

# Photography '75: The Still Photography Division's "Women's Show" as an Act of Subtle Protest

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## Abstract

This paper examines a largely under-explored exhibition organized by the Still Photography Division in Ottawa in 1975, appropriately titled *Photography '75*. Featuring the works of eighty-three women photographers, the show was organized around the distinction of the year 1975 as the International Year of the Woman. Although it claimed to capture a "feminine way of seeing" and a national vision of Canadian life, this exhibition marked a significant contribution to the history of Canadian photography through its engagement with contemporary debates surrounding photography as art, and women's roles as practitioners of the medium. While the exhibition's opinions on women and photography date itself, it was successful at professionalizing women artists and contributing to collections of female photographers in the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP) and the Canadian Photography Institute (CPI) at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC).

**Keywords:** Canadian Women's Photography, Photography '75, Still Photography Division, International Year of the Woman, Canadian Women's Art History, Contemporary Canadian Photography, Suzy Lake, Lynne Cohen, Barbara Astman

In the summer of 1975, the National Film Board's Still Photography Division exhibited over 100 works by eighty-three female Canadian photographers in honour of International Year of the Woman. In a statement released regarding the exhibition, Lorraine Monk, director of the Still Photography Division, stated:

*Photography '75* will become a framework for new ideas, unorthodox approaches to the whole concept of

photography, and a challenge to examine some worn stereotypes about art, women, and the world in general. Featuring new concepts, new artists, new perspectives in traditional realization, and new formats exploring classical concerns, these are the makings of a powerful and stimulating presentation. The bringing together of 83 women photographers, each with a strong individual direction, creates new sources of vitality and understanding in photographic expression.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lorraine Monk, *Photography '75 Exhibition Pitch*, Box 5, *Photography '75 Fonds*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Monk's description of this exhibition provides insight into what the Still Photography Division was hoping to achieve by hosting a show on all female photographers. By using new and innovative approaches to photography and challenging stereotypes about art and women, this exhibition stands as an attempt to engage several shifts occurring in both art and society at large. Despite the positive reception of the exhibition and the fundamental marks it left on the collection of the Still Photography Division and the subsequent Canadian Photographic Institute, *Photography '75* was largely overshadowed by the division's many other exhibitions and glossy picture books and is rarely mentioned in the literature on photographic exhibition history in Canada. While the marginalization of this exhibition remains largely unexplored, this paper will argue that *Photography '75* is significant to both Canadian photography and feminist art history. As a product of the United Nation's declaration of 1975 as the International Year of the Woman, increased funding for cultural institutions, and the increased presence of female photographers in Canadian camera clubs, this exhibition reflects a rich moment in Canadian photographic history which saw an increase in the professionalization of women in the arts and the emergence of a more diverse national art collection.

Grounding this analysis in the social and historical context of the Canadian photography scene in 1975, this paper will begin with a discussion of the Still Photography Division's role in Canadian photographic collecting

practices and the shifts in perception around photography as an art form. Using a semiotic approach, it will then turn to the exhibition itself to explore how both the content of the show and the exhibition's design and marketing aimed for a more diverse definition of documentary photography and the ways in which female photographers may possess a distinct visual language. While the claim that female photographers have a distinct artistic style was critiqued for reifying many of the gender stereotypes around women as amateur in the photography scene at this time, *Photography '75* can ultimately be deemed successful in demonstrating the skill of female photographers and professionalizing them as artists in the national collection.

