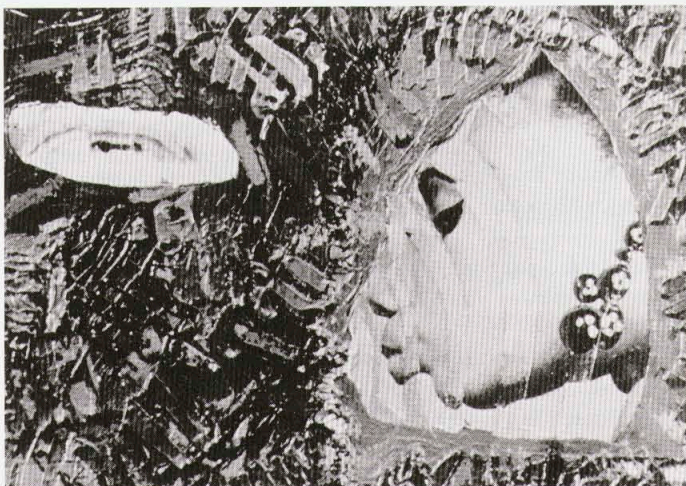


Wadsworth Atheneum
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

Howardena Pindell/MATRIX 105
March 25 - June 18, 1989



Autobiography: Earth/Eyes/Injuries, detail, 1987

Photo: D. James Dee

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Howardena Pindell/MATRIX 105

Howardena Pindell is a multi-talented artist at midcareer. During her ten years in the curatorial department of prints and illustrated books at the Museum of Modern Art, she also established an independent, distinguished reputation as an artist. She left the museum in 1979 to teach studio art at the State University of New York at Stony Brook where she is now a tenured professor.

Neither education (BFA Boston University, 1965; MFA Yale University, 1967) nor professional status protected Pindell from the narrow and hierarchical aesthetic perspective African American artists have encountered within the art world. Perhaps this is one reason Pindell has chosen to broaden her interests to the far reaches of the globe and why she has become a student of the myths and languages of many cultures. She enjoys traveling and has received major grants (e.g., Guggenheim Fellowship, 1987-88; National Endowment for the Arts Painting Fellowship, 1983, 1972; U.S./Japan Friendship Commission Creative Artists Fellowship, 1981) over the years which have allowed her to spend extensive time in East and West Africa, India, Japan, South America and Europe. These travel experiences are the inspiration for much of her work. Many examples in this MATRIX exhibition specifically incorporate the history, politics and cultures of these places.

Pindell was also one of the founders of A.I.R., the prestigious women's cooperative gallery in New York City. It was Pindell who, in reference to the phrase "artists-in-residence" and as a pun on "Jane Eyre," suggested the organization's name.

Pindell's observations on the art world found bold expression in a twelve-minute videotape which she made in 1980 entitled **Free, White and 21**. Said Pindell at about that time, "I'm not going to remain silent. I have been punished for being in the Women's Movement and for having brown skin, so I figure—shoot! It couldn't be any worse." In this tape Pindell reveals her feelings about being a "token" black woman in the Women's Movement and the white establishment. **Free, White and 21** was a sign of things to come.

