

Ways of Perceiving

Through the Home

Word count : 1498

This exhibition, *Through the Home*, taking place inside of The Mission Gallery, Swansea, will be an experience taking you through the works of women, made in or around the home. I have chosen this location due to the size and nature of the building. The size is suitable for these works to be seen and work with each other, that do not need to be on a large scale. I will be using this space to highlight and bring forward these artists that continued making whilst often not being recognised as artists due to the prejudice surrounding being a housewife and the use of those materials that have been regarded as purely domestic. However, these women did not stay within the walls of the home, they showcased their anger and frustration through making and sharing art. The artists that will be displayed in this exhibition are Su Richardson (1947), Judy Chicago (1939), Faith Wilding (1943), Martha Rosler (1943) and Sandra Orgel (1952), all prevalent in the second wave of feminism within art.

Starting artist Su Richardson, who was one of the creators of the *Women's Postal Art* event (1975-7), that directly brought together women, attempting to bridge that gap between artist and mother that felt so far apart. Through the medium of making and exchanging pieces of work, which became the *Feministo: Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife* (ICA 1977) (2023 p63) exhibition. Although, the exhibition was said to not be widely reported on in the mainstream media (Dudley, 2025) so this resulted in lots of the pieces of work, that were the foundations of this exhibition, to no longer exist, so I think it is very important these influential people receive the recognition for their work.

The next Artist: Judy Chicago, who is a widely recognized feminist artist, also founded the first feminist arts programme which “acted as a catalyst for feminist art and art education in the 1970s” (Judy Chicago, 2025) teaching women artists how to enter the art world, which was largely dominated by men at the time. The work I have chosen goes around the theme of motherhood, *The Birth Project* (1980-5) where she commissioned artists from all over the world to create needlepoint images of the birth process, inside of their own homes these pieces were created and brought together to create the representation that is not nearly shown enough. Chicago, when talking about works such as this says, “male artists indulge in and are rewarded for all manner of outrageous aesthetic acts,..., women artists are continually castigated for daring to challenge the sacred cows” (1999, p66), showing the double standard regarding the subject is still prevalent here.

Following is artist Faith Wilding who was a prominent feature in the 1972 *Womanhouse* exhibition, where a group came together and created an installation, emulating the traditional household, and showcased a variety of work including performance art and created environments within each room. I have chosen to include her because particularly her work in this was using crochet, a material often demeaned to a domestic craft, therefore breaking the boundaries of material that is “allowed” to be considered art.

Next, I have a piece from Martha Rosler whose work consists of some video pieces, photography and performance of which I have chosen to display the video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) which parodied the role that was seen as traditional for women in the kitchen. Reid talks about something known as the Women’s sphere, where the person’s sphere is the understanding of the duties they carry out, she says “the women’s sphere does not do this for she has many duties in common with a man” (1988 p8), because of these limits the women are reduced to only their domestic duties, seemingly having nothing outside of this, I thought this linked in with the anger that is felt by Rosler

in this video. This coincides with Lucie-Smith talking about how “women in general,..., look for fulfilment in things done outside of the home” (1999, p169) creating these feelings of resentment to the home, more so what responsibilities come along with it.

Additionally, I am including a piece by Sandra Orgel which was likewise made for the *Womanhouse* (1972) exhibition. This piece tackles the more domestic and heavy labour tasks performed by women in the household, the laundry, Lucie-Smith mentions this being not just about the drudgery of the task, but the physical and mental claustrophobia caused (1999, p169). This links into the confinement and restriction, women at the time were facing and the resentment to these duties, how it came out through the art made in this time. Judy Chicago mentions alongside this about the changes and progressions that have happened with women's art, over the years, which are always inadvertently challenged with the permanent institutionalisation of women's place in art history (p169).



This first piece shown is a textile sculpture by Su Richardson *Bear in it Mind* 1976, (Dungarees, jeans, coat hanger, gloves, ink on paper and other materials 150 x 45 x 4). Which will be hung on the wall, emulating clothes but also an absence of a body. This was a direct response to her experience in motherhood, made just 2 years after her first child was born. The pair of dungarees with many items strapped together, and extra hands, insinuating the need for more ways to get everything done herself, and directly faces the overwhelming duties in a mother's daily life. Falskova mentions the cut off jeans at the top being in place the absent father figure, resulting in the mothers' growing hands, and not being enough to handle the various tools dangling from her many pockets (2023, p94). This Highlights the unfair balance of labour between mother and father. This was all created within the home, using some domestic material and processes seen as craft, such as crochet, it becomes a direct response to her personal experience, being a mother but also as an artist at the same time.



