



Groundbreaking

The Women of the Sylvia Sleigh Collection

Rowan University Art Gallery

August 29–October 1, 2011

Front cover: Cynthia Mailman, Study for God, 1976, graphite and acrylic on paper, 9½ × 5⅝ in. (image), Rowan University Art Gallery, Sylvia Sleigh Collection (cat. 35). © Cynthia Mailman. Used by permission.

Sylvia Sleigh: Artist and Collector

The Sylvia Sleigh Collection is comprised of nearly one hundred paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and photographs by women artists. It was amassed by Sylvia Sleigh (1916–2010), a pioneering feminist who became well-known in the 1970s for her paintings of nude men. She challenged the tradition in which male artists depicted anonymous, idealized, and often eroticized female models. While she unashamedly reveled in the beauty of the human body, Sleigh refused to objectify her sitters, embracing their individuality instead. Her subjects are identified by name and their physical features, such as body hair or freckles, are retained (fig. 1).

Sleigh was among the founding members of SOHO 20 Gallery (est. 1973), an important women's cooperative, as were Barbara Coleman, Joan Glueckman, Cynthia Mailman, Lucy Sallick, Rosalind Shaffer, Eileen Spikol, and Sharon Wybrants, all of whom are represented in the Sylvia Sleigh Collection. She subsequently joined A.I.R. Gallery (est. 1972), the first artist-run exhibition space for women in the United States, which counted Dotty Attie (one of its founders), Judith Bernstein, Blythe Bohnen, and Rosemary Mayer among its original members.

In this vital period of change, Sleigh was actively involved in exhibitions of work by women, participated in protests of patriarchal

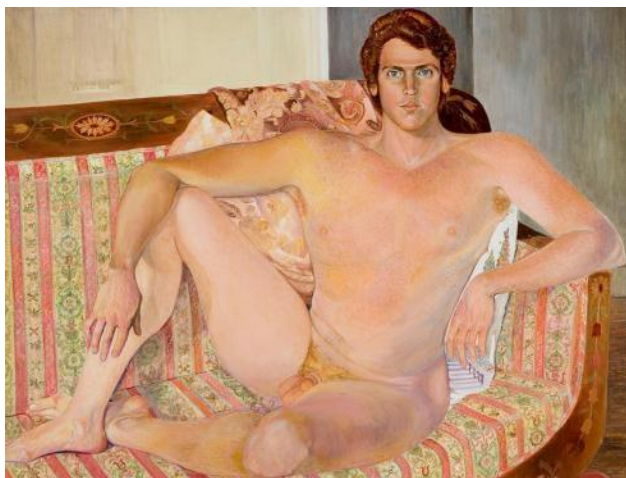


Fig. 1. Sylvia Sleigh, *Portrait of an Actor: Sean Pratt*, 1994, oil on canvas, 42½ × 56 in., Rowan University Art Gallery, Sylvia Sleigh Collection.



Fig. 2. Installation of *The Sister Chapel* at P.S.1, Long Island City, New York, January 1978.

museum practices, and provided encouragement for younger artists. She also collaborated with twelve other women to create *The Sister Chapel* (1974–78), a nonhierarchical celebration of female role models, which was conceived by Ilise Greenstein (1928–1985) (fig. 2). Works by five of the other participants – Martha Edelheit, Shirley Gorelick, Diana Kurz, Cynthia Mailman, and Sharon Wybrants – are also found in the Sylvia Sleight Collection.

Although she was a tireless supporter of women artists, Sleight was unable to collect their work seriously before the death of her husband, Lawrence Alloway (1926–1990). He was concerned that such acquisitions might compromise his professional integrity as an art critic and curator. Nevertheless, he and Sleight sometimes received gifts from other artists, as attested by the personalized inscriptions on several works in the collection (cats. 11, 13, 18, 28, 35, and 46).