### **Photographic Collecting Practices and the Canadian Cultural Landscape**

In the 1970s, the collection of Canadian photographic heritage was distributed amongst four federal institutions. These included the National Archives of Canada which collected "hot documents," the National Gallery of Canada which collected "artistic photography," the National Film Board which collected "social and documentary photography," and the Canada Council, which interpreted and made funding decisions around these bodies.<sup>2</sup> Martha Langford states that, "the organizational principles of these institutions carved out certain values of photography and marked a delineation between expressive photography and social and documentary photography, both which were formed on the precept that a photograph could be categorized based on the intention of the maker."<sup>3</sup> Progressing alongside

<sup>2</sup> Martha Langford et al., "Imagined Communities: Putting Canadian Photographic History in its Place,"

*Journal of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 2 (2015): 307, doi:10.3138/jcs.49.2.296

<sup>3</sup> Langford et al., "Imagined Communities," 307.

these institutional shifts was a mass increase in funding at the federal and provincial level in the arts, which transformed the museum landscape in Canada during the 1970s and '80s. With more federal funding, the National Museum Policy developed and museums saw tremendous growth and better programming, with the caveat of stricter restrictions surrounding the nature of these funded activities. The purpose of this museum policy according to Anne Whitelaw "was to establish a more coherent national policy on culture and to have greater oversight over the institutions tasked with bringing culture to Canadians."<sup>4</sup> At the National Gallery, expressive photography was seen distinctly as an art form. Under the direction of Gallery Director Jane Sutherland Boggs in the 1960's, for instance, the National Gallery hired their very first curator of photographs, James Borcoman, and established a photographic collection. James Borcoman determined that this photographic collection would serve as historical context for contemporary photographers and would include examples of what he considered "high quality work which typically stressed attentiveness to materials and composition."<sup>5</sup>

The delineation between expressive photography collections and social and documentary work was divided between institutions as well, as photographs collected by Borcoman and Sutherland Boggs at the National Gallery were considered art objects and presented as such, and those collected by the Still Photography Division were exhibited in the Photo Gallery on Kent Street as social and

documentary images. As a sister institution of the National Film Board of Canada, the photographs commissioned and later collected by the Still Photography Division served a similar nation building function to its film counterpart.

The role of the Still Photography Division as a collector of Canadian social and documentary photographs can further be seen reflected in their collecting practices prior to the 1970s. At this time, the Still Photography Division served a nationalist function and was highly involved in commissioning photographs of Canadian life. These photographs, often consisting of landscapes, industrious working Canadians, children, and popular images of the Arctic were combined to produce a series of photo essays which would circulate around the country, operating as what Carol Payne refers to as "banal nationalism."<sup>6</sup> She states, "the division unobtrusively circulated sophisticated images of Canadian life to a 'middlebrow' audience, which worked to naturalize governmental attitudes about nationhood."<sup>7</sup> They also produced glossy picture books to be traded to other nations as propagandistic tools. Such works included *Canada: Year of the Land*, *Call Them Canadians*, and *Between Friends* -an elaborate publication regarding Canada-United States relations. Using these methods, the Still Photography Division presented a collection of beautiful documentary images which produced a distinct sense of Canadianism. Carol Payne similarly emphasizes that "the division served as the country's image bank, producing a governmentally endorsed portrait of Canadian society."<sup>8</sup> By understanding the context in which

<sup>4</sup> Anne Whitelaw, "The Perils of Decentralization: Federal Funding and Art Museums in Western Canada," in *Spaces and Places for Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 224.

<sup>5</sup> Whitelaw, "The Perils of Decentralization, 224.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada 1941-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Payne, *The Official Picture*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Payne, *The Official Picture*, 3.

the Photography '75 exhibition was born, one can clearly see the ways in which this exhibition was opposed to the national projects which came before it and deferred from traditional interpretations of Canadian life.

It wasn't until the mid-1960s when the division began to shift towards more expressive forms of documentation that the Still Photography Division began to incorporate the work of individual art photographers into their collection, producing a number of individual artist books and special interest projects such as *Photography '75*. Furthermore, Loraine Monk created the photo gallery on 150 Kent Street in 1967 as the first gallery in Canada devoted to exhibiting the work of living Canadian photographers. This shift did not exist without tension, however, as other institutions such as the National Gallery of Canada were already recognized and tasked with the collection of Canada's expressive photography. As Andrea Kunard states, "since its beginnings, strict delineations of photography's artistic and documentary roles have always vacillated. As the division began promoting descriptive images, it also began collecting and exhibiting photographs as contemporary art, emphasizing the interior world of the creator or artist."<sup>9</sup> Despite the Still Photography Division's symbolic separation from expressive photography, Monk worked to further the notion that photographs could simultaneously be expressive and serve a documentary function. This began a new era in both the projects and collecting practices of the Still Photography Division which emerged to celebrate contemporary photographers in ways which blurred the preconceived distinction between documentary and art photography.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Kunard, *Photography in Canada: 1960-2000* (Ottawa: Canadian Photography Institute, 2017) 13.