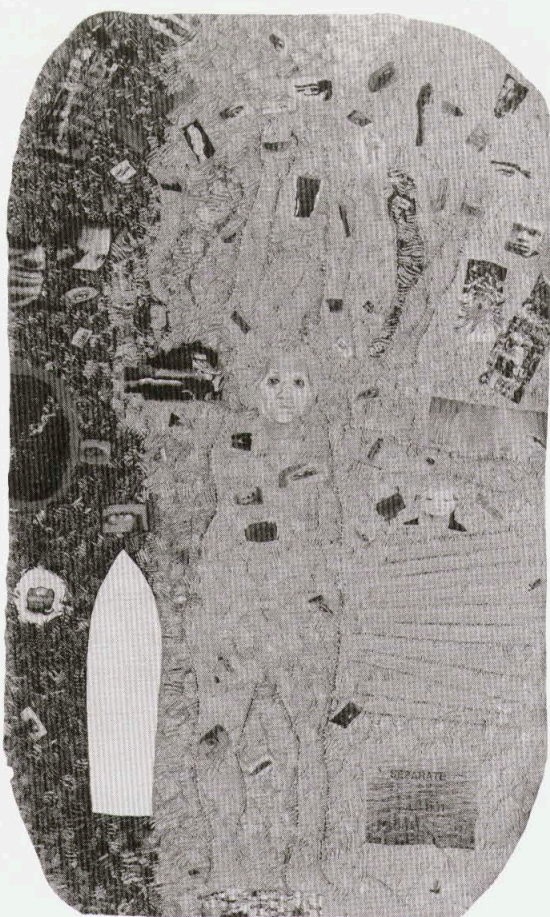
For over a decade Pindell's reputation was based on works which were predominantly abstract. Pindell's artistic vision has always reflected her intimate knowledge of materials and processes. Whether using paint, sewn canvas, paper, photography or travel postcards, she imbues each with a seductive physicality. Her works were admired for their sheer beauty, and, because Pindell was a prominent activist, her works were sometimes criticized for their apparent remoteness from the political issues of the day.

Hiroshima Disguised: Japan (1982) is an important transitional work. It combines both the compelling abstract surfaces which established Pindell's reputation along with a more direct expression of the horror and fear that she felt upon visiting Hiroshima, first in 1979 and again in 1981. The ten piece work is scattered across the wall like the islands of the Inland Sea where Pindell was staying in 1981. From a distance the glitter also suggests an aerial view. Close scrutiny reveals mutated body parts, a helicopter from Vietnam, the domed building left standing at ground zero in Hiroshima and an upside-down image of New York City. **Hiroshima Disguised** is an eloquent statement about the vulnerability of all humankind in an era of nuclear weapons.

Pindell's more recent works seem to celebrate her heightened awareness of the fertile relationships that exist between her own experiences as an African American woman, artist, teacher, world traveler and former curator and her observations about important issues at home and abroad.

Since 1986, many of Pindell's works are titled **Autobiography**. Often she has sewn into the larger pieces a life-size cutout of her own body, a cutout that she makes by tracing herself while lying flat on a canvas. Four major works featured here focus on each of the four ancient elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

Autobiography: Earth/Eyes/Injuries (1987) presents a canvas embedded with images of eyes. There is also a distinctly African profile, a turquoise skeleton and the X ray of a hand. This work refers, in part, to a traumatic automobile accident in 1979 in which Pindell was trapped in the back seat of a red Volkswagen. Fearful of the car's punctured gas tank, bystanders watched, unwilling to assist her exit. Pindell suffered hip and neck injuries, a severe concussion and partial memory loss. The eyes also convey the considerable scrutiny Pindell felt as an isolated black person attending white schools and working in a white museum. In such situations all kinds of injuries occur.



***Autobiography: Water/Ancestors
Middle Passage/Family Ghosts, 1988***

Photo: D. James Dee

During her long recovery she turned to old postcards, both those from friends and those she had collected on her travels, to help jog her memory of past events. Pindell often cut her own travel postcards into vertical strips and then replaced alternating sections with areas of in-painting. The postcards acquire a history of fragmentation and careful reconstruction, and yet, despite Pindell's impressive efforts, there remains the sense of something still missing. They become an exquisite metaphor for the diffuse and incomplete memory of past experiences.

Autobiography: Air/CS560 (1988) expresses Pindell's concerns about the double standard of Israel's "iron fist" policy towards Palestinians in the occupied territories. CS560 is a tear gas which can cause fetal abortions, allegedly used by Israel against the Palestinians. For Pindell it is also significant that CS560 is manufactured in her home state, Pennsylvania. Repetition of words such as "beaten...beaten...beaten" along the bottom and elsewhere speak of repeated assaults. If divorced from the subject, the colors themselves might be delicate and appealing. However, the surface also suggests strips of bandages and, by extension, festering wounds, physical and emotional.

