



(l. to r.) Yvonne Gaudelius and Mary Wyrick present Elizabeth Garber with The Mary J. Rouse Award.

**Glimpses of Past, Present, and Future  
given on acceptance of  
the Mary Rouse Award  
4 April, 1993  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Elizabeth Garber**

this talk is dedicated to my Mom, who was on my  
mind as I wrote this  
she died a year ago

As the individuals who have previously accepted this award, persons I have held in high esteem, I am honored and humbled to now accept the Mary Rouse Award. Mary Rouse made energetic contributions to our field early in her career and seems to have been tremendously respected by those who worked with her, students and colleagues alike. I recognize other individuals who are equally worthy of the recognition the Rouse Award makes and am humbled before their accomplishments. I have been fortunate in the opportunities afforded me in art education and I am grateful to the many people who have helped me along the way.

In remembering and reviewing past acceptance talks for the Rouse Award, I found a mixture of professional lives and personal histories. On this precedent, I organized my comments around "past," "present," and "future." I found writing about myself one of the hardest writing tasks I have undertaken (probably the hardest). I found myself adverse to repeating to you only the details or facts of a personal history or even a professional history. So what I have

done is organize a mixture of those facts with personal vignettes and the poetry and clips of prose that others have written but I have felt at the core of who I am and who I aspire to be.

**Long Past**

Life began in Washington, D.C. with two long-married people who had given up any hope of children: I was the first of two surprises. They both worked; I enjoyed the freedom after school presented. I would quickly finish my homework so that I might have uninterrupted time alone. What did I do with it? Mostly climbed trees and explored the patches of woods around a reservoir. I was what you would call a "tomboy," interested in the woods, bugs, snakes, small animals. What about art, you might ask? I did not do much on my own except the doodles that many children compile. I rather like this—perhaps because it breaks with ideas of the artist as born. The exceptions to this were actually great influences on my later life. When I was about eight, I took a pottery class in the basement of an old school. I remember vividly the smell of the clay, making a slab bowl in a sling mold, watching a lump of clay on the wheel spinning beneath my nose. It was these memories that brought me back to clay at 21, beginning a career in ceramics and later photography that is part of what brought me to art education. Another experience was art in junior high school. There I met my best friend, Anne Reuss. Anne and I had similar drawing interests and outdoor interests (she taught me to sail and to canoe during summers I visited her in Wisconsin). But of greater influence was that Anne introduced me to my first peace rallies (her older sister and brother were active in the early peace movement in Milwaukee), to campaigning for Lyndon Johnson, to an awareness of the political world that she knew through her parents and these older siblings. From knowing her I reached out to Alabama, to Washington in 1968, to teaching ghetto kids to read. My parents trusted me with enormous freedoms.

These words are spoken by Pilar, a teenage artist in Cristina Garcia's recent novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*. It is a favorite quote for me because it bluntly re-prioritizes history and what is valued as knowledge and affirms the importance of what our maternal forbearers teach us and our own experiences. An enormously influential person on my life was and continues to be my grandmother. When I was growing up, my family lived in proximity to her home and I chose to spend many days with her from the time I was in my late teens until she died nine years ago. Her room was filled with plants and the smell of china paints. She was wise, patient, had an enormous amount of faith (both worldly and spiritual), and under all her gentleness she was enormously strong. In terms of deeds, my grandmother raised five children and was a recognized storyteller and teacher of young children. She was my first teacher of humble women's arts. Passages written by Alice

Walker and Helena Maria Viramontes capture part of her legacy to me and to others who knew her. From Walker,

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release . . . Whatever she planted grew as if by magic . . . And I remember people coming to my mother's [and grandmother's] yard to be given cuttings from her flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden. A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity . . . Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect for the possibilities - and the will to grasp them 2

And from Viramontes

I'd gladly go help Abuelita [Granny] plant her wild lilies or jasmine or heliotrope or cilantro or hierbabuena in red Hills Brothers cans. Abuelita would wait for me at the top step of her porch holding a hammer and nail and empty coffee cans. And although we hardly spoke, hardly looked at each other as we worked over root transplants, I always felt her gray eye on me. It made me feel, in a strange sort of way, safe and guarded and not alone. Like God was supposed to make you feel.3

I think many women have experienced their first mentorship through a grandmother, mother, or another elder female. I believed in my grandmother as I have believed in few people.4

In seventh grade, I cast my presidential class vote for Margaret Chase. I was the only person to do so. My teacher, a woman, liked the idea. So did my mother.