Figure 2

The next piece by Faith Wilding is *Crocheted Environment* 1972, (Woolworth's Sweetheart acrylic yarn and sisal rope 108 x 108 x 108) I have chosen to install this piece at the cove to the rear of the gallery, to be able to take over the whole space and become an immersive experience that the viewer could enter. This piece also referred to as the *Womb Room* is a suspended large-scale crochet web, designed to be sat with and experience the comfort and emulate the warmth of the womb. But also, is said to be the "linking of the male domain of architecture with the female world of needlework" (French, 2015). Which I also think is an interesting way to look at it, because the material and process is a great feature in this work because of the connotations the crochet has, the work feels motherly.

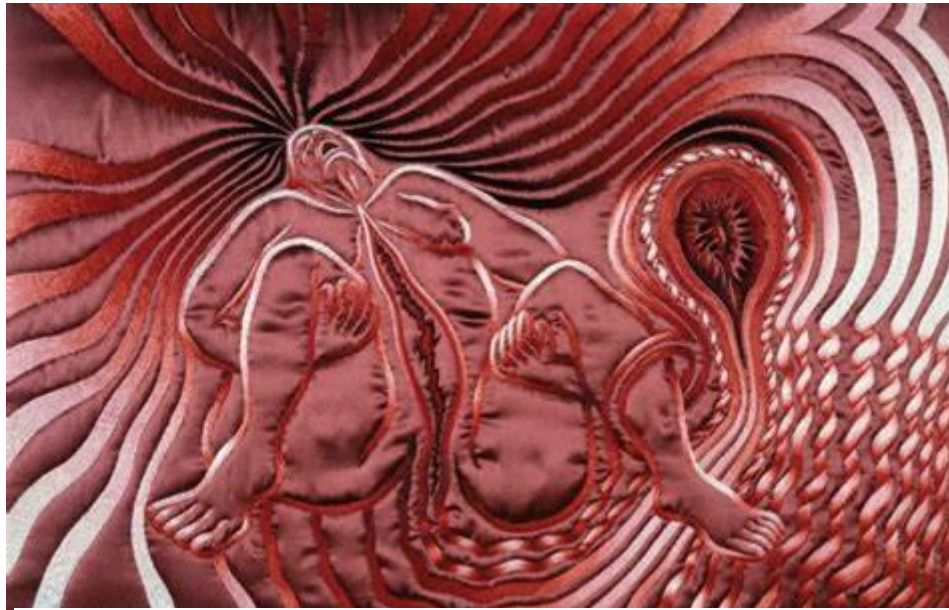


Figure 3

Judy Chicago *Birth Tear/Tear From The Birth Project* 1982, (mixed media, dimensions unknown). This is one of the scenes from *The Birth Project* that I have chosen because I feel as though it emulates such a raw pain and emotion, that is rarely mentioned in lots of art spaces. “Chicago Chose a generically “gentle”, feminine way of representing” (Lucie-Smith, 1999, p65), talking about the use of a delicate process, and what could be considered “feminine” materials. Whilst the use of stitch is a laborious slow and specific process almost contrasting the intensity of this piece. The colour really drew me in, it feels like mimicking the excruciating pain felt in that very moment. It is a very harsh and honest depiction of childbirth, paralleled by the often-portrayed sugar-coated versions of motherhood.