*Photography '75* did just that, by suggesting that photographs by women may possess a biological filter which renders their work more expressive than their male counterparts, allowing the Still Photography Division to diversify their collection while simultaneously celebrating women in the arts.

Occurring at this time in the Canadian cultural sector was the declaration of 1975 as the International Year of the Woman by the United Nations, which implicated many cultural institutions in the celebration and recognition of women in the arts. The Canadian Privy Council stated in a meeting regarding programming that year, that "one of the main objectives for Canada in International Women's Year should be to educate the public of Canada to the changing attitudes concerning women's role in society. Priority should be given to those activities designed to heighten the awareness of the people of Canada to this change and to indicate the government's support of it."<sup>10</sup> In Canada, this demarcation of the year 1975 was immersed in an already politically charged Second-Wave Feminist movement, which advocated for an increase in female bodily autonomy, control over reproductive rights, access to equal pay, and an increased intersectional approach to feminist concerns. This manifested in several ways, but in the cultural sector resulted in several exhibitions, conferences, and lectures about women's representation in the arts. Events began to be organized all over Canada at a regional level and beyond to commemorate the year including but not limited to, The Festival of Women and the Arts, lectures, presentations, symposiums, rallies, and letter writing campaigns. The

<sup>10</sup> Privy Council Minutes January 17th International Year of the Woman, Box 5, Photography '75 Fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada.

National Gallery of Canada contributed by holding inaugural exhibitions on female artists such as Joyce Weiland in 1971, and in 1975, an exhibition titled *Some Canadian Women Artists*, which celebrated the work of emerging contemporary Canadian women artists.

In the photographic arts, women were becoming increasingly involved in Canadian camera clubs and were beginning to be seen as serving an important and welcomed role in these organizations for their contributions to expressive photography.<sup>11</sup> Beginning in the early twentieth century, the camera club was a predominantly male group for amateur photographers dedicated to the promotion of amateur photography and its recognition as an art form. According to Pedersen and Phemister, “these organizations provided forums where both amateurs and professionals could meet to exchange experiences and to hear lectures on photography. They could consult photographic manuals and periodicals, use club darkrooms and workrooms, and participate in photo excursions and a variety of social events.”<sup>12</sup> While these clubs existed first as men’s clubs, women participated alongside their husbands, representing the minority in Camera clubs at the turn of the century. Pedersen and Phemister state, “while in the early decades of photography, contemporary gender stereotypes combined with the nature of the technology to limit women active participation as photographers and encourage their participation

as consumers, the later 20<sup>th</sup> century offered women increased access to the medium with the changes in accessible technology.”<sup>13</sup> While women’s place in the clubs was initially met with some marginalizing efforts, they soon became avid members of grassroots photographic institutions around the country. However, the advent of the Kodak camera in the late nineteenth-century and the targeted advertising towards women as “amateur photographers” worked to diminish women’s contribution to the field as playful, expressive and requiring little to no technical skill. According to Pedersen and Phemister, “the preliminary examination of women and photography in Ontario suggests that in the early years, women’s responses to photographic technology clearly differed from those of men and that they did so in a manner which reflected social convictions about women’s scientific and artistic abilities, women’s role in the family, women’s relationship to other women and women’s economic importance as consumers.”<sup>14</sup> What continued to distinguish female and male photographers was the expressive and artistic sensibility of women’s photography rather than pure technical ability.

