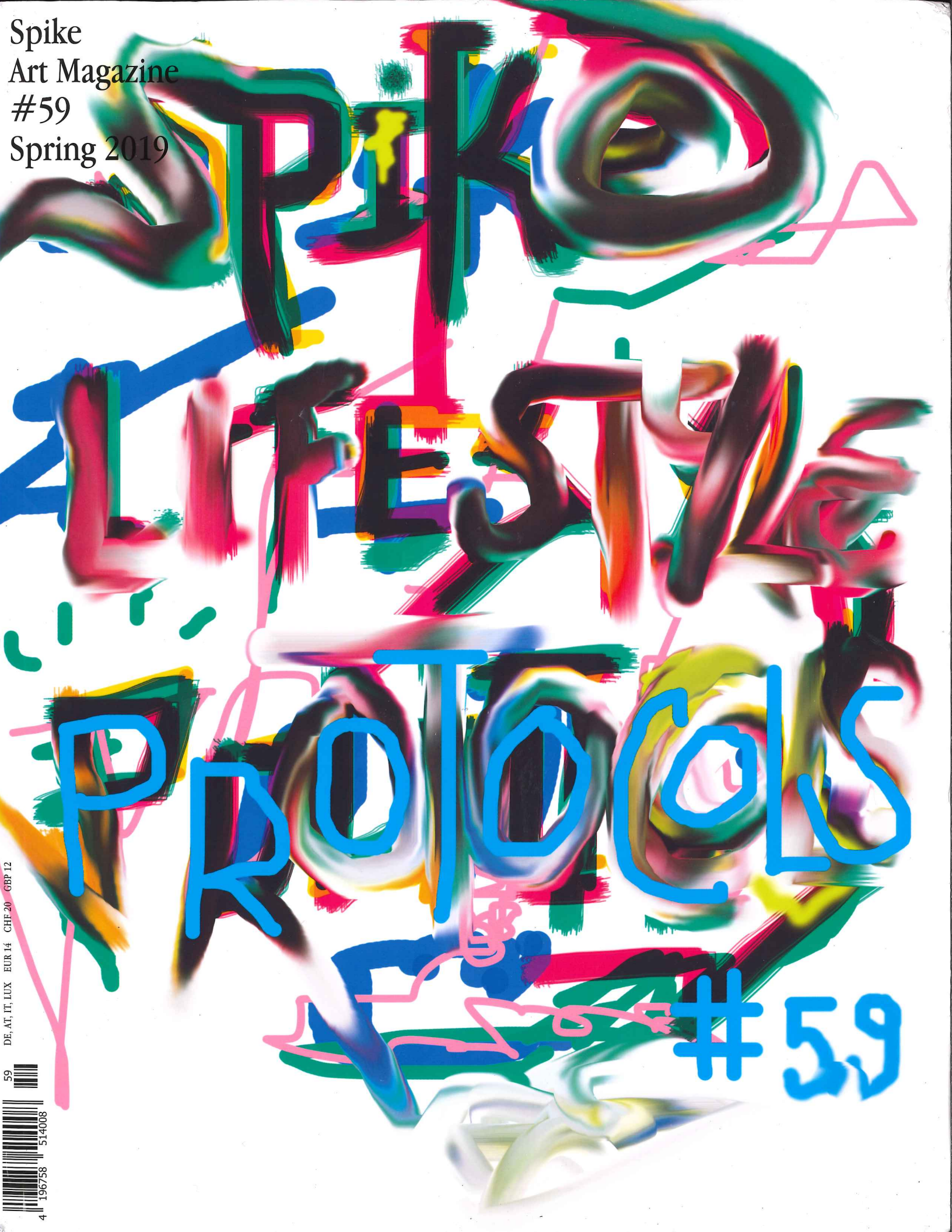


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RIDGEFIELD, CT

Harmony Hammond "Material Witness, Five Decades of Art"

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum
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For nearly fifty years, Harmony Hammond has employed abstraction as a means of dissension to give voice not only to women as artists but also to the maligned history of lesbians in America, yet she has long lurked in the shadows of institutional recognition. Hammond was one of twenty women artists who, in 1972, together founded A.I.R. Gallery, a modern-day Salon des Refusés and the incubator for radicals such as Judith Bernstein, Agnes Denes, Nancy Spero, and Ana Mendieta – all of whom, like Hammond, had to wait until their twilight (or in some cases, posthumous) years to be celebrated. For Hammond, this celebration has come at age seventy-five in the form of her first survey exhibition, hosted by the small but

mighty Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in the heart of New England.

The show is introduced via a lobby installation of Hammond's *Kong* (1981), a paradigm of the artist's beloved wrapped sculptures. These works are built up from found armatures, which are then afforded a plump, flesh-like surface through materials such as cloth, acrylic rubber, gesso, and wax. For *Kong*, this skin was stained with charcoal powder and a gentle smattering of glitter, leaving the work to resemble a meaty black claw.

Hammond's work is then positioned in sparse, variegated clusters, with the first of five rooms presenting a group whose primary association is the source of their material components. The sculpture-cum-paintings are largely constructed from straw and steel scraps, which the artist foraged from locations near her home and studio in Galisteo, New Mexico – an isolated desert town that was also the adopted residence of

Agnes Martin. The most striking work here is an untitled diptych from 1995 in which straw is smoothed on top of a vast canvas. A narrow slit forces its way between the two abutted planes, its presence asserted by smears of red paint. Beyond the overt symbolism of menstruation, a wall text makes it known that Hammond interprets the crevice as further representing "a violent rupture, referring to the exploitation of both land and the gendered body".