#### My Middle Past

is characterized by three things. First, I moved to the desert. I remember looking for vast stretches of unvegetated sand. The Sonoran desert is, by comparison, lush. But there is a sense of expansiveness in the land and sky that is very spiritual for me, an expansiveness I seek now in literature and art. I am drawn to people and cultures who hold a connection to these forces. This connection is in passages written by Elena Poniatowska and Gloria Anzaldua that I quote to you

so that you may perhaps experience it also. Poniatowska writes:

I arrived in an enormous plain surrounded by mountains and live volcanoes, traversed by buzzards that would circle around and then suddenly swoop down to feed off the carcass of some skinny donkey. A land of corn, hard, yellow corn, like large teeth, that women grind on a stone into tortillas.5

Anzaldua writes:

She watches the white sky dwarf the chaparral, the cattle and horses, the house, and the portal with the guests moving under it. The sun dominates the land. Always. La tierra. Everywhere, punctuated here and there with mesquite thickets and clumps of prickly pear . . . she hears the cackle of the hens clucking over their finds, a fat earthworm or dry grass seeds. On the highest branch of The Mesquite a mockingbird imitates another bird's trill. Under her, the hard roundness of the mesquite post seems an appendage of herself, a fifth limb, one that's also part of the corral, the corral that's part of the land.6

My father leaves me with these parting words: "Your mother has more degrees than I do and is probably a lot smarter (my mother was a mathematician employed by the government). But she didn't work for a few years when you kids were born and then I'm a man so I might get paid more anyway."

Studying at the University of Arizona, I switched my major to Spanish because of the connections I felt with my newly found culture. I spent time in Mexico. After college, I took up art properly, met Roy Pearson, my partner, earned an M.F.A., spent years making art and a meager living through gallery and craft fair sales. My art was sculptural, with the salable objects raku pots with paintings on them of women or women and men together. It was on these that I began working out my experiences as a woman and my ideas about womanhood. During these years, we also taught art and kids, drove a school bus, lived on a 27,000 acre ranch, and tended a 3/4 acre garden.

I also found feminism proper, women's performance art, photography, actions with other women students (our professors, almost all men, typically encouraged the men in our classes and tolerated the women). I was finding a voice for my frustrations through the work of poets such as Susan Griffin: I was finding actions as well, and new ways of thinking. Do you remember this passage written by John Perreault?

"Worker-artist" is a term I use to indicate artists who support themselves for years, even for a lifetime, by non art work: waitress-artists, cabby-artists, carpenter-artists, clerk-artists, book-keeper artists. Given the economics of survival, women artists, like minority artists and working-class male artists, are almost always worker-artists. None of the artists in these categories is considered an art professional . . . To make matters worse, husband servicing, house-keeping, and child-rearing are not considered legitimate work . . . We must redefine or discard the common definition of the professional artist . . . My suggestion, though it risks ridding art of snobbery and false glamour, is to allow worker-artists into the charmed circle, without penalty . . . I would go further . . . I might even suggest we consider [making a living from your art] a stigma. Making a living off your art is either a matter of luck or the result of hucksterism and/ or the artist's bowing to the market.<sup>8</sup>

I love the essay this passage comes from because in it, Perreault restructures the art world or at least the criteria for an "important" artist. Writings like Perreault's and Griffin's and support I received from peers and the four women I put on my M.F.A. committee to balance the sexism of the designated adviser gave sustenance. I began to think of my many roles, my eclecticism, as texture, not liability.

By this time, Roy and I had two of our three daughters, Erin and Greta. In the mid- 1980s, we left Arizona for Ohio State and entered the Ph.D. program. There I found a faculty engaged with the field and the future, people such as Ken Marantz, Kathy Desmond Easter, Terry Barrett, and Judith Koroscik who willingly gave me the mentoring I so desired. I am indebted to each of these people for their care and wisdom. Each gave me very different and valuable understandings. Ken prodded, challenged, then listened. We spend literally hundreds of hours in his book-lined office or his back yard, grappling with questions as large as the reformation of teaching and as informal as the year's crop of vegetables. I am fortunate to be part of his extended family. After an initial period of questioning our union (I chose Kathy as my advisor before I began coursework at Ohio State), Kathy met with me almost weekly for four years, got me to try new things (including co-administration of a Museum competition), patiently tended my path through art criticism from crafts to photography to women's issues. In the end, it was her encouragement and confidence in me that helped

me see I *had* to pursue feminism even in my scholarship because it was where my convictions and intensity lay. With Terry, I took my first formal criticism courses—and the best criticism courses in art. He also offered me two important opportunities to work with him on editing *Columbus Art* and the *Arts Education Review of Books* and he offered me friendship. Judith welcomed my philosophically-oriented mind into her experimental study of the art understandings of children of multicultural backgrounds. It was her study, but she worked with me as both mentor and collaborator, seeking out my ideas as contributions. Ken maintains half the doctoral experience is student peers. At Ohio State, Roy and I also found strong camaraderie, both intellectual and social, in our peers. We formed bonds I believe will sustain the years. At Ohio State, I assimilated the potential of education.

Roy and I have many times been asked how at once we were parents (our third child, Johannah, was born in the midst of our sojourn in Ohio), workers, and graduate students. I must foremost advocate the importance of quality day care. As a couple, we weathered difficult times, yet we stuck together. Roy is my friend as well as my lover and the dad of the family. Our intellectual lives have and continue to feed each other's. We knew we still had a much easier life than half the world.