What Martha Langford refers to as “the professional/amateur split” began to emerge in photographic discourse in Canada, contrasting the “technical instrumentalism of commercial photography with the amateur’s purity of aesthetic interests.”<sup>15</sup> Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson explain that professionalism in

<sup>11</sup> Diana Pedersen and Martha Phemister, “Women and Photography in Ontario, 1839-1929: A Case Study of the Interaction of Gender and Technology,” *Scientia Canadensis: Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine* 9, no.1 (1985) 43; dot:10.7202/800204.ar.

<sup>12</sup> Pedersen and Phemister, “Women and Photography in Ontario, 1839-1929,” 43.

<sup>13</sup> Pedersen and Phemister, “Women and Photography in Ontario, 1839-1929,” 27.

<sup>14</sup> Pedersen and Phemister, “Women and Photography in Ontario,” 28.

<sup>15</sup> Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, *Professionalism as a Critical Concept and Historical Process for Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), 20.

the art world came in the form of artists' societies and academies which sought to "validate artistic pursuits, advance the interests of their members, and to set aesthetic standards."<sup>16</sup> The notion that photographs produced by women were unprofessional became an unfortunate stereotype which was often reified by women's exclusions from earlier camera clubs and public displays of photography. This discourse can also be seen reflected in *Photography '75's* claims to a distinct female engagement with the photographic arts. While the exhibition attempts to celebrate women's photography, it also unintentionally participates in the reification in some of these stereotypes. Nevertheless, organizing an exhibition around a special interest group allowed the division to contribute to the dialogue surrounding women's rights in the arts in Canada, to exhibit a more diverse range of photographic practices, and to provide exposure for upcoming women artists.

### Photography '75

*Photography '75* began in 1974 with a call for art submissions to camera clubs, art schools, and women's organizations around the country. What followed was an influx of photographic works by working female artists in Canada eager to be recognized for their photographic expertise at such a pivotal moment in Canadian art and social politics. Each woman submitted ten prints and 185 were collected from a survey of eighty-three women artists. While some of the artists had engaged with the Still Photography Division in the past, and others were fresh out of art school and experimenting with new techniques that

complicated the delineation between documentary photographs and art still widely circulating in the cultural zeitgeist. Ultimately consisting of 129 black and white and thirty-three coloured photographs, the exhibition included techniques ranging from photo sculptures, and silkscreen to photo-collage and photo etching, as well as a multi-screen slide projection by Montreal photographer Janine Carreau titled "PS" which proved the most popular element of the exhibition among visitors. These elements cumulatively expressed an incredible diversity in photographic styles and techniques which both highlighted the experimental and expressive shift in photographic practice and the technical skill of the exhibited photographers.

The exhibition opened with a poem written for the International Year of the Woman by Miriam Waddington. It read, "...we are no more the face in the picture but the hand making the picture...we are carving our names in times forest of stone."<sup>17</sup> The reference to a physical carving in this last stanza makes claim to the agency of the female artist and the disruption of the established photographic canon in Canada which primarily consisted of male photographers. While the exhibition suggests that these photos render a feminine "way of seeing," the distinctions made between these images and those which preceded them are rather arbitrary. For instance, Sandra Semchuk's monochromatic, documentary images of the artist's Ukrainian heritage and Saskatchewan neighbours reflects an aesthetic sensibility and technical skill reminiscent of male photographers working before her. Using photography as a means to connect to her

<sup>16</sup> Huneault and Anderson, *Professionalism as a Critical Concept and Historical Process for Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Lorraine Monk, *The Female Eye* (Ottawa, National Film Board of Canada, 1975).

community of Meadow Lake Saskatchewan and Indigenous and Ukrainian heritage, scholars have argued that Semchuk's photographs of people in her community reflect a more personal and emotional connection to the subject rather than detached human interest stories. Some images, such as *Felix Mui and Daughter Jennifer in their Apartment, Saskatoon Saskatchewan* (1974) reflects this tendency more clearly than others. In this image, the viewer is invited into an intimate setting in close proximity to a parent and child. Rather than remaining nameless, Semchuk identifies the figures and suggests that she has a personal relationship with them. Semchuk's photographic techniques also suggest an interest in personal and collaborative engagement with her subjects and an interest in subject matter which reflects relationships between women, her relationship to the land, and her Ukrainian heritage.

