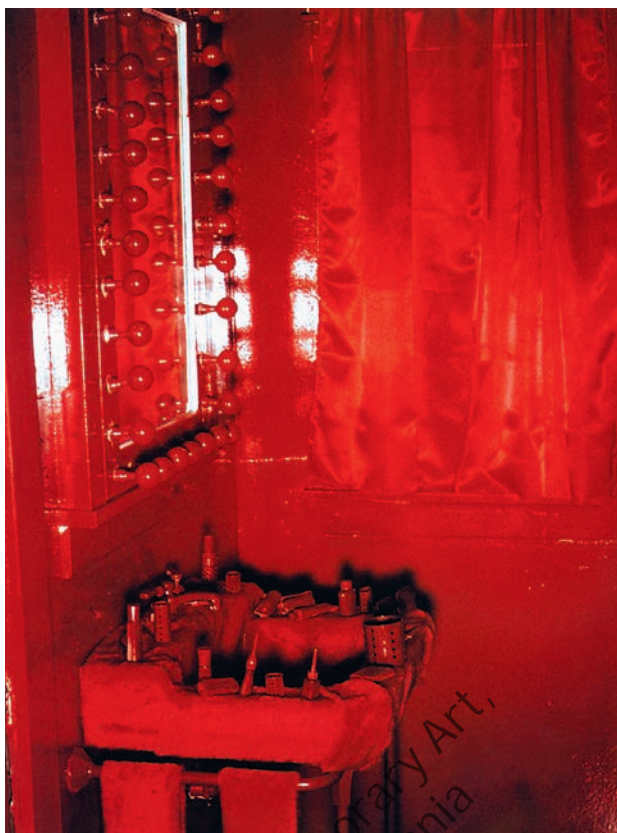
Eleanor Antin, video still from
Representational Painting, 1970.

Celastical Turn,” in this volume, 248–51.

86. Mierle Ukeles, “Manifesto for Maintenance: A Conversation with Mierle Laderman Ukeles,” interview by Bartholomew Ryan, *Art in America*, March 18, 2009,

<https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/draft--mierle-interview/>.

87. Carlson, “Remarks on Friendship”



Camille Grey, *Womanhouse: Lipstick Bathroom*, 1972.



Karen LeCocq and Nancy Youdelman, *Womanhouse: Lea's Room*, 1972.



Martha Wilson, video still from *Deformation*, 1974.



Sylvia Plimack Mangold, *Floor, Floor Mirror, Wall*, 1973.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Outside*, performance at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, July 22, 1973, from the series *Maintenance Art*, 1969—present.

YOU SEE LOTS OF GOOD STUFF WHEN YOU KEEP MOVING AROUND, ALTHOUGH IT DOESN'T ALWAYS REGISTER RIGHT AWAY, DELAYED REACTIONS ALLOW FOR THE FERMENTATION THEORY.

—Ree Morton⁸⁸

In May 1974, while a visiting lecturer at the Montana State University in Bozeman, Morton further experimented with celastic, molding the pliable material around clay letters before the plastic-infused fabric hardened into a static material that could be painted. *Bozeman, Montana* (1974; pp. 202–3) was created during this time, a period that seemed unproductive to Morton initially but ultimately signaled an important turn in her work. A playful wall piece comprising a constellation of eccentrically colorful objects, *Bozeman, Montana* includes celastic plaques bearing the names of Morton's students or suggesting various activities or places—playing pool, fishing, drinking beer.

(lecture).

88. Ree Morton, "Places: Ree Morton," *Journal: The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*, no. 10 (March–April

The objects' shiny, glittery surfaces reveal the artist's finger impressions and revel in defiant celebration of the people and things that perhaps distracted Morton from her studio practice: friends, teaching, leisure, and landscape. This foray into an eclectic use of color would mark her practice through the end. Morton was beginning to play with notions of "bad taste." Her color choices do not simply push at these boundaries; they flaunt their crossover.

As David Batchelor argues in his analysis of color in Western art history: "Chromophobia manifests itself in the many and varied attempts to purge color from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish its significance, to deny its complexity. More specifically: this purging of colour is usually accomplished in one of two ways. In the first, colour is made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological. In the second, color is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic."⁸⁹ Not only does *Bozeman, Montana* mark Morton's first application of celastic to text, it also is the first work in which she incorporated color electric light bulbs, whose red, yellow, and white globes project color onto the iridescent, glitter-covered surfaces of the celastic objects. She continued to experiment with this combination—of celastic words and electric light bulbs—over the next several years. In these works, color is what Batchelor would describe as excessive, uncontained. A subjectively emotional reaction to color, whether repulsion or joy, is matched by an equally unfixed use of language as Morton incorporated found text—a kind of readymade—into subsequent celastic series.