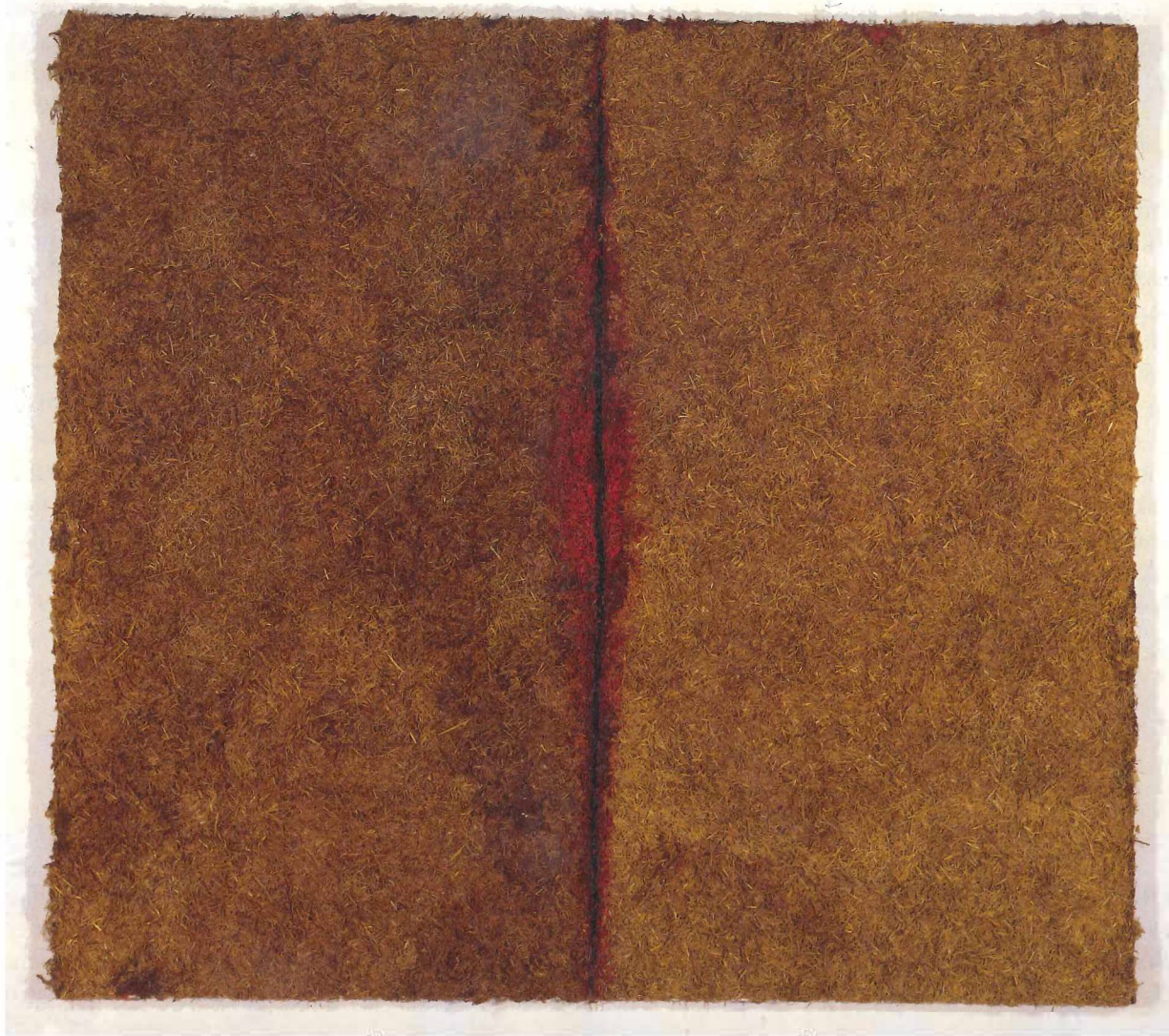
Gender stereotypes are both embraced and subverted in Hammond's work. One clear demonstration of this is found in the artist's "Floorpieces" (1973), a series of spiral carpets constructed from fabric scraps. The works allude to the iconoclastic gestures of Carl Andre, while championing the traditional women's work of weaving. However, the manipulation of gendered tropes doesn't end here, as Hammond teases the work through a queer lens with her use of a braiding method of weaving, intended to



Harmony Hammond
Floorpiece VI, 1973
Acrylic on fabric, diameter 165 cm

RIDGEFIELD, CT

Photo: Herbert Lotz



Harmony Hammond, *Untitled*, 1995
Straw, acrylic, oil on canvas,
188 x 208 cm

represent two women in coital embrace.

In yet another antagonistic gesture to the macho Minimalists, Hammond champions the power of the monochrome not for its ability to claim the autonomy of the pictorial field, but as the ultimate representative of an other through which to consider the reciprocal relation of objects (and moreover, materials) to the body. A series of ochre and vermilion canvases from recent years are constructed from repurposed tatami

mats, sourced from the dōjō where Hammond has trained for over thirty years in the Japanese martial art form of Aikido. These six- to eight-foot long canvases are doused in pigments and then layered with the belts and harnesses which are used to secure the mats in place. The yonic site can be read into the crevices of the belt's grommets which are laced across the surface, providing further index of the relation between the painting and the female self.

In these works, and throughout this exhibition, Hammond's advocacy for resistance and female strength in life and art is a message conveyed with both ferocity and grace. As she wrote in her book *Wrappings: Essays on Feminism, Art and the Martial Arts* (1984), "The pieces are defensive, protective, manipulative ... I want my work to demand your attention because I can get it no other way. Is this not part of my woman's madness?"

Ariella Wolens