Similarly, Lynne Cohen's contributions to the exhibition also maintained a monochromatic style and vernacular subject reminiscent of earlier documentary images. Her work has been described as expressive and conceptual by many scholars who refer to her earlier images featured in this show as eerie expressions of inhabited, but empty, vernacular spaces. Cohen's early photographs consist of monochromatic interiors of domestic spaces, community centres, schools, and country clubs. Their composition is striking, eerie, and off-putting. While the spaces existed in everyday life, Cohen embodied the photograph with a haunting quality which surpassed any kind of pure documentary account of Canadian life. For instance, in *Living Room, Ann Arbor Michigan* (1973), Cohen captures a corner of a suburban living room complete with a small fireplace, floral armchair, and obscure sculptural decor. While the space is not empty and contains

evidence of human inhabitants, it is unusually clean and kept, with no evidence of being "lived in." While she would go on to create much larger, coloured prints of more industrial spaces, these early photographs demonstrate Cohen's interest in mystery and theatrical aesthetics. She wavers understandably between identifying as a documentary photographer and a conceptual artist, as she expresses interest in both the materiality of photography and the limitations of the medium, as well as the tension between art and documentary photographs. The works included in the exhibition are eerie but illustrate a sincere attention to detail and skill.

Cohen and Semchuk render their environments using similar technical skill and composition to their contemporary male photographers. However, their attention to personal and intimate connections to their subjects as well as their documentary images, which waver on the conceptual, situate them in this show as demonstrating a particular female way of representing the world. While the photographs of Cohen and Semchuk both draw on the monochromatic, documentary style which dominated the previous repertoire of the Still Photography Division, the exhibit also incorporated a diverse range of experimental works which demonstrated expressive photography more overtly.

Barbara Astman, for instance, uses photo-collage as a means to draw attention to the tangible interaction she has with the photographic image. She also demonstrates a self-reflexive knowledge of the ways in which women's photography is often deemed as expressive and amateur, and subverts this notion by incorporating childlike, playful elements and highlighting women's importance as consumers of photographs. For instance, in

*Homage to Love Comics*, Astman uses mixed media and photography which engages with pop art tropes and women's craft. Jeff Mahoney states, "one of the great triumphs of Astman's art has been the apotheosis of the polaroid snapshot. She has manipulated it, enlarged it, dressed it up, stressed it as far as it would go in the darkroom, mixed it with text and other media, all in inspired ways."<sup>18</sup> *Homage to Love Comics* features two gelatin silver prints, lace, stickers, fabric, plastic, and ink and resembles comic books of the time. Her fusion of "low art and women crafts" to be included in a photography show was quite unique at this time and pushes back on the assumption that the use of a Kodak snapshot may be deemed unartistic. Andrea Kunard states, "this hybrid mix of media and techniques reflects the influence of pop art and aligns with emerging conceptual practices that were using photography as a tool for deconstructing modernist assertions of the autonomy of art."<sup>19</sup> Be Van der Heide's chosen photographs also engaged with similar themes and used the collage as a means to do so. Including crayon on photo-silkscreen, *Deux Amies* presents a stark betrayal of the monochromatic style as well and subverts the stereotype of women's photograph as playful, non-technical and non-professional.