Personal experience and distant culture converge in the intense **Autobiography: Fire/Sati (India)** (1986-87). *Sati* is a now-outlawed Hindu practice in which widows joined their husbands in death, ridding society of unproductive females and yielding their possessions to others. Before being placed on her husband's funeral pyre, a widow traditionally placed her handprint on a temple wall. These handprints remain widely visible today. For Pindell, this piece speaks also of her experience of being trapped in an automobile at risk of bursting into flames.

All who have become residents in this country, until recently, came by water. This was true for those immigrants who arrived by choice and for those who came in chains as cargo, the horrific Middle Passage. Pindell's own ancestry is diverse. It includes bloodlines to Africa as well as to the Seminole nation (which, Pindell is quick to point out, was the only native American group not to sign a treaty with the U.S. government), Jamaica, French Canada and Germany (both Christian and Jewish). Some of these legacies (as well as the proclivity for twins on both sides of her family) are represented in the imagery of **Autobiography: Water/Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts** (1988). At the top upper right is the image of a male model who is actually a cousin of Pindell. The emphasis is on Middle Passage, with the diagram of the slave ship on the left. In addition, the documented text of the extent of a slave owner's "rights" over a slave's wife are chillingly quoted on the surface.

The central image is a self-portrait of the artist with a ghostlike face, indirectly influenced by the make-up used in Michael Jackson's video, **Thriller**. (In 1988, Pindell worked with Jackson's family on an ambitious art auction at their home to benefit Bishop Tutu's fund for displaced persons.) Pindell first used her own image in **Free, White and 21**.

Pindell's incorporation of current events into her work is clearly evident in "**Separate But Equal**" (1987), a maquette for a larger work. The black and white painted sections are a straightforward graphic representation of the proportion of blacks to whites in South Africa's population. It is a "picture" of *apartheid*. Despite their overwhelming majority, the blacks are, by the laws of the country, kept separate (segregated) and unequal in their civil liberties and unequal in their opportunities to share the country's great wealth (diamonds, gold). The status quo is maintained through various repressive policies suggested by the aggressive frame of nails, the angry words in white vinyl letters and the bullet holes.

For over twenty years, Pindell has been an avid observer of the art world and of life in the United States, and an eager world traveler. Throughout this period she has grown toward maturity as an artist. This MATRIX exhibition is evidence that much that she has seen and thought about over this period is now finding lively and candid expression in her recent work.

Andrea Miller-Keller
Curator of Contemporary Art

NOTE: Howardena Pindell will be the featured Guest of Honor at the Saturday, April 1, 1989 Kids' Blitz party for the Hartford Public School seventh graders and their teachers and parents. Pindell will make some general introductory remarks about her own early awakenings as an artist and will be available to discuss her works with individuals in the MATRIX exhibition between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.

On Friday, March 31, 1989 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., Pindell will speak and lead a forum on "The Institutionalization of African American Art: An Artist's Personal Journey," sponsored by the Institute for Community Research, Hartford, with support of the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. For information and reservations call the ICR, 278-2044.

On Thursday, April 20, 1989 at 12 p.m. at the Hartford Art School Pindell will give an informal lecture on her work sponsored by the Art History Department at the University of Hartford with partial support from the Atheneum's MATRIX program. The public is invited. For more information, call the Hartford Art School, 243-4393.

Works in MATRIX:

Free, White and 21, 1980, twelve-minute black and white videotape. Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Hiroshima Disguised: Japan, 1982, acrylic, paper, dye, gouache, polymer-photo transfer, glitter and powder on canvas, 60" x 132" (ten parts). Collection of the artist.

Lakshmi: India, 1984, gouache, tempera, watercolor and postcards on museum board, 19" x 20". Collection of the artist.

