WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?

A feature documentary directed by Pamela Tanner Boll and co-directed and edited by Nancy C. Kennedy

From the producing team, that won an Academy Award for Born Into Brothels, comes WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?, a film that examines some of the most pressing issues of our time: parenting and work, partnering and independence, economics and art.

The film follows five women artists as they navigate the economic, psychological, and spiritual challenges of making work outside the elite art world. From Hawaii’s Big Island to the suburbs of Ohio, from New York City to the deserts of New Mexico, we watch as these women—ranging in age from 27 to 65—fight to honor their vision and their families every day.

Interviews with experts like Riane Eisler (The Chalice and the Blade), Maura Reilly (Sackler Center for Feminist Art-Brooklyn Museum) and the Guerrilla Girls add a cultural context for these women’s uplifting journeys. It is not accolades they seek; it’s simply the radical opportunity to live whole.

Pamela Tanner Boll co-executive produced the Academy award-winning film, Born into Brothels: The Kids of Calcutta's Red Light District. She is currently producing the film projects: Global Moms; Life on the Edge: True Stories of Doctors Without Borders; 9/12: From Chaos to Community; Kashmir; and In a Dream.

Nancy C. Kennedy edited the Sundance Grand Jury winner Why We Fight (2005) and Sundance winners Thank You and Goodnight and Riding the Rails. She also co-directed and edited Bluegrass Journey and Who’s On First.

Running Time: 82 mins
Shooting Format: HDCAM
Screening Format: HD, Digibeta, Beta SP
Theatrical Opening: New York City, Angelika Film Center, Oct 17, 2008
Website/trailer/downloadable press kit: www.whodoesshethinksheis.net

Mystic Artists Film Productions
32 Everett Avenue, Winchester, Massachusetts, 01890
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SYNOPSIS

From the producing team, that won an Academy Award for *Born Into Brothels*, comes WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?, a film that examines some of the most pressing issues of our time: parenting and work, partnering and independence, economics and art.

The film follows five women artists as they navigate the economic, psychological, and spiritual challenges of making work outside the elite art world. From Hawaii’s Big Island to the suburbs of Ohio, from New York City to the deserts of New Mexico, we watch as these women—ranging in age from 27 to 65—fight to honor their vision and their families every day.

“(This film) is not about being a woman or being a woman artist but rather how to be a human, how to find your true place in life.”

*Jean M Murphy*  
*Wellesley Centers for Women*

Interviews with experts like Riane Eisler (*The Chalice and the Blade*), Maura Reilly (Sackler Center for Feminist Art-Brooklyn Museum) and the Guerrilla Girls add a cultural context for these women’s uplifting journeys. It is not accolades they seek; it’s simply the radical opportunity to live whole.

“The women have a heroism that we don’t see in our society anymore. (The film) awakens an advocate in me. I wanted to march on Capitol Hill!”

*Jessie Dill Cousins*  
*Wellesley Centers for Women*
WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE FILM

“Pamela Boll's documentary is a call to arms: Rise up, ladies, with those chisels and paintbrushes and pens!”

Robert Wilonsky
The Village Voice

“…an engaging documentary about the struggle to create art while nurturing life.”

Jeannette Catsoulis
The New York Times

“Can women follow their artistic instincts and still function as wives and mothers? Pamela Tanner Boll's articulate documentary answers that question with a qualified "Yes.”

V.A. Musetto
The New York Post

“Who Does She Think She Is? provides a nuanced look at the sacrifices and challenges facing female artists who become mothers. The stories of the diverse artists profiled in the film mirror those of many professional women — they struggle with periods of not making art; they watch their marriages fail when their commitment to their artistic talent doesn’t mesh with a partner’s vision of a wife; they do work they don’t really want to do to stay afloat financially.”

Marci Alboher
Shifting Careers -- New York Times

“Who Does She Think She Is? is a terrific documentary that discusses the challenges, rewards and struggles of women artists in our culture.”

Melissa Silverstein
Women & Hollywood blog

“Watching their struggles, hearing these women, I just felt bigger than I’ve ever felt — more empowered, more aware, more sure, and more focused. SEE THIS FILM!!! You’ll be glad you did.”