Through gifts, exchanges, and purchases, Sleight accumulated a substantial and varied private collection. For many years, the art of her contemporaries could be found throughout her home in Manhattan. Works by Betty Parsons, Phyllis Rosser, and Paula Tavins hung near the sofa where she routinely sat to read *The New York Times*, talk on the telephone, or visit with a friend (fig. 3). In the hall were two paintings by Rhea Sanders and a work by Louise Weinberg. Eileen Spikol's sculpture was in her nearby bedroom (fig. 4). In the stairwell, she displayed paintings by Marion Lerner-Levine, Selina Trieff, and Stephanie Rauschenbusch. Elsewhere in the

house were works by Freda Wadsworth, Sabra Moore, Diana Kurz, Linda Bastian, Rosemary Mayer, and Phyllis Janto.

In order to encourage the artists and publicize their accomplishments, Sleigh exhibited fifty-four works from her collection in “Parallel Visions” at SOHO 20 Gallery in 1999. Of that group, forty-four are currently in the inaugural exhibition at Rowan University, accompanied by eighteen works that did not appear in “Parallel Visions.” Two of the absent works – Elisa Decker’s *David* (1987) and Nancy Spero’s *Codex Artaud II* (1971) – were no longer in Sleigh’s collection by the time it was gifted to the Rowan University Art Gallery. A third, Nancy Holt’s untitled composition of black-and-white photographs (c. 1972), is presently on loan for a major retrospective, “Nancy Holt: Sightlines,” which originated at Columbia University’s Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery and is now traveling to several venues in Europe and the United States.

The premiere of the Sylvia Sleigh Collection at Rowan University features approximately two-thirds of the works. For reasons of space, conservation, and cohesiveness, some parts of the collection could not be exhibited. In many cases, Sleigh owned two or more works by the same individual; thus, it was possible to reduce the number of objects on display without omitting artists. Notably absent from the exhibition, however, are an untitled print (1961) by Pat Adams, which is too fragile to display; Jacqueline Livingston’s *Photographposter Mail Exhibition*



Fig. 3. Interior of Sylvia Sleigh’s residence with Betty Parsons’ *Gate* (cat. 41), Phyllis Rosser’s *Before Night Falls* (cat. 44), and Paula Tavains’ *Untitled* (cat. 53).

(1979), a group of fourteen unframed posters that could not be shown effectively in the available space; and three small etchings by Felicity Rainnie, which were only recently rediscovered in Sleigh's estate.

It was Sylvia Sleigh's intention to donate her collection to an institution that would preserve the work and make it accessible through periodic exhibitions. She acquired the works of other women as a way of supporting them and honoring their achievements, regardless of whether they were critically acclaimed or financially successful. With the Sylvia Sleigh Collection as its foundation, the permanent collection of the Rowan University Art Gallery will be supplemented in the same spirit, with particular emphasis on the works of women who were active in the pivotal period of the 1970s and 1980s.

Andrew D. Hottle, Ph.D.
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Fig. 4. Interior of Sylvia Sleigh's residence with Eileen Spikol's *Enigma* (cat. 51).

Checklist of the Exhibition

* Illustrated in the “Parallel Visions” catalogue

The following information is based on recent research, which has yielded a number of titles and dates that were not readily available when the “Parallel Visions” catalogue was published in 1998. Numbers 1–62 are part of the Sylvia Sleigh Collection.

Cecile Abish (b. 1930)

1. *Boxed Monuments 3*. 1969. Paper, corrugated cardboard, and acetate. $6\frac{1}{4} \times 15\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ in.



2. *Study for Declination*. 1972. Vinyl, kraft paper, and Dyna Core panel. 15×20 in.*

Anne Abrons (b. 1950)

3. *Self-Portrait with Amy*. 1981. Oil on canvas. 60×36 in.*

Dotty Attie (b. 1938)

4. *The Scoutmaster's Return*. 1975. Color lithographs, four sheets. Each $11 \times 9\frac{1}{4}$ in.*

Helène Aylon (b. 1931)

5. *Painting that Changes in Time*. 1974. Plexiglas over linseed oil on Masonite. $11\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{7}{8}$ in.*

Roseanne Backstedt (1941–2008)

6. *Earth Wedding*. 1992. Acrylic on canvas. 24×24 in.*

Emily Barnett

7. *Self-Portrait in the Studio*. 1981. Oil on canvas. 42×48 in.*

Linda Bastian

8. *Reflecting Pool with Irises*. 1990. Watercolor on paper. 41×29 in.*

Judith Bernstein (b. 1942)

9. *Horizontal*. 1973. Charcoal on paper. 41½ × 29½ in.