Autobiography: Fire/Sati (India), 1986-87, acrylic, paper, polymer-photo transfer and oil stick on sewn canvas, 90" x 56". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Art: West, 1986-89, postcards, gouache and acrylic on museum board, 35" x 27" x 2". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Art: East, 1986-89, postcards, gouache and acrylic on museum board, 37" x 28" x 2". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Autobiography: Earth/Eyes/Injuries, 1987, acrylic, paper and polymer-photo transfer on sewn canvas, 88" x 78". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

"Separate But Equal", 1987, acrylic, nails, zircon, paste jewels, gold paint, vinyl type, wood caulking and silicone sealant on sewn canvas, 20 1/2" x 24" (maquette).
Collection of the artist.

Autobiography: Air/CS560, 1988, acrylic, tempera, oil stick, paper, polymer-photo transfer and vinyl type on sewn canvas, 87" x 84". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Autobiography: Water/Ancestors/Middle Passage/Family Ghosts, 1988, acrylic, tempera, cattle markers, oil stick, paper, polymer-photo transfer and vinyl type on sewn canvas, 118" x 71". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Autobiography: Bedford Stuyvesant (Brooklyn, NY, 1968), 1988, Cibachrome, acrylic and tempera on museum board, 9" x 20 1/2" x 2". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Autobiography: Egypt (Colossi of Memnon, 1974/Paris, 1973), 1988, Cibachrome, acrylic and tempera on museum board, 9" x 35" x 2". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.

Autobiography: Japan (Kanazawa, 1981), 1988, Cibachrome, acrylic and tempera on museum board, 36 1/2" x 8 1/2" x 2". Courtesy of the Liz Harris Gallery, Boston.



Howardena Pindell, 1988

Photo: Dawoud Bey

Selected One-person Exhibitions:

A.I.R. Gallery, NYC '72, '73, *Memory Series: Japan* '83; Lerner-Heller Gallery, NYC '80, '81; Franklin Furnace, NYC *Free, White and 21* '81; Monique Knowlton Gallery, NYC '81; David Heath Gallery, Atlanta, GA *Traveler's Memories: India* '85; Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL *Traveler's Memories: Japan* '85; Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand Rapids, MI, '86; Miami Dade Community College, Miami, FL '86; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NYC *Odyssey* '86; Harris/Brown Gallery, Boston, MA '86; Liz Harris Gallery, Boston, MA '89.

Selected Goup Exhibitions:

Larry Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, CT *Twenty-Six Contemporary Women Artists* '71; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Boston, MA *New American Graphic Art* '73; New York Cultural Center, NYC *Blacks: USA: 1973* '73; National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. *Self Portraits* '74; Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN *Painting and Sculpture Today* '74; Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia *The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection* (traveling show) '75; National Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris *Ninth Paris Biennale* '75; P. S. 1, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, NY *Rooms: P.S. 1* '76; Herbert Distel's *Museum of Drawers*, Bern, Switzerland (traveled extensively, including to the Wadsworth Atheneum '78) '76; A.I.R. Gallery, NYC *Dialectics of Isolation* '80; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven *Twenty Yale Alumni* '81; P. S. 1, The

Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, NY *Afro American Abstraction* (traveling exhibition) '82; Islip Museum, East Islip, NYC *Photo Sculpture* '82; 42nd Street and Broadway, NYC *Messages to the Public* sponsored by Public Art Fund, Inc. (computer animation for Times Square Spectacolor light sign) '83, re-run '84; New York State Museum, Albany *Diamonds are Forever: Artists and Writers on Baseball* '87; Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, NYC *Connection Project/Conexus* '87; Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Holyoke, MA *Prints by Contemporary American Women Artists* '87; Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, MD *Art as a Verb* '88 (traveling '89); Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA *New Art on Paper, the Hunt Manufacturing Co. Collection* '88; Lehman College Art Gallery, Bronx, NYC *Turning Point: Art and Politics* '88; Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, OH *Making Their Mark/Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-85* '89 (traveling); The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY *Traditions and Transformations* '89; The Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Snug Harbor, Staten Island, NY *Bridges and Boundaries* '89.

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"The Aesthetics of Texture in African Adornment," *Beauty by Design: The Aesthetics of African Adornment*, edited by Marie-Thérèse Brincard, The African-American Institute, (New York) 1984.

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