Morton spent the summer of 1974 with her children in Tannersville in upstate New York, where she discovered two horticultural texts that would shape both her drawing practice and her sculptural celastic works: *Weeds of the Northeast* (1956) and *Wildflowers Worth Knowing* (1917).⁹⁰ The former is the namesake of Morton's series of ten colorful works on paper—technically collages—with glitter and wood-grain wallpaper frames originally installed on commercial wood-grain wallpaper that she found in a student's studio (see pp. 226–27).⁹¹ The comical Victorian moralism of the latter, as evident in *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* (pp. 194–95), became a primary source of text for many of Morton's drawings and celastic pieces: "The words I've used are all from an old wildflower book. I got involved with the language because it's so very moralistic about the flowers' attributes. The references to flowers seem to also pertain to people."⁹² The pithy title of *Terminal Clusters* (1974; pp. 216–17) mixes with more personal references in works such as *Weeping Willow* (1974; pp. 212–13), a nickname given to Morton by her sister, and *Maternal Instincts* (1974; p. 211), which includes the first-name initials of her three children. Major works on paper such as *Yellow Clintonia* (1974; p. 209) and *Jack in the Pulpit* (1974; p. 208) are also completed at this time.

1976): 20.

89. David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 22–23.

90. Claude Ellis Phillips, *Weeds of the Northeast: Aids to Their Identification by Basal-Leaf Characteristics* (Newark: University of Delaware, Agricultural

Experiment Station, 1956); Blanchan, *Wildflowers Worth Knowing*.

91. Morton, *Ree Morton*, interview by Blumenthal and Horsfield.

92. Ree Morton, "Methods and Materials: New and Old," interview by Barbara Schwartz,

In December 1974, Morton, who was then a visiting artist at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, exhibited many of these works at the city's John Doyle Gallery. For the show, several of the gallery walls were painted in pastel colors and lined with floral wallpaper borders as baseboards, and it was in this exhibition that Morton debuted *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* on animal wallpaper. The symbolic shapes of the pieces veer from the celebratory to the funerary, glittery banners and ribbons vying with the melancholic symbolism of gravestones. The language Morton employed in them would evolve into more effusive phrasing in subsequent works, less sinister but equally ambiguous. Morton increased the scale of her celastics as she became more comfortable with the material; the massive *Of Previous Dissipations* (1974; pp. 218–19) and *Don't worry, I'll only read you the good parts* (1975; p. 221) continue to radiate the dark humor infused in much of this body of work. Their heaviness is amplified by the metallic sheen Morton applied to their surfaces at various points, which gives the pieces the illusion that they are made of cast, or even crushed, metal.

The limited access to detailed color images of Morton's work for many years—the New Museum catalogue includes only four illustrations in color—prevented many scholars from being able to study the intricacies of the objects' surfaces. The pieces are not simply wide washes of color, but patterned in small repeated symbols and marks. The orange celastic frame of *Of Previous Dissipations*, for example, is covered in yellow stars and squares with dashes of red. The yellow flower petals and green letters of *Don't worry, I'll only read you the good parts* are flocked, softening the metallic effect of the work as one moves closer to it. The banner of *Terminal Clusters* includes five different paint colors: an exterior border of blue followed by a thinner one in red encircles a green interior on which pink letters outlined in a dark reddish-brown spell out the work's title. The wood horseshoe-shaped support is painted a deep green and is outlined by another verdant shade and small red dots, while the structure's lights are surrounded by circles of pink dots. Precision is not sought in the application of paint: the lines and forms are loose, casual, playful. Color is something to be immersed in, rather than controlled.

The pink and yellow housewife motif of *Many Have Run Away, To Be Sure* (1974; pp. 206–7)—created after *Bozeman, Montana*—continues the feminine cliché as referent that began with *Untitled (Bake Sale)*. An absurdly long celastic apron surrounded by five celastic bows that seem to flutter and fly away, *Many Have Run Away, To Be Sure* literalizes Lippard's description of women artists' "untying the apron strings." Morton's entire John Doyle Gallery show complicated the conceptual and formal features that were then coalescing around the emergent discourse of feminist art. The language was darkly cryptic, as in *Terminal Clusters* and *Fading Flowers* (1974; p. 150). *Antidotes*

for *Madness* (1974; p. 154), in which the work's grim titular phrase is draped in celastic across a wood beam, was installed with two celastic bows hovering above. The ambiguity that so often defines Morton's work is found here in the tension between the ominous wording pulled from *Wildflowers Worth Knowing* and the brightly painted wood-mounted celastic elements with their flashing lights.⁹³ The work thus deters any logical link between language and form. Critics have suggested that these pieces and their presentation create a "nursery" or "amusement park" atmosphere, and have likened them to "high school prom decoration."⁹⁴ The self-aware humor is there, of course, but the emotion is not fully legible. Morton was reading Gertrude Stein at this time—"Plowing through G Stein and trying to understand what she's doing"—and is clearly thinking about the materiality of language.⁹⁵ The decorative effects she elicited in her physical materials recodes these phrases, complicates them, renders them ambiguous.