Lastly, Suzy Lake's work *Suzy Lake as Gilles Gheerbrant* (1974), overtly makes claim to an expressive photography and also engages with gender expression and images of feminine identity. A feminist artist engaged in performance and critiques of gender identity, Lake often challenges the ways in which women are made to visually appeal to male viewers. By dressing up, wearing a fake mustache, and

scribbling over her eyes with a pen, Lake demonstrates a playfulness in the way the female figure is rendered in the photograph. She stated regarding her engagement with performance and identity in 1975, "role-playing is a daily occurrence; it can be as subtle as dressing for a special occasion, diplomacy, or inadvertently picking up someone's mannerisms" ... "our self-image is distorted by a moment's mood, environment, and recent history, which is then balanced and/or reinforced by a particular life history of selective and cumulative growth."<sup>20</sup> These images reflect an overt commentary on women's role in the arts and further challenge the notion that women artists do not exist on the same technical level as their male counterparts. The works described above illustrate the ways in which the show explored the range of photographic style, technique and subject matter being undertaken by women photographers at the time. Just as the show makes claim to a feminine way of capturing human experience, these works uphold the experimental techniques and more intimate depictions of Canadian life that these photographers rendered. By creating a show consisting exclusively of female photographers, this exhibition depicts the range and technical skill which these female photographers bring to the practice and gave them a professional space to do so. However, *Photography '75* used the distinctly female show as a way to engage their new mandate of collecting and exhibiting more diverse photographic techniques and to engage the social climate of Second Wave feminism at the time. This conceptual framework came under critique at the time for essentializing the female experience, yet the exhibition design

<sup>18</sup> Jeff Mahoney, "Barbara Astman: A Remarkable Body of Work That Never Stood Still," *The Spectator*, June 06, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Kunard, *History of Photography in Canada*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Baird, "Self-Inventions: The Photography of Suzy Lake," *Border Crossings*, September 2011.



further illustrates how this strategy worked to subvert notions of gender differences in photography by displaying the works by female photographers in the same minimal and evocative fashion as their male counterparts.

A minimalist exhibition design accompanied the expressive images in the exhibition which further illustrated the Still Photography Division's attempt to join the National Gallery of Canada in exhibiting expressive photographs. The photo gallery on Kent Street was organized in a rather obscure and closed way. Consisting of a number of different rooms and hallways, this exhibition maintained simplicity by painting all walls white and lining up the images in a linear fashion around the space. Some of the images were clustered together, but the lack of descriptive text in the space fails to explain the correlation between the clustered images. Behind each image was a simple maquette and black frame which further decontextualized the photograph. The lack of introductory text, wall labels, and tombstone information works to signify the ability for the image to speak for itself, disregarding the need for a descriptive story to be told through the photograph. The work was thus ideologically coded through the removal of contextual information and presented as evocative, expressive art rather than images intended to tell a story. The works around the room are intended to be evocative, visually stimulating and challenging, or as Monk states in her pitch for the exhibition, "conventional ways of seeing photography."<sup>21</sup> While this show remained incredibly diverse, many of the works reflected subject matter which engaged in the political and social unrest of the women's

liberation movement and it depicted the expressive capacity of the photograph to do so. While the exhibition was small, five different cities across Ontario including Belleville, Kingston, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Ottawa, Chatham, and Windsor contributed photographs to the show.

Circulating with the exhibition was its catalogue, appropriately titled *The Female Eye*. The catalogue, similar to the exhibition, consisted of one photograph per page with no tombstone information or descriptive text. In a book review of *The Female Eye*, Gary Micheal Ault states:

Titling the book *The Female Eye* was a provocative, but as it turns out, an almost aggressively annoying thing to do. Admittedly a more academic title wouldn't have had much zip. But it would be less likely to drive you mad as you try to precipitate out of the infinite variety of some quality of vision, some alternate perceptiveness, some readable hormonal texturing that might help to explain the curiously biological emphasis. Perhaps it is the book's purpose to illustrate that there is no female eye.<sup>22</sup>

The suggestion that perhaps the title is meant to be subversive and make the viewer aware of the fact that distinctions in gender in art are arbitrary is interesting, but others see the claim to a female aesthetic as highly problematic. The claims to a female way of seeing the world through the camera became a way for the Still Photography Division to exhibit expressive

fonds, National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa Ontario, Canada.

<sup>21</sup> Monk, *The Female Eye*.

