

Miriam Schapiro



- **Born:** Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1923
- **Studied:** Bachelor of Arts in 1945, a Master of Arts in 1946 and a Master of Fine Arts in 1949 from the University of Iowa, Iowa City.
- **Known for:** Feminist imagery and icons in painting, printmaking, collage, “femmeage”
- **Leader/Founder:** Feminist Art movement (1960s-1970s), Pattern and Decoration art movement (1970s-1980s), New York Feminist Art Institute (1970s-1990s) Heresies Collective and *Heresies* magazine (1970s-1990s)
- **First female** professor at California Institute of the Arts, later became Dean
- **First artist** recognized for using computers to aid in the development of her work
- **Established** Feminist Art program and *Woman House* at Cal Arts with Judy Chicago in 1972

Born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1923, Miriam Schapiro was an influential printmaker, painter, sculptor and pioneer of the Feminist Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Her interest in fabric and sewing laid the foundation of the Pattern and Decoration (P & D) art movement. Blurring the lines between fine art and craft, she incorporated elements related to domesticated craft and imagery associated with women and femininity into her work, which raised awareness of the female identity in contemporary society through art.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Schapiro collaborated with print workshops in the Tampa Bay area, including Graphicstudio at the University of South Florida, Julio Juristo of Topaz Editions and Berghoff-Cowden Editions. Schapiro produced this series of screenprints in collaboration with Berghoff-Cowden Editions, a women-owned screenprinting workshop located in New Port Richey, Florida.

Miriam Schapiro’s father was an artist and taught her drawing at age 6. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in 1945, a Master of Arts in 1946 and a Master of Fine Arts in 1949 from the University of Iowa, Iowa City. She married artist Paul Brach and they moved to New York City in 1951 where they became immersed in the Abstract Expressionist art movement throughout the 1950s. Schapiro was struggling to find her identity and place as an artist and felt conflicted between being a mother and having the freedom to create and to be taken seriously in the male-dominated art scene of the 1950s.

In 1960, she transitioned away from abstract expressionism and looked for maternal symbols to unify her own roles as a woman. A turning point in 1964, she and her husband worked at the Tamarind Lithography

Workshop, where she experimented with Josef Albers' Color-Aid papers and collage, making shrines with geometric forms and female symbols, such as egg, womb, mirror and house. In 1967, Schapiro moved to San Diego to teach at the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts) as the school's only female faculty member and was later appointed the first Dean of the program. Working with a physicist who developed computer programs to plot her drawings, she was the first artist to use the computer as a creative instrument to design and develop her work.

By the 1970s, Schapiro established the Feminist Art Program at Cal Arts, in Valencia, with Judy Chicago and they created *Woman House* in 1972, a feminist art installation and performance space in an old 17-room house in Hollywood. The program addressed problems in the arts from an institutional position and focused on the expansion of a female environment in Downtown, Los Angeles. Schapiro started to develop a collage style using fabrics she called "femmages." In 1974, she moved back to New York and collaborated with Robert Zakanitch to form Patterns and Decorations Group, which became a popular art movement in the 1970s and 1980s. She was a founding member of the New York Feminist Art Institute, the Heresies Collective and *Heresies* magazine, a publication dedicated to the diversity, dialogue, and feminist critique of art and politics. In the early 1990's Frida Kahlo was the centerpiece of her "conservatory" arts and crafts and presentation series, representing Frida as a goddess.

Schapiro's works are held in numerous museum collections including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Jewish Museum (New York), the National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Her awards include the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement from the College Art Association and a 1987 Guggenheim Fellowship. Schapiro was awarded Honorary Doctorate degrees from the College of Wooster, Wooster, OH (1983), California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, CA (1989), Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis, MN (1994) and Lawrence University, Appleton, WI (1994).