Morton's celastics are also deeply personal. "Cliché includes memory," Morton wrote in a notebook in 1974.⁹⁶ Her use of wallpaper emphasizes this point, and frames the celastic works within notions of the domestic, foreboding language bordered by floral motifs. In a drafted letter from February 1975, Morton, who was then a visiting artist in the sculpture department at Yale University, reflected on the reception of her Chicago gallery show:

IF WHAT YOU WANT IS NOT TO PRESENT GRAPHICALLY A RESOLUTION OF A THEORY, BUT TO LAY OUT ALL THAT WILD INPUT OF SENSATIONS, COMPLICATIONS, CONTRADICTIONS, AND THE OLD, ALREADY DOG-EARED WORD, AMBIGUITY, THAT CONTINUALLY COMES ROLLING IN OFF THE BEACH, THEN WHY DOES THAT MEET SO MUCH RESISTANCE? IF I WERE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT MY ANSWERS ARE, AND SAY THEM TO YOU, THEN HOW QUICKLY WOULD THAT CLOSE OFF THE POSSIBILITIES THAT THE WORK HAS A LIFE OF ITS OWN AND CAN CONTINUE TO GROW OF ITSELF, AND FIND NEW MEANINGS, AND CHANGE ITS MEANING, AND CONTRADICT ITS ORIGINAL MEANING, AND LIVE?

—Ree Morton⁹⁷

Although many critics and scholars have addressed the ambiguity that defines Morton's practice, they have avoided slipping into discussions of "motherhood."⁹⁸ Perhaps the narrative that Morton "abandoned" her children is too strongly rooted. This renders the "ambivalence of motherhood"—an emotional

Craft Horizons, no. 35 (December 1975), 48.

93. Installation images reveal the lights on or off at different moments, blinking, as Morton described in her notebooks and as confirmed by Alan Artner in a review of the John Doyle Gallery show for the *Chicago Tribune*. Artner, "Current Clue to a Deceptive Realm," *Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1975.

94. Artner, "Current Clue"; Ruth Askey, "Four L.A. Artists Open Women's Building,"

Artweek, February 21, 1976, 7. Ken Johnson,

"Art in Review; Ree Morton," *New York Times*, September 14, 2001.

95. Morton, Ju '73–Feb 74 artist sketchbook, *Sketchbooks*, RM-07, [p. 135].

96. Morton, "73–74" Small Black Sketchbook, *Sketchbooks*, RM-02, [p. 41].

97. Morton to unknown recipient, draft letter [dated February 1975], Estate of Ree Morton.

98. See, for example, Molesworth,

state of conflicting feelings, from guilt and shame to joy and fulfillment that is central to many women's experiences as mothers—underexplored in the context of Morton's work, as well as in its relationship to the sentimentality that so many of these writers have thoroughly unpacked. More than Morton's mixed feelings about joint custody and the social judgment her friends and family say she endured from this arrangement, these emotional fluctuations are a shared experience of parenting. This ambivalence is, as Melissa Benn aptly notes, "a place where a variety of values can be expressed and maintained." In her critique of second-wave feminism's approach to motherhood, she continues: "While feminism's boldest and best story—and certainly its most publicized one—has always been the tale of the one who got away, it has always had a slight difficulty with the one who stayed behind, and *liked* it.... Even when it has been able to acknowledge the strength and pleasure, as well as the difficulties, of the mother-child bond, it has—fearing sentimentality perhaps?—not often been able successfully to create a public language to express all the dimensions of motherhood."⁹⁹

Sentimentality remains a lens through which Morton's work is often read, an unfinished project initiated by Helen Molesworth's 2007 essay "Sentiment and Sentimentality: Ree Morton and Installation Art," bolstered by Susan Richmond's 2016 essay "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's *Signs of Love*," and further explored in Abi Shapiro's 2017 dissertation.¹⁰⁰ Although Morton would situate herself within the "one-who-got-away" narrative ("feminist classic: out of the kitchen, into the studio," as she had described herself for a grant application around 1976), she was also actively looking for employment as a full-time teacher, as the transience of her various visiting-artist positions was not particularly child or family friendly.¹⁰¹ In Morton's work, the sentimental is also transient, sometimes located within motherhood, as in *Maternal Instincts* (p. 211); within friendship, as in *Something in the Wind* (1975; pp. 244–45); or in her focus on romance in *Signs of Love* (1976; pp. 232–33). Yet, as Cynthia Carlson and so many other friends of Morton's have reminded us—and following Mierle Ukeles's radical manifesto in 1969—her identity as a mother could not be extracted from her roles of friend, teacher, and lover.¹⁰² They were bound together, and generously so.

