

Phoebe Farris

Like Dr. Marantz I also get confused, exasperated, and at times annoyed with the entire spectrum of terms such as *multicultural art*, *multiculturalism*, *culture*, *multicultural education*, and *multicultural artists*. *Culture*, *Art*, and *Multi* are mixed together in various combinations to suit writers, educators, and artists who are competing for various funds/grants . . . so aptly described by Marantz as "another faddish educational tidal wave, one that has more to do with politics and personal power grabbing than sound education."

But my disillusionment has a slightly different origin, concern, and theoretical viewpoint so I will temporarily digress from Marantz's essay and give the reader the Phoebe Farris version of the multicultural art *problem-controversy*?

One can ask the question, "Why is it necessary as we approach the millennium to continue writing essays about multicultural art, multicultural artists, artists of color, etc., if postmodernism, poststructuralism, and feminism have supposedly *liberated* academia, art, and society as a whole from the rigid boundaries of race, sex, class, and gender?" A brief overview of affirmative action and multiculturalism as they apply to the artwork is needed to answer that question.

Affirmative action policies were enacted in the corporate world, which includes the art world, and in academia in a temporary period of a liberal reform that sought to increase *minority* access to the middle class and to repress more radical *minority* voices such as the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, and AIM (American Indian Movement). It was during this initial phase of affirmative action that African American, Latino, Native American, Asian American, and Women's Studies Programs proliferated in academia. During the 1980s affirmative action was watered down to a superficial version of multiculturalism. As the term *multicultural* became more mainstream, its initial purpose as a cultural expression of affirmative action was lost and multiculturalism was co-opted as white educational and cultural institutions sought to make profits by securing grants to host so-called multicultural art exhibits, symposia, and artist/scholar residencies. The definition of *multicultural populations* expanded from minority/people of color to include women (often white), gays/lesbians, and the physically disabled/challenged, among others, when institutions realized that huge profits could be reaped by attaching the term *multicultural* to every conceivable category. This is not to slight the real needs and issues affecting women of all races, gays/lesbians, and the physically challenged—but to point out how capitalism seeks to profit from disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

Back to my original question, "Why is it necessary to continue writing about multicultural art as we approach the millennium?" The answer: Racism (and sexism) are alive and well in the art world. Mainstream art exhibits, art criticism, and art history are still not fully integrated. My challenge is for the art establishment to go beyond the tokenism of black art exhibits in February (Black History

Month), Native American exhibits in November in conjunction with Thanksgiving, women's exhibits in March (Women's History Month), and nonWestern art chapters at the end of the book (back of the bus).

Back to Ken Marantz and his version of the "culture wars." I like his suggestion of incorporating picturebooks to achieve multicultural art education goals and must confess that as my daughter made the transitions from childhood to adulthood I stopped reading picturebooks. Now that I've finished this essay I am on my way to the bookstore to look for *Spirit of the People*, *Animal Dreaming*, *The Hatseller and the Monkeys*, and *Tibet Through the Red Box*.