<sup>22</sup> Micheal Ault, Gary. "All Cats Are Grey in the Dark Room". Book Review, 1976, Box 5, Photography '75

photography by women and to engage with International Year of the Woman and Second-Wave feminism more broadly. However, asserting a fundamental difference between female and male photographs echoed the contradictions in the women's movement at large. Lauritas claims that:

To suggest that there is a certain formal, stylistic, or thematic marker of female presence behind a film camera only means complying and accepting a certain definition of art, cinema and culture, and obligingly showing how women can and do continuously pay their tribute to society. The effort and challenge of women is to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject. Feminist work in film seems necessarily focused on those subjective limits and discursive boundaries that mark women's division as gender-specific, a division more elusive, complex and contradictory than can be conveyed in the notion of sexual difference as it is currently used.<sup>23</sup>

A review in *Books in Canada* from 1976 similarly states, "the search for what is feminine undermines the validity of the whole collection. The implications made by the collection are in fact as powerful as the statements made for the technical merit of women photographers. One does not gain any insight into that which makes the state of female a unique or joyful thing."<sup>24</sup>

What can be gleaned from these criticisms is the way in which an exhibit which claims it represents the feminine experience is bound to exclude and limit what constitutes being female. It also reifies the same boundaries and stereotypes which designated female photographers as amateur and expressive rather than technical in equal capacity to their male counterparts.

Despite the suggestive claim that these images occupy a feminine visual language inherent in the title of the catalogue and the perception of the exhibition as a whole, it is evident that this exhibition works first and foremost to professionalize these female artists and as Monk states in her exhibition pitch, "to interrupt known stereotypes about women artists."<sup>25</sup> Through the subversive, technically sophisticated and innovative works included in the show, Monk's encouraging statement, and the professional success gained by the women, one can observe that this exhibition was ultimately successful in professionalizing female photographers and diversifying the Still Photography Collection through an assertion of feminist aesthetic which aligned with the political climate that year. This professionalism, which Huneault and Anderson characterize as a complex set of boundaries which previously excluded women from photographic collections because of their lack of access to exclusive clubs and technical training, was achieved by these female photographers as they were now permitted in the exhibition on the basis that their capacity to reflect Canadian life was

<sup>23</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema," *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 163, doi: 10.2307/488343.

<sup>24</sup> All Cats Are Grey in the Dark Room book review by Gary Micheal Ault, 1976, Box 5, Photography '75

fonds, National Gallery of Canada archives Ottawa Ontario Canada.

<sup>25</sup> Lorraine Monk, Photography '75 Exhibition Pitch, Box 5, Photography '75 Fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

notably different than their male contemporaries.

*Photography '75* signifies a particular shift in Canadian photographic history where the modes of delineating the collecting mandates of national institutions became more blurred with the depleting distinction between documentary and expressive images. It also marks a time during the women's movement where female artists were becoming increasingly more professionalized and represented in national institutions for their experimental style and ability to render a different perspective towards Canadian life. While this exhibition may be critiqued for its perpetuation of stereotypes surrounding female photographers and a tendency to solidify stark gender categories, the inclusion of these artists assisted in the professionalization of women in the arts and broke down some of the preconceived stereotypes about women artists by highlighting the diversity in female photographic practice ranging from photo collage and drawings, to monochromatic pictorialist photographs.

While this exhibition has been largely overshadowed by the division's flashier projects, it can be seen as significant for its exploration of an area of photography which shifted national collecting practices and advanced the acceptance and professionalization of female photographers in Canada. The photographs included in the exhibition also went on ultimately to be collected by the division, and therefore to the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, which subsequently became the Canadian Photography Institute (CPI) collection at the National Gallery of Canada. Ultimately,

despite its criticisms, *Photography '75* was able to, as Monk had hoped, "examine some worn stereotypes about art, women, and the world in general."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lorraine Monk, *Photography '75 Exhibition Pitch*, Box 5, *Photography '75 Fonds*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

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