Nowhere is this more explicit than in Morton's *Something in the Wind*, a public outdoor project produced in June 1975 in association with the South Street Seaport Museum that comprised a collection of over one hundred brightly colored nylon flags strung across the rigging of a nineteenth-century sailboat docked in the East River in New York. Each flag was dedicated to a friend or family member of Morton's, including many artists in her New York community, such as Laurie Anderson, Carlson, and

"Sentiment and Sentimentality"; Shapiro, "Ree Morton and Feminist Installation Art"; Ammer, "How's My Painting?"; and Sabine Folie, "Performing Sculpture, Performative Language: The 'Allegorical Impulse' in Ree Morton's Work," in Folie and Lafer, *Ree Morton*, 156–180.

99. Melissa Benn, *Madonna and Child: Towards a New Politics of Motherhood* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1998), 212.

100. Molesworth, "Sentiment and Sentimentality"; Susan Richmond, "The Sentimentality of Ree Morton's *Signs of Love*," *American Art* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 92–111, <https://doi.org/10.1086/690268>; Shapiro, "Ree Morton and Feminist Installation Art."

101. Morton to unknown recipient, draft letter, undated [c. 1976], Estate of Ree Morton.

102. Carlson, "Remarks on Friendship"

Gordon Matta-Clark, and featured an image that the artist associated with that person, such as an Egyptian head for Anderson or a bird on a branch for Matta-Clark. Although Morton later displayed the flags in a grid pattern in her exhibition at the University of Rhode Island in 1976 (p. 162), they were originally intended to be seen from afar. A sprawling network of love and friendship, *Something in the Wind* is unyieldingly earnest, a personal map made public. As Morton wrote in 1977, "I made a flag for each person in my life that I have good feelings for, or who I feel connected to in some way. It was a celebration for them, and a means of identifying and locating myself in the world by naming the persons who surround me."¹⁰³

Film and photographic documentation of the installation reveals that at the top of the boat's main mast was a single, larger flag with no inscribed name and with two symbols from, as Kathryn Gile uncovered in her research, the *Lone Dog Winter Count* of the Nakota people.¹⁰⁴ The ear of corn signifies the Ree (Arikara) Native American tribe of North Dakota, and the women's head with a straight line above likely symbolizes unity, loneliness, or independence—three emotions that Morton's works from this multiyear period affectively generate.¹⁰⁵ Following their installation in New York, Morton began to give the flags to their namesakes as gifts: "Each flag is a present for the person it's about. The work goes full circle. I got to think about each person as I made the flags; then I flew them together; then I gave the person that time and that object."¹⁰⁶ Today, they continue to surface to join the larger collection of forty-one flags now housed at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (mumok) in Vienna (six recently donated flags were on view in the exhibition accompanying this catalogue and will be sent to mumok at the end of the tour). Mary Delahoyd opened her 1980 *Artforum* review of the New Museum's Morton retrospective by recalling her experience encountering the installation of *Something in the Wind* for the first time: "Gradually, we began to decipher mutual friends, then to search for ourselves, to discover how Ree 'saw' us, in color and metaphor. We could not look at this art from the traditional stance we had been trained to take; instead we were drawn into an enveloping network of human associations, visually articulated and interwoven by one among us."¹⁰⁷ Documentation in Morton's archives also reveals that the flags were used to decorate the porch of artist Robert Huot's house in upstate New York for a party, literally enclosing the home in a band of friendship, family, and love (p. 162).¹⁰⁸

In August 1975, Morton attended the Midwest Women Artists' Conference at the Oxbow Summer School of Painting in Saugatuck, Michigan. Writings in a notebook from this period reflect her continuing to think through her relationship to feminism and women's art. In what appear to be notes from

(lecture); Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance."
103. Ree Morton, quoted in *Attitudes Towards Space: Environmental Art*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Mount Saint Mary's College, 1977), quoted in Schwartzman and Thomas, *Ree Morton*, 51.

104. *The Lone Dog Winter Count* (National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC) is a document of pictographs that covers the history of the

Yanktonais Nakota community from 1800 to 1870. Gile found these images in Garrick Mallery, *Picture-Writing of the American Indians: Extract from the Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington DC: Government Print Office, 1894).