Elizabeth Bisbing

10. *Princess Dorothea (after Gossaert)*. 2009. Painted paper collage. 5¼ × 4¼ in.



Blythe Bohnen (b. 1940)

11. *Motion between Five Points*. 1975. Graphite on paper. 28¼ × 22½ in.*

Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010)

12. *Femme Maison*. 1984. Photogravure with chine collé. 10 × 4¼ in.*
13. *Untitled II*. 1985. Lithograph on paper. 17 × 11 in.

Diane Burko (b. 1945)

14. *#3*. 1983. Color lithograph on paper. 27 × 21 in.*

Ann Chernow (b. 1936)

15. *I Get Along Without You Very Well*. 1979. Lithograph on paper. 27⅝ × 21½ in.*

Barbara Coleman (b. 1937)

16. *#9*. 1975. Graphite, gel, gravel, and acrylic on canvas. 72 × 12 in.

Rosalyn Drexler (b. 1926)

17. *Emilio Meets the Enchantress*. 1968. Offset lithograph on paper. 11 × 11 in.*

Martha Nilsson Edelheit

18. *Sno White in Tripliket*. 1966. Watercolor on paper. 9 × 11¼ in.*

Audrey Flack (b. 1931)

19. *Demonstrators*. Ca. 1967-68. Graphite and gouache on paper. 7 × 9 in.*

Ruth Ann Fredenthal

20. Untitled. 1971. Alkyd high-gloss enamel on cloth Mylar. 17 × 17 in.



Joan Glueckman (1940–1978)

21. *#1*. Undated. Yarn and fabric tapestry. 7¾ × 7 in.*

Shirley Gorelick (1924–2000)

22. *Beth*. 1976. Silverpoint on paper. 24 x 20 in.

Nancy Grossman (b. 1940)

23. *A Garden for Sylvia*. 1966. Graphite on paper. 13⅞ × 21⅜ in.

Jane Henry (b. 1953)

24. *Flash in the Pan*. 1997. Wire, papier-mâché, pigment, and chinchilla. 12½ × 8 × 6 in.*

Phyllis Janto

25. *Eagle Eye Two*. 1992. Carved pine, pigment, and calcite. 9¾ × 5 × 5 in.*

Lila Katzen (1925–1998)

26. Untitled. Ca. 1971. Plexiglas, light, and electrical cord. 7 × 18 × 19 in.

Irene Krugman (1925–1982)

27. Untitled. Undated. Wood and canvas. 12 × 14 × 6 in.

Diana Kurz (b. 1936)

28. *Woman in Doorway*. 1974. Watercolor on paper. 14¾ × 10½ in.

29. *Couple on a Patchwork Quilt*. 1978. Oil on linen. 56 × 48 in.*

30. *Portrait of Sylvia Sleigh at 80*. 1996. Oil on canvas. 72 × 36 in.



Bibi Lenček

31. *Insights*. 1982. Oil pastel on paper. 20 × 65 in.*

Marion Lerner-Levine (b. 1931)

32. *Long May They Reign*. 1975. Watercolor and graphite on paper. 15 × 20½ in.*

33. *Memory of the Coronation, 1937*. 1978. Watercolor and graphite on paper. 4 × 6 in.

Jill Mackie

34. *Red Hibiscus*. 1989. Oil on paper. 5 × 7 in.*

Cynthia Mailman (b. 1942)

35. *Study for God*. 1976. Graphite and acrylic on paper. $9\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{5}{8}$ in. (image).*

Rosemary Mayer (b. 1943)

36. *Cabbage*. 1974. Watercolor and graphite on paper. 11×15 in.

37. *Iris*. 1974. Watercolor and graphite on paper. 11×13 in.