Sue Hodara
Sue’s News blog
As a girl, I painted, drew and wrote stories. But as I learned about the solitary, suicide-prone lives of women artists, I grew frightened. So, after college I fled into the business world and started a family.

However, when I had my first child, I was re-awakened to what mattered, by the unexpected ferocity of love, deep passion and the terror of caring for this new life. I had to write and to paint to make sense of these feelings—through mothering I regained my creative confidence.

Four years ago, I realized I was back at the crossroads -- my boys were nearly grown – launched, beautiful. But, I had no book or gallery representation to show for 20 years of making art in the cracks of my caregiving. I felt empty.

Then I met Maye Torres. Like me, a mother of three boys and an artist, Maye brought me to the beginning of my film. How had she been able to balance art and family while I had not? And what about other women? *Who Does She Think She Is?* was my search to find some contemporary heroines to provoke and inspire all of us to demand more from our work, our creativity and our lives.

Pamela Tanner Boll,
Director
DIRECTOR
Pamela Tanner Boll is an artist, writer, filmmaker, and activist. Pam co-executive produced the Academy award-winning documentary, *Born into Brothels*. She is currently producing the film projects: *Global Moms: Life on the Edge: True Stories of Doctors Without Borders*; *9/12: From Chaos to Community*; *Kashmir*; and *In a Dream*. Pamela grew up in Parkersburg, West Virginia then graduated from Middlebury College. She and her husband live in Massachusetts where they have raised their three sons.

EDITOR/CO-DIRECTOR
Nancy Kennedy is a New York based editor with several award-winning films to her credit, including Sundance Grand Jury winner *Why We Fight* (2005) and Sundance winners *Thank You and Goodnight* and *Riding the Rails*. She has also co-directed and edited several independent documentaries, most recently, *Bluegrass Journey* and *Who’s On First* (baseball comes to Greece) and is currently directing a film about feminism, *She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry*. Her many editing credits include work at all the major networks on television series such as *GREAT PERFORMANCES, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, WIDE ANGLE, 60 MINUTES*, and *NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC* Specials.

PRODUCER
Michelle Seligson is a senior researcher and associate director at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, where, from 1979 to 1999, she founded and directed a national organization dedicated to improving after-school child care programs for school-age children. Seligson co-authored *Early Childhood Education and the Public Schools: Between Promise and Practice* (Auburn House Press, 1989). In 2003, her research resulted in a book on the need for personal development of child care staff: *Bringing Yourself To Work: A Guide to Successful Staff Development in After School Programs* which was published by Teacher’s College Press, Columbia University. In 2000, Seligson was accepted as a candidate in the analytic training program of the CG Jung Institute of Boston and will soon complete her certification.

CINEMATOGRAPHER
Gary Henoch is a cinematographer with more than 25 years experience including film and HD projects for *NOVA, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, NATURE, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, FRONTLINE*, numerous PBS series, and Discovery Channel series. His recent credits include *Forgotten Genius*, a two-hour *NOVA* about Dr. Percy Julian featuring Ruben Santiago Hudson and feature film projects including; *The Legend of Lucy Keyes* starring Julie Delpy and Justin Theroux, and *Made Up*, the directorial debut of actor Tony Shalhoub, starring Tony Shalhoub, Brooke Adams, Gary Sinise and Eva Amurri. Henoch is a continuing Guest Teacher of Documentary Filmmaking at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.
WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?

PRODUCTION TEAM

DIRECTOR/EXEC. PRODUCER  Pamela Tanner Boll
CO-DIRECTOR / EDITOR  Nancy Kennedy
PRODUCERS  Will Dunning and Michelle Seligson
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY  Gary Henoch
COMPOSER  John McDowell
WRITTEN BY  Pamela T. Boll/Nancy Kennedy and Will Dunning
ASSISTANT EDITOR/ASSOCIATE PRODUCER  Laura Madden
CONSULTING PRODUCERS  Kerthy Fix and Heidi Reinberg
SOUND RECORDIST  Juan Rodriguez
ADDITIONAL ASSISTANT EDITOR  Michelle Chang