105. Kathryn Gile, "Don't Worry, I'll Only Read You the Good Parts" (lecture presented at the symposium "'Using the Self to Imagine the World': Conversations on Ree Morton,"

lectures, or perhaps readings, Linda Nochlin is referenced, as are Betty Friedan, Lucy Lippard, and Kate Millett, with lists of women artists and phrases such as “feminist movement instrumental in breaking down the stereotype of the personal in art as ‘trivial’”; “the circle has been sexualized and politicized, but these things don’t add up to an inherent sensibility”; “explore and evaluate wife, mother, lady etc.”; and “reaching for a new kind of women, eschews roles and role playing and refuses to dwell in the past.”¹⁰⁹ At this time, she drafted a letter to Marcia Tucker outlining a slide presentation she was planning to give on contemporary women artists, with the names Jackie Winsor, Mary Miss, Ann McCoy, Pat Steir, Barbara Kruger, Cynthia Carlson, and Elizabeth Murray followed by the adjectives “eccentric and/or personal”:

MOST OF THE WORK THAT I’LL DEAL WITH FALLS INTO AN AREA THAT CAN BE CONSIDERED ECCENTRIC AND/OR PERSONAL. THIS IS AN AREA THAT I FEEL WOMEN HAVE OPENED UP FOR ALL ARTISTS, MALE AND FEMALE. THE WORK THAT WOMEN DO, AND THE FREEDOM IN MATERIALS AND ESTHETIC CHOICES THAT HAS COME FROM THAT I SEE AS POSITIVE, AND THE LABEL ‘FEMINIST ART,’ AND THE CATEGORIZING NATURE OF THAT LABEL I SEE AS NEGATIVE [THIS IS A GOOD TIME FOR WOMEN TO BE DEFINING THEMSELVES THROUGH THEIR WORK.] THESE FORMULAS OF GENERAL FACTORS COMMON TO WOMEN’S ART I FIND OFFENSIVE, PREMATURE... THEY ARE, AFTER ALL, PROPOSALS ON THE PART OF CRITICS AND SOME SMALL GROUPS OF WOMEN ARTISTS. I FEEL VERY STRONGLY THAT WOMAN ARTISTS ARE IN DANGER OF BEING CLUMPED INTO AN ACADEMY WHICH THEY HAVE HAD A HAND IN CREATING.

—Ree Morton¹¹⁰

This text reveals Morton’s unwavering support and enthusiasm for art made by women, a stance that has been adamantly confirmed by her surviving friends and colleagues, but also shows a clear reluctance toward the kind of “women’s imagery,” such as circles or vessels, that was then being promoted by Lippard, as well as by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. Although many of these artists were bicoastal in their travels, Morton was also aware of what was happening in Southern California, as her position in 1975–76 at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) immersed her in the context of the Woman’s Building, founded in 1973 in Los Angeles by Chicago, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, and Arlene Raven, and in UCSD’s fine-arts program, which helped

ICA, Philadelphia, March 17, 2018).

106. Morton, “Methods and Materials,” 48.

107. Mary Delahoyd, “Ree Morton,” *Artforum* 18, no. 9 (May 1980): 60.

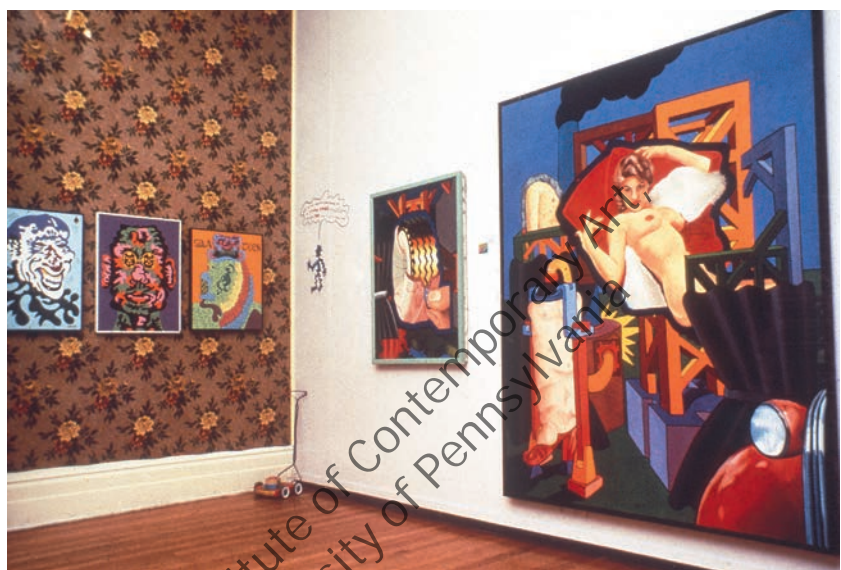
108. Cynthia Carlson, e-mail message to

author, April 22, 2019.

109. Morton, c. 1975 Auto Trips notebook, Sketchbooks, RM-04, [p. 11–15].

110. Morton to Marcia Tucker, draft letter,

generate the Pattern and Decoration movement that coalesced in the years following her death. Cynthia Carlson, along with Morton's friend Jane Kaufman, is often included as a core artist of P&D, but Morton's relationship to the movement remains more tenuous, arguably because of her ambiguous—rather than purely celebratory—position on the domestic tropes that define P&D, such as wallpaper and patterning, folk arts, and craft. Morton is certainly part of this conversation, one that questions definitions of good and bad taste, high and low culture, and via the additional influence on her work of the Chicago Imagists, particularly their use of floral linoleum as a wall support (see below). Her work is also produced from the subjectivity of a mother who is perpetually refashioning a living space for herself and her children across the United States. Placemaking remained a central force in her practice.