Katherine Miller (1892–1971)

38. *Landscape*. Ca. 1932. Oil on panel with painted frame. 11×13 in.*

Sabra Moore (b. 1943)

39. *Door*. 1986. Oil on wood with sticks, string, and beads. $63\frac{5}{8} \times 36 \times 7\frac{1}{4}$ in.*

Vernita Nemec, a.k.a. Vernita N'Cognita

40. *Self-Portrait*. 2005. Cast paper of checks from credit card companies. $42 \times 15 \times 8$ in.



Betty Parsons (1900–1982)

41. *Gate*. 1967. Driftwood and acrylic. $15\frac{1}{4} \times 11 \times 1$ in.*

Stephanie Rauschenbusch (b. 1942)

42. *Homage to Balthus*. 1981. Oil on canvas. 30×24 in.*

Ce Roser

43. *Double Vision*. 1991. Oil on canvas. 56 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 30 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.*

Phyllis Rosser (b. 1934)

44. *Before Night Falls*. 1991. Driftwood and acrylic. 48 × 89 × 10 in.*

Lucy Sallick (b. 1937)

45. *Photographs of Summer 1974*. 1975. Oil on canvas. 22 × 28 in.*

46. *Pencils, Pencils*. 1978. Lithograph on paper. 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (image).

Rhea Sanders (b. 1923)

47. *Inside-Outside, Karolyi Stone House, Vence*. 1989. Egg tempera on wood. 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.*

Lisa Schwartzberg (b. 1948)

48. *Dreamscape #2*. 1995. Mixed media construction. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 4 × 2 in.*

Rosalind Shaffer

49. *Scourge* (maquette). 1982. Conté crayon on paper, mounted on wood with glass. 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 17 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.*

Susan Sills

50. *After Manet, The Fifer*. 1994. Oil on birch plywood. 51 × 26 in.*

Eileen Spikol (1938–2011)

51. *Enigma*. Undated. Hydrocal and pigment. 82 × 28 × 8 in.*

Michelle Stuart (b. 1933)

52. *Tsikomo Suite*. 1974–75. Color lithographs, five sheets and portfolio. 20 × 15 in.*

Paula Tavins (b. 1939)

53. Untitled. 1975. Canvas with acrylic and stitching. 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.*

Selina Trieff (b. 1934)

54. *Head*. 1985. Oil and gold leaf on paper. 7 × 10 in.*

Audrey Ushenko (b. 1945)

55. *Perseus and Medusa II*. 1993. Oil on canvas. 36 × 24 in.*

Pegeen Vail, called Pegeen Guggenheim

(1926–1967)

56. *Nativity*. 1956. Gouache on paper. 19⁷/₈ × 25³/₄ in.*

Freda Wadsworth (1918–2003)

57. Untitled. Ca. 1990. Gouache on paperboard. 32 × 17 in.

Marjorie Wadsworth (d. 2001)

58. *Victorian Fantasy, Kensington Gardens*. 1995. Watercolor on paperboard. 20¹/₂ × 15¹/₂ in.



Marie Warsh

59. *Sylvia in the Mirror*. 1997. Black-and-white photograph. 11 × 13³/₄ in.*

Louise Weinberg

60. *Heart's Lake*. 1997. Ink and beeswax on copper over wood. 16¹/₄ × 14¹/₄ in.*

Jacqueline Wray

61. *Blue Ridge Spring #1*. 1992. Oil pencil on paper. 26 × 40 in.*

Sharon Wybrants (b. 1943)

62. *Artist in the Nursery*. 1971. Mixed media on paper. 14 × 17 in.*

Selections from *The Sister Chapel*

Alice Neel (1900–1984)

63. *Bella Abzug – the Candidate*. 1976. Oil on canvas. 108 × 60 in. Rowan University Art Gallery, gift of an anonymous donor, 2010.

Sylvia Sleight (1916–2010)

64. *Lilith*. 1976. Acrylic on canvas. 108 × 60 in. Rowan University Art Gallery, Sylvia Sleight Collection.



Sharon Wybrants (b. 1943)

65. *Self-Portrait as Superwoman (or, Woman as Culture Hero)*. 1978/2010. Oil on canvas. 108 × 60 in. Rowan University Art Gallery, gift of the artist, 2010.

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