

## NANCY MACKO: ENVISIONING A FEMINIST FUTURE

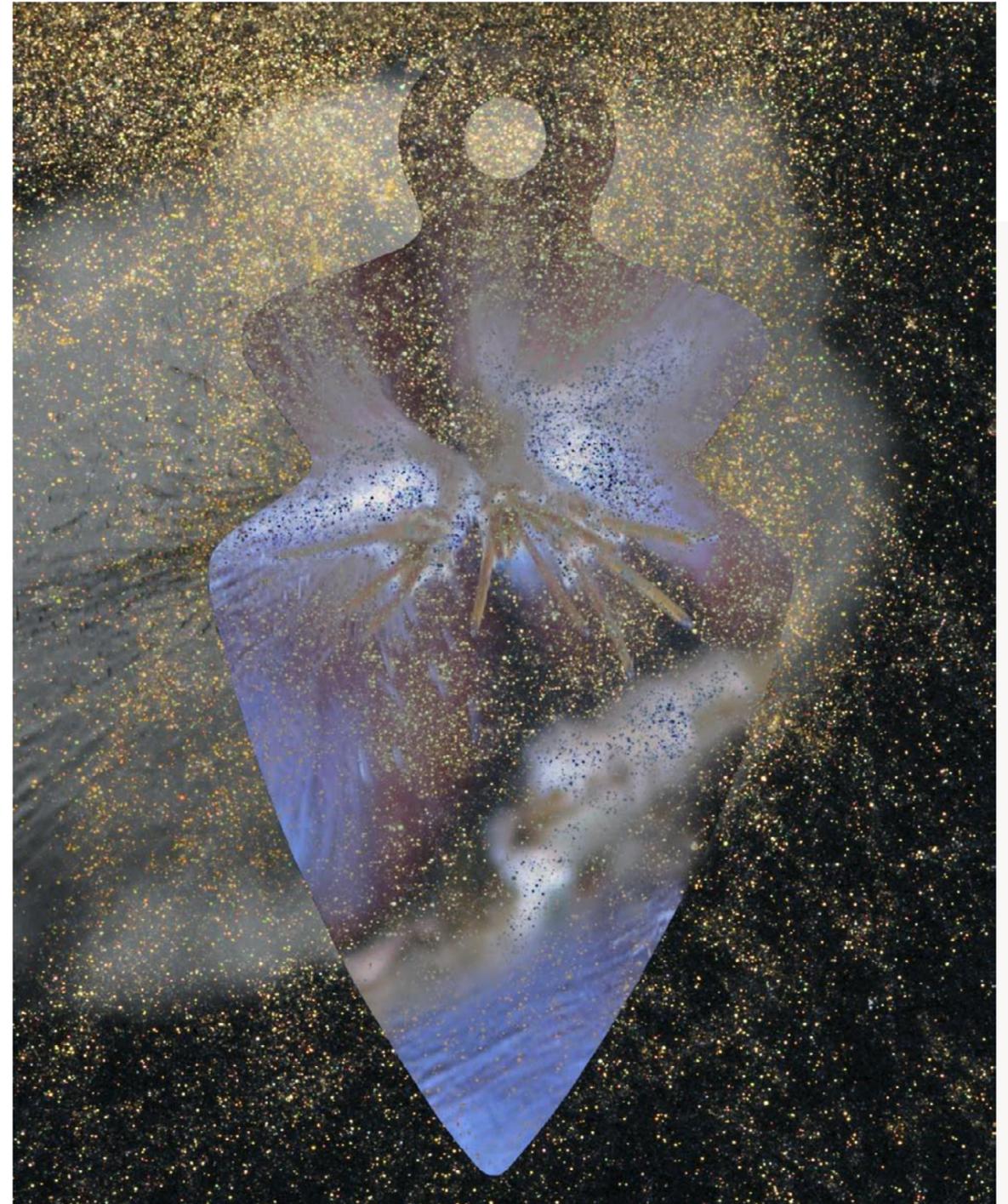
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The legacy of feminist art argues powerfully for second-wave feminist practice as the most widely influential impulse or movement in postwar contemporary art. The strategies and subjects of the feminist artists of the 1970s gave rise to complex and generative modes of art making in the fields of technology, public art, performance, and post-studio. Artist, teacher, and activist Nancy Macko participated in the making of *The Dinner Party* in 1979 and, as an artist in her early twenties, was influenced by such pioneers as Nancy Azara, Judy Chicago, Jane Kaufman, Kate Millett, and Nancy Spero. While her long-standing commitment to feminism and feminist art practice began in the early 1980s, she also sought a role in the broader community of artists through work as a curator, activist, and organizer. This impulse toward a kind of socially engaged practice has its roots in the previous decade in the fearless work of such figures as critic and curator Lucy Lippard, who turned her attention primarily to women artists in the late 1960s. Judy Chicago, with colleagues Miriam Shapiro and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, redefined pedagogy for visual artists through the establishment of the Feminist Art Program at California Institute of the Arts. Working collectively as artists and teachers with a generation of young women, they taught them to take themselves seriously and envision themselves as artists. This legacy of women as organizers holds true throughout North America, where, in the 1970s, women were largely responsible for the nascent alternative space movement and the founding of numerous nonprofit teaching and exhibition spaces. Prominent examples can be found not only in Los Angeles but also in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Toronto. Still other women, such as Suzanne Lacy, were elaborating on the model of social and performative sculpture inherited from artists such as Joseph Beuys and Allan Kaprow and staging public interventions and bringing the artistic and political messages to a wider audience.

As a child of the 1970s, I had my first clear activist experience in the early 1980s, when I joined protests again then—presidential candidate Ronald Reagan’s visit to the Scripps College campus. My own feminist consciousness was not raised until many years later, when

projects such as this survey of the work of a self-proclaimed feminist artist made me realize that my own trajectory has been deeply imprinted by the legacy of feminism and, as an art historian and curator, the radical strategies proposed by feminist art. I have often referred to cultural theorist bell hooks’s proposal for the reworking of the term “feminist movement” from static to descriptive—full of restless possibility. I find this inspiring and provocative as a way to structure my own practice as a curator. Artists and teachers such as Nancy Macko enact a kind of tireless searching and generous activity every day in their cultural and aesthetic work. To list Macko’s involvements as a cultural worker is impressive to say the least. She has led the Northern California chapter of the Women’s Caucus for Art (1981); organized numerous conferences and panels on the subject of women’s art; and curated exhibitions focusing on women artists, including solo exhibitions of work by Ruth Boerefijn, Ellen Cubit, Raisa Fastman, Barbara Howard, Brenda Luckin, and Sharon Siskin. This kind of curatorial activity as an extension of artistic practice has its genesis in the feminist art movement.

Nancy Macko’s own work comprises an ongoing analysis of the honeybee society and its parallels with the ways in which women form community. She has, for example, studied the construction of feminist utopian societies as portrayed in science fiction. In these imagined worlds, women strive to attain strength, autonomy, and freedom. The examination of the relationships between art and technology and her deployment of digital technology and mathematics in her work have allowed Macko to investigate the relationship of the rational and the organic. The current exhibition, *Hive Universe*, includes video, installation, both digital and conventional prints, and mixed-media works and is the most comprehensive examination of her art to date. Through her digital innovations and nature-inspired imagery, Macko conflates past communities and civilizations with futuristic visions of a matriarchal and feminist-inspired universe.



ABOVE AND FOLLOWING PAGES:  
*Nirvana for the Future*, 2004–6  
Digital print; edition 6  
50 × 40 in.