Hairy Who, April 15–May 17, 1969,
installation view, Corcoran Gallery of Art,
DuPont Center, Washington, DC.

The P&D movement, as explained by Anne Swartz, was “inspired by imagery from the distant past, faraway places, and the beautiful, sentimental, or kitschy close at hand.”¹¹¹ Swartz connects the non-Western imagery that defines much of the movement to moments such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s renovation of its Islamic galleries in 1975, as well as to the global travels of several key P&D members; yet, there is also a strong celebration of nonurban imagery. According to Miriam Schapiro, “P&D came out of the sense of lushness of the landscape. We’re not talking about living in an asphalt city, we’re talking about being under the sky at the beach and being surrounded by the blueness of blue of the water.”¹¹² The work that Morton produced in Southern California and after her return to New York incorporates landscape in a manner both literal—actual sunsets at the beach—and absurd, a kind of burlesquing of the landscape genre.

undated [c. 1975], Estate of Ree Morton.
111. Anne Swartz, “Pattern and Decoration:
An Ideal Vision in American Art,” in *Pattern
and Decoration: An Ideal Vision in American*

Art, 1975–1985 (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River
Museum, 2007), 12–13.
112. Miriam Schapiro, quoted in Swartz,

THE STORY IS CALLED REE LOOKS BACK TO SEE
IF ANY OF THE OTHER PLACES SHE HAS BEEN
HAVE CHANGED HER WORK, IN ORDER TO TRY
AND ANSWER THE QUESTION, DO YOU THINK
CALIFORNIA, THE CALIFORNIA EXPERIENCE IN
GENERAL OR IN PARTICULAR OR IN ANY WAY AT
ALL, HAS OR EVER WILL NOW OR IN THE NEAR OR
DISTANT FUTURE INFLUENCED, ALTERED, AFFECTED,
OR FED YOUR WORK, GIVE IT TWO BEAN TACOS,
AND SOME ORGANIC SAN MIGUEL. LET ME TELL
YOU WHAT I THINK...LET ME LET ME LETTUCE PREY.
—Ree Morton¹¹³

Morton, joined by her son and youngest daughter, spent the 1975–76 academic year as a visiting artist in San Diego at the University of California. Photographic documentation of her faculty studio reveals postcards of beach sunsets pinned to the wall, and her notebooks include references to the various tropical fish that appear in her *Regional Pieces* series (1975–76; see pp. 246–47). The “seasets and sunscapes” of these diptychs, each of which feature a below- and above-water scene framed by a celastic curtain, are indulgent immersions in the pleasures of the California coastline, but also defiant statements on matters of taste.¹¹⁴ California is where Morton made the first iteration of *Devil Chaser* (1975; pp. 164–65) and where she would continue experimenting with the work’s brightly painted coiled celastic forms. It is also where she produced the series *One of the Beaux Paintings* (1975; p. 167) for a faculty show at UCSD. *Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas Flow* (1975; p. 220) was also made during this time for the inaugural exhibition at the Woman’s Building in Los Angeles; a preliminary sketch in Morton’s notebook refers to the words inscribed on the work’s celastic ribbons as “Joan’s words,” an attribution affirmed in an *Artweek* review of the show.¹¹⁵ She also completed *For Kate* (1976; pp. 166–67), a corner work of celastic streamers and roses, which was exhibited in the UCSD faculty show. Thought to be an homage to her paternal grandmother, Kate, the work may additionally reference a text she encountered at the Library Company of Philadelphia that Morton would later include in Alan Sondheim’s 1977 book project *Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America*.¹¹⁶ Morton was photographed in her installation at the Woman’s Building art gallery waving one of her celastic streamers, replicating the movement that is gestured to in her celastic pieces and suggesting her shift toward the performative, a move that is elaborated in several projects over the following year.

“Pattern and Decoration,” 23.

113. Ree Morton, “Places: Ree Morton,” *Journal: The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*, no. 10 (March–April 1976): 20 (spellings have been maintained from original).