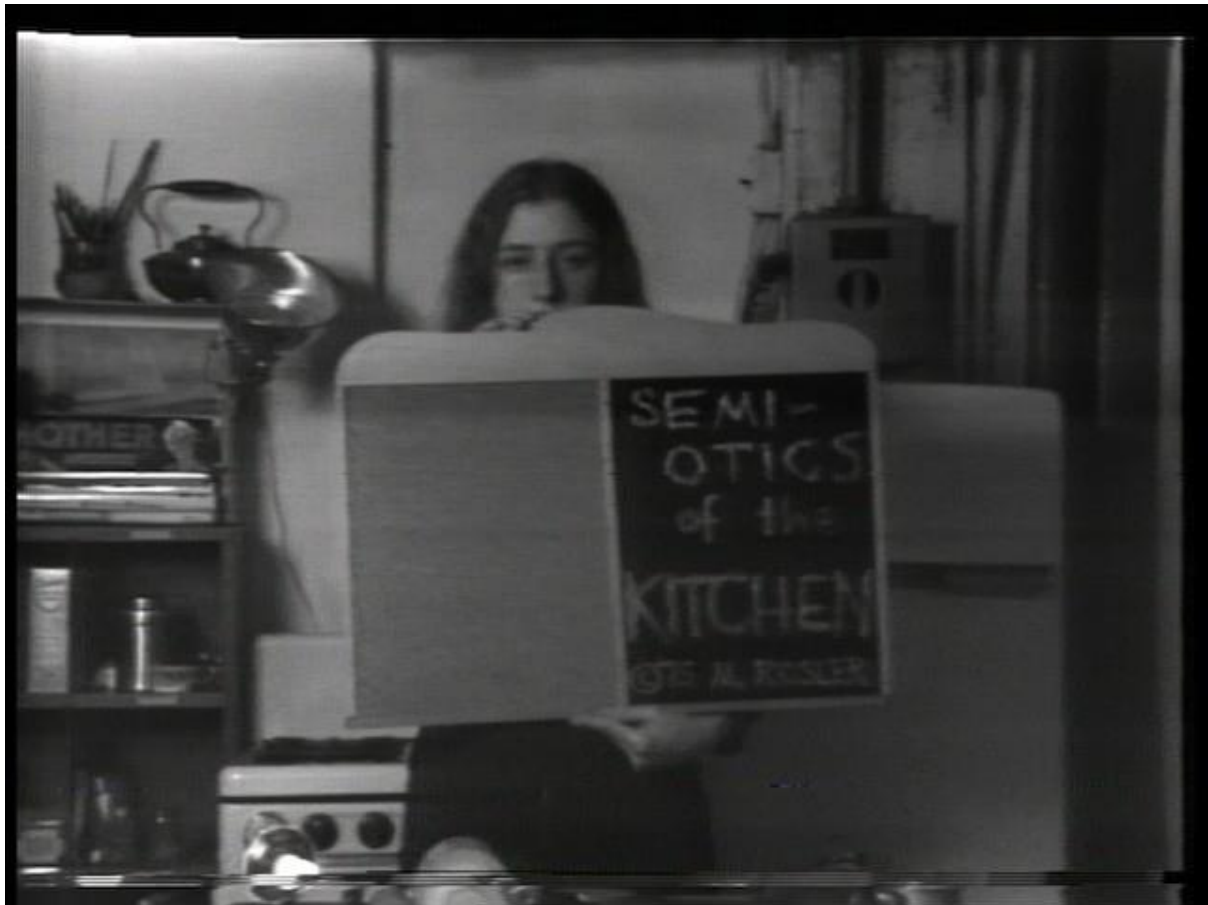


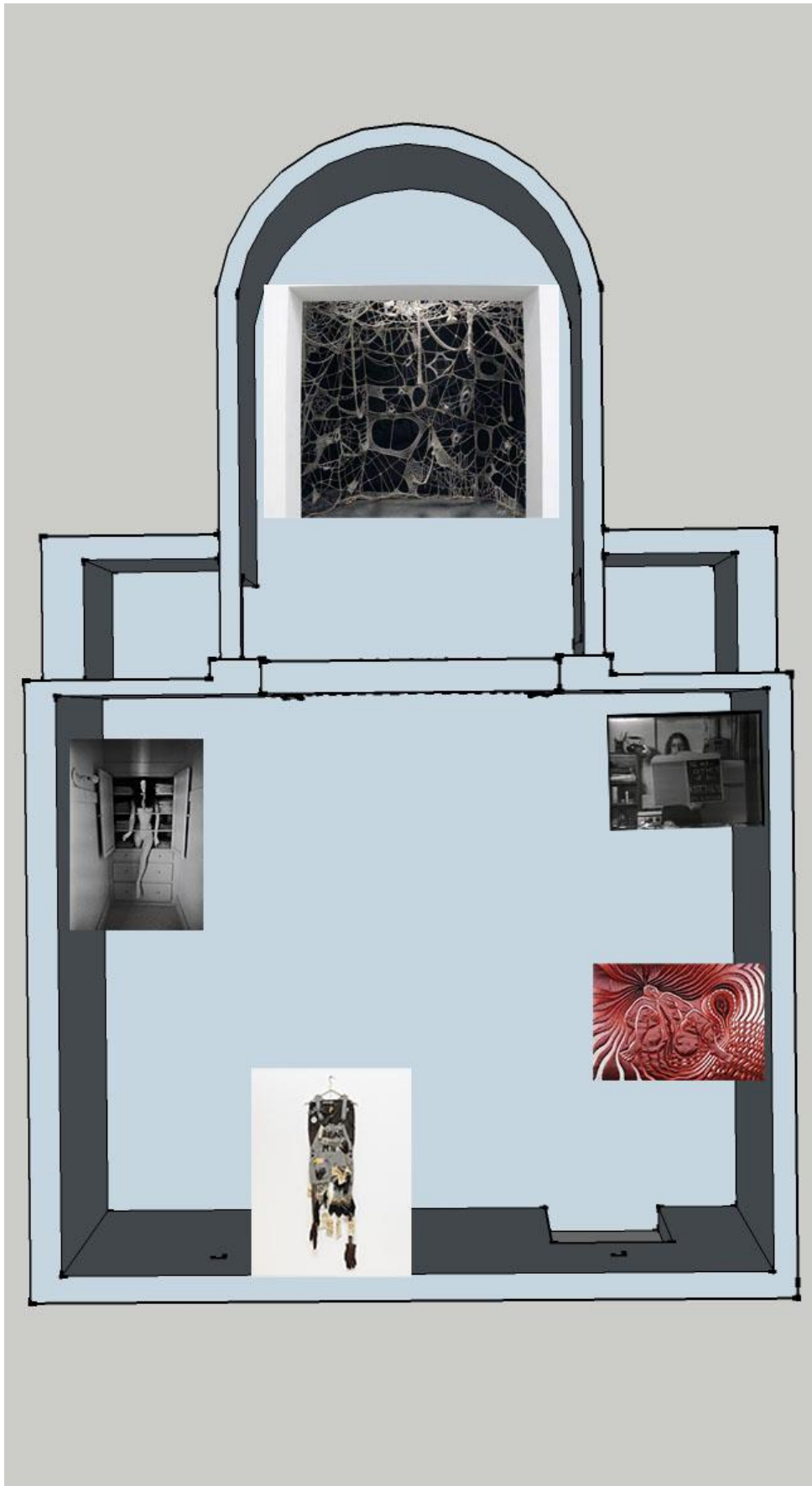
Figure 4

The next piece displayed is *Semiotics of the kitchen* 1975, (video (black and white, sound) 6.19min) which shall be displayed in the corner of the gallery on a small screen with the audio filling the room. In this work Rosler is parodying a popular cooking show and she goes through each letter of the alphabet and holds or acts out an action with a kitchen utensil corresponding. Some parts such as when she grabs the knife feel angry or threatening, her voice will fill the room as the viewers walk around and hear the constant repetition. As the work is a criticism to the “traditional” role, for women, I wanted to mimic this and have this shown on a small screen to follow suit to the reality of feeling trapped like she is, here.



Figure 5

This is the piece by Sandra Orgel that I will be displaying is *Sheet closet* 1972, (mixed media, dimensions unknown) an installation into a linen closet where she has stuffed a mannequin inside of it, that seems forever trapped, and evidently, she has become bonded with the closet. But also like she is only what duties she carries out and nothing more. This piece is speaking on the domestic labour performed by women, in the home, often going by unnoticed and becoming a captive trap keeping them in the home.



Mission Gallery

Arial view.

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Figure 1: Richardson S. 1976 *Bear it in Mind*

Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/richardson-bear-it-in-mind-t15972> (Accessed: 02 April 2025)

Figure 2: Wilding F. *Crocheted Environment* 1972/1975

Available at: <https://www.icaboston.org/art/faith-wilding/crocheted-environment/> (Accessed: 02 April 2025)

Figure 3: Chicago J. *Birth Tear/Tear* From *The Birth Project* 1982

Available at: <https://judychicagoportal.org/projects/birth-project> (Accessed: 02 April 2025)

Figure 4: Rosler M. *Semiotics of the Kitchen* 1975

Available at: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/159788> (Accessed: 02 April 2025)

Figure 5: Orgel S. *Sheet Closet* 1972

Available at: <https://elephant.art/sandra-orgel-womanhouse-linen-closet-1972/> (Accessed: 02 April 2025)