#### Present

Mary Helen Washington described her first semester of teaching at a new university this way:

know who was an ally and who was to be avoided.<sup>9</sup>

I identify my first year at Penn State in this passage. Roy had left to study at Teacher's College. Erin, my oldest daughter, missed her best friends so much she cried every night. Johannah, who was just two and not able to sort through the multiple changes in her life, screamed or was belligerent from the moment she came home from daycare until I deposited her back. I felt alone, as though "I had been dropped on an alien planet." <sup>10</sup> I made a series of drawings of myself, being successively stuffed into a rigid container. Thank you, Marge Wilson, for being my friend that first year.

Things have grown steadily since then. At Penn State, I have found an intellectual home and people excited about ideas, about contemporary art and the potential of education. I found the Women's Studies Program during my first semester at Penn State and in 1991 was granted a joint appointment. In Women's Studies I have particularly enjoyed interdisciplinary exchanges and support.

I have come to know our faculty in art education and appreciate them as colleagues. I am continually challenged and inspired by our vital, active students. I have learned tremendously from them and feel

privileged to work and to share friendships with them. At this point, we have a strong community of art educators at Penn State. I am closer to balancing research, teaching, home life, and interior life. Or at least there are periods of calm seas. But I hope not to settle down.

When I left Ohio State, Kathy told me some enormous percentage of PhDs do not continue researching the area of their dissertations. With characteristic humor, she added that I probably would. I liked that. I have continued with my concerns about women and my commitment to feminism. I still hold firmly to the idea of multiple feminisms and the need to understand activist and social roots of feminisms in art. I am concerned that backlash is on the increase. More than ever, women and feminists are threatened with losing the rights and equalities we have gained and particularly the few social changes for which we have fought. I continue to look for ways to reach out to others and to concerns I have.

A second reflection offered me when I left Ohio State came from Pat Stuhr. She thought it only a matter of time until I connected with the issues and concerns of multiethnic groups. The extension in my work came rather naturally. Almost twenty years earlier I had formed a connection with the peoples, land, and cultures of the southwest and Mexico. I have never accepted the claims of an increasingly small contingent of feminists that women's issues are more important than those of other disadvantaged groups. With Brent Wilson's encouragement to overcome my initial hesitancy to tread with the scholarship of African-Americans and Chicanos, I was able to connect with the broad convictions about equality and social change that I had acted on in my teens and twenties. I can't put down the writings of Gloria Anzaldua, Norma Alarcon, Ramon Saldivar, Guillermo GomezPena, Helena Viramontes—and many other Chicano writers. Somehow I connect with them. Their work in art, cultural studies, and literature has extreme importance, in my mind, to contemporary education, to the framing of narrative and identity in education that is now being investigated by some curriculum theorists.

#### Suenos or, I hope, the Future

As most aspiring scholars in our field, I continue to want to develop as a scholar and intellectual, making some helpful contributions to art education (or less modestly, changing the world and the field). I remain a somewhat frustrated activist and want to find more and better ways my activist nature can contribute to change in education. I identify with a character in Cristina Garcia's novel, "griev[ing] in [my] dreams for lost children, for the prostitutes in India, for the women raped in Havana last night. Their faces stare at [me], plaintive.11 I want a green world, a world of equality and respect for all variations of humans, a world without poverty, a world based on human and earth values

and not economic riches and power over. So in part, *alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro*, I look forward to the day when I become the liberated figure imagined by Gina Valdes and Gloria Anzaldua: She goes through her backpack, keeps her journal and address book, throws away the muni-bart metromaps. The coins are heavy and they go next, then the greenbacks flutter through the air. She keeps her knife, can opener and eyebrow pencil. She puts bones, pieces of bark, *hierbas*, eagle feather, snake-skin, tape recorder, the rattle and drum in her pack and she sets out to become the complete *tolteca*. 13

I figure this will take me until I am 100—if I can do it at all. My life to this point has been a process of becoming. I hope it will continue to be so. I am grateful to Yvonne Gaudelius and Mary Wyrick, two exceptional people, for their faith, support, and energies in nominating me.

1 Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 28.

2 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (San Diego & New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983), 233 & 241-242.

3 Helena Viramontes, "The Moths," in Viramontes', *The Moths and Other Stories* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1985), 24.

4 My friend and art educator Alice Schwartz (who received the June King McFee Award in April 1993) reminds me in many ways of my grandmother.

5 Elena Poniatowska, "A Question Mark Engraved on my Eyelids," p. 83.

6 Gloria Anzaldua, "El Paisano Is a Bird of Good Omen," in Alma Gomez, Cherrie Moraga, & Mariana Romo-Carmona, *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983), 153.

7 Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978), 38, 46.

8 John Perreault, "Women Artists Are Also Worker-Artists," *Village Voice Arts Supplement*, (October 6, 1987, 12-13.

9 Mary Helen Washington, "How racial differences helped us discover our common grounds," 221.

10 Washington, 224.

11 Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*, 82.

12 Anzaldua, 77. Loose translation: "I walk between two worlds, three, four, my head hums with contradictions, I am pulled or decline northward by all the voices that I simultaneously hear.

13 Gina Valdes, *Puentes y Fronteras: Coplas Chicanas* (Los Angeles, CA: Castle Lithograph, 1982), 2. Cited in Anzaldua, 82.