114. Morton, 1975 Black Sketchbook, Sketchbooks, RM–18, [p. 42].

115. Askey, “Four L.A. Artists,” *Artweek*, February 21, 1976, 7.

116. Sondheim, *Individuals*. The title of the text that Morton included in Sondheim’s book is *Love and Death in a Barn, or, The Sad, Sorrowful Life of Beautiful Kate Harrington: Who Was Married to the Son of an Aristocratic Family, with Whom She Lived as a Servant, And, Being Discovered by Them, Both Sank into Misery and Sickness, Resulting in Kate’s Death by Starvation in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Old Franklin

Existing documentary footage captures two performances that Morton produced as an artist-in-residence at Artpark outside Buffalo, New York, in the summer of 1976. *Regarding Landscape* and *Maid of the Mist* (both 1976; pp. 176–79; pp. 180–81) brought celastic into conversation with the dynamic landscape of the Niagara River and with the thousands of people who visited the public art space that season. Artpark’s decade-long visual-arts program was founded in 1974 and attracted a peak attendance of 504,000 people in 1978. Situated along a 172-acre stretch of the Niagara Gorge, Artpark invited artists to create free-form projects at various locations on the property, from the scenic trail along the river that Morton chose for both pieces to the soils pile, a dead zone of rock and gravel that was transported from the site of the Robert Moses Power Plant—land that the United States government had seized by eminent domain from the Tuscarora Nation in 1960. This history together with the Hopewell burial mound being located on Artpark’s campus compelled many artists to make works that addressed, honored, or problematized the site’s colonial roots, as well as those of the United States and neighboring Canada; these included Agnes Denes’s *Rice/Tree/Burial with Time Capsule* (1969–79), Jody Pinto’s *Bleed Pockets* (1975; p. 61), and Barbara Zucker’s *We See You* sound piece (1978). Artists were required to be at the site of their work during scheduled hours to engage with the public, and video documentation depicts Morton answering questions from visitors to *Regarding Landscape*.



Ree Morton in *Artpark people* (directed by Michael Blackwood, produced by Michael Blackwood Productions, 1976).



Jody Pinto, *Bleed Pockets*, 1975, canvas, twelve-foot wood poles, red earth, hay, and rain. Installation view, Artpark, Lewiston, NY.

Morton's *Regarding Landscape* augmented the waterfalls and scenery of the riverside trails with arches of celastic installed in front of theater seats, which were available for viewers to sit in, and with simple paintings of the vistas framed by celastic curtains installed on rocks along the edge of the water. For the live performance of *Maid of the Mist*, Morton created a long celastic ladder covered in ribbons and a life preserver decorated with celastic flowers to "rescue" the young woman of Haudenosaunee mythology, who threw herself over the falls (an action that had incorrectly been described for centuries as a human sacrifice).¹¹⁷ In 1979 *Art in America* published an article on Artpark titled "Public Sculpture for the Post-Heroic Age," and Morton's prescient sense of this mood can be seen in a concurrent drawing titled *Like Many Other Heroes* (1976; p. 182).¹¹⁸ The work on paper gestures toward the romantic love of fairy tales and the frequent narrative of a woman being rescued: Morton's handwritten text reads, "After having sent a letter to his sweetheart, she descends by a rope ladder from the upper floor of the municipal Palace and Augustin carries her off...Like many other heroes, he was born and grew up magically; always a friend of the needy and an enemy of the rich." Although *Maid of the Mist* was Morton's singular foray into live performance, she participated in a theater workshop in New York in the fall of 1976, and designed props for a performance by the experimental theater collective Mabou Mines that was staged following her death. Among the props she designed was a dress that the women actors stepped in and out of during the play.

Publishing House, 1876).

117. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is considered to be the oldest participatory democracy in the world and comprises the

Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca.

118. Lawrence Alloway, "Public Sculpture for the Post-Heroic Age," *Art in America* 67,



Cynthia Carlson, *Gingerbread House*, Sculpture, 1975, acrylic and oil on wood, and polyurethane foam with fiberglass. Installation view, Artpark, Lewiston, NY.

A theatrical influence is apparent in the set-like structure of *Signs of Love* (1976; p. 232–33), produced that fall. A culmination of recent forms, the L-shaped installation features ladders from *Maid of the Mist*, the draping celastics of *Weeping Willow* and the *Regional Pieces*, and the medallions and ribbons of *Let Us Celebrate While Youth Lingers and Ideas Flow*. In this large-scale celastic piece, the earnest yet humorous sentimentality that infused much of Morton's work since the 1973 *Souvenir Piece* (pp. 123–25) converges as a musing on desire—an unironic celebration of romantic love, longing, and loneliness. Manuela Ammer has succinctly described the result as “actually a celebration: the affect of love, the most clichéd of all feelings, has infused painting and molded it into cliché; painting, in turn, has animated these clichés and pieced them together to create a public body. What is celebrated here is the shared (formal) history of personal emotion—conventionality as a form of collectivity.”¹¹⁹ As Morton had made clear in her earliest use of celastic, her interest in feminine tropes was always rooted in both their toxicity as cliché and in her unrelenting attraction to the pure sentiment behind the symbolism.

Morton's final project, *Manipulations of the Organic* (1977; pp. 262–63), focused on Chicago-based architect Louis Sullivan (1856–1924) and was

designed as a friezelike installation of fourteen paintings. In the spring of 1977, Morton was a guest artist at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she was surrounded by Sullivan's architectural influence in the city and became fascinated by his portfolio of drawings *A System of Architectural Ornament*, which was commissioned by the school's library in 1924 (p. 64). For *Manipulations of the Organic*, the walls of the Walter Kelley Gallery were painted a medium gray and the paintings, hung approximately six feet high, were accompanied by a text from Sullivan's portfolio in which he described various archetypes, including the artist, or "dreamer," description that Morton used in her installation:

*The purpose of setting forth man's powers in groups, is to show their conjoint powers in practical affairs—their mutual reinforcement of each other's power. Thus:
The physical man may be called the worker—the artificer.
The inquiring man becomes the scientist.
The emotional man dramatizes the activities. He colors life.
The contemplative, speculative man becomes the philosopher.
The moral power of man urges on toward democracy (the great dream).
The dreamer—man becomes the seer, the mystic, the poet, the prophet, the pioneer, the affirmer, the proud adventurer. He dreams his dreams with open eyes, with clear vision of realities, with far foreseeing outlook, with intense persistent concentration upon an idea, a purpose. His power utilizes and manipulates all powers—focusing their aim upon a program of genuine achievement.*¹²⁰

Morton included Sullivan's words as a wraparound text below the paintings, which are based on examples of the architect's aesthetic investigations into the morphology of seed germs as they develop into various shapes. She described the process of the project in a concurrent notebook as one of experimentation and as an attempt to get "serious," perhaps an admission of anxiety that her previous work, such as *Signs of Love*, was not considered "serious": "The drawing is wonderfully decorative, but I think the seriousness comes through...it seems now that the ability to be light and free has been learned, and now it becomes necessary to use that towards some end, in order not to be truly frivolous and irresponsible. Light and ironic on serious subjects, without frivolity. The joy is there."¹²¹ She later wrote, "Today was in drawing stage—from Sullivan—Simple and complex leaf forms—copied his images carefully—bright and basic color—single colors. The effect is decorative, but the substance is there—the spiral is working—the drawing is breaking—I'm sure it is art, and that it is a major drawing, and an important breakthrough,

119. Ammer, "How's My Painting?," 93.

120. Louis H. Sullivan, "The Inorganic and the Organic," in *A System of Architectural Ornament, according with a Philosophy of Man's Powers* (New York: Eakins Press, 1967), n.p.

121. Morton, 76–77 Artist Sketchbook,

whose implication I’m not clearly seeing just yet. I’m feeling very moved, and tired—a major expenditure of energy, although I took just a couple of hours to do 3 drawings.” Carlson remembers that Morton spoke about “getting serious” at the time.¹²² Unlike Morton’s free-form celastic projects, Sullivan’s dense, pithy theories leave little room for play, a claustrophobic philosophy of creativity and ornament that provides a rigid set of rules. The direction Morton would have taken after this gallery show, however, remains unknown.



Louis H. Sullivan, *Manipulation of the Organic*, 1922, plate 2 from *A System of Architectural Ornament* (1924), graphite on Strathmore paper, Art Institute of Chicago. Commissioned by the Art Institute of Chicago (1988.15.12).

Morton had been offered a full-time teaching position at the University of Colorado in Boulder for the fall of 1977 and finally would have had a fixed place for her and her children to live. The day before *Manipulations of the Organic* opened, she was gravely injured in a car crash; three weeks later, on April 30, 1977, she died from complications related to the injuries she had sustained.

In the decades since her death, Morton has become somewhat of a cult figure, an “artist’s artist.” As Nayland Blake states in this book, Morton’s 1980 catalogue provides “a working ethics as much as a working method” on how to be an artist.¹²³ That her practice remained unrelentingly personal even as the work oscillated from enigmatic to transparent has given both her peers and younger generations permission to radically assert sentiment as a legitimate subject of art-making. Her subjectivity as a mother—and the complicated,

Sketchbooks, RM-15, [pp. 64–65].
122. Cynthia Carlson, conversation with the author, October 20, 2017.
123. Nayland Blake, “15 Things I’m Still Learning from Ree Morton,” in this volume,

often convoluted array of emotions that accompany this role—increasingly inspires caregivers navigating both career and familial obligations. Schwartzman and Thomas’s most enduring contribution to Morton’s legacy may be, then, their catalogue’s inclusion of the artist’s transcribed notebook entries that reveal her grappling with these concerns, as she was thinking through ethics and methods alongside occasional musings related to teaching and parenting. The rawness of these texts, their revelation of vulnerability and certainty, of humor and pathos, continues to enrich our understanding of not only Morton’s object-making, but her entire artistic cosmology. In one of her final notebooks, Morton wrote a heartbreakingly prescient entry about her place in this world: “Thinking about art and other artists—feeling an affinity with other artists, and that this is a good way to do your life. The important thing is that we are here. And trying to make a difference, and giving a damn.”¹²⁴

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124. Morton, 76–77 Artist Sketchbook, Sketchbooks, RM-15, [p. 49].