FILMED ON LOCATION IN:

Watertown, MA  Providence, RI
Ogunquit, ME  Chicago, IL
Taos, NM  St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Albuquerque, NM  Kealekekua, HI
New York, NY  Columbus, OH
Brooklyn, NY  Carmel, CA
Pomona, NY  Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn
North Bergen, NJ
GENDER EQUITY FACTS

Source: Guerrilla Girls

• The number of professionally trained artists and art historians in the U.S. – Males 52%, Females 48%

• Percentage of artists at major institutions:
  - National Gallery of Art -- 98% male, 99.9% white
  - National Portrait Gallery -- 93% male, 99% white
  - Hirshhorn Museum - modern and contemporary art -- 95% male, 94% white

• Exhibition opportunities: Juried (artists unknown to juror) – Males 52%, Females 48%

• Exhibition opportunities: Invited (artists known to juror) – Males 80%, Females 20%

• Gender distribution of visual artists in art texts – Males 90%, Females 10%

• Of the over 100 Tonys awarded since 1947 for theater direction, only 2-5% have been to women Directors; only 2-6% to African American Directors.

Source: A Room of Her Own: A Foundation For Women Writers and Artists

• Only 9 out of 52 winners of the National Book Award for Fiction are women.

• Only 11 out of 48 winners of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction have been women.

• Women writers won 63% of the awards but less than 30% of the money in awards reported by Poets & Writers. (Jan/Feb ’03 issue).

• 94% of all the writing awards at the Oscars have gone to men.

• A recent study by the Coalition of Women’s Arts Organizations showed that in all 1-person shows for living artists in American museums, only 2% of the featured artists are women.

• 51% of all visual artists are female and women hold 53% of art degrees, but 80% of college faculty members are male.

Source: MomsRising.org

• Only four countries in the world fail to provide paid maternity leave to all workers:
  - Lesotho, Swaziland, Papua, New Guinea and the United States

• The average college graduate who becomes a mother will sacrifice a million dollars over her lifetime.

• Businesses that create flexible work environments find that productivity goes up, they attract more talent, turnover is reduced and their bottom line improves.

• Single women make 90% of what men make

• Women with children make 73% of what men make

• Single women with children make 60% of what men make

• Paid maternity leave is proven to lower child mortality, improve children’s learning, and reduce juvenile delinquency.

• Paid maternity leave:
  - Sweden -- 15 months
  - Canada -- 12 months
  - U.K. -- 6 months
  - U.S. -- 0 months
  - California just started offering parental leave for 6 or 12 weeks.
Five female artists explore the competing demands of muse and family in “Who Does She Think She Is?,” an engaging documentary about the struggle to create art while nurturing life.

For Maye Torres, whose mountain home in New Mexico overflows with her paintings and sculptures, this has meant divorce, guilt and feeding her three sons on $24,000 a year. Janis Wunderlich, on the other hand, seems cheerfully adept at managing five children, a husband and a successful career as a sculptor. Only when we examine her fantastical, disturbing figures — often with rabbit ears and tiny, toothy creatures swarming over them — do we see explicit evidence of her internal conflict.

Calmly directed by Pamela Tanner Boll, “Who Does She Think She Is?” is about answering the call to self-expression in the face of biological imperatives and cultural programming. The Guerrilla Girls and other feminists appear for an enlightening primer on sexism in the art world, while the artist Larry Bell inadvertently backs them up by recalling his long-ago decision to mentor Ms. Torres when she appeared as “a cute girl in shorts and halter top” at his front door.

Dismissal is even more painful when it’s closer to home. “I always thought it was a hobby to kill time and stress,” says one son of his mother’s painting. Perhaps he’ll watch this movie and understand.

WHO DOES SHE THINK SHE IS?

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Directed by Pamela Tanner Boll; written by Ms. Tanner Boll, Nancy Kennedy and Will Dunning; director of photography, Gary Henoch; edited by Ms. Kennedy; music by John McDowell; produced by Mr. Dunning and Michelle Seligson; released by Artistic License Films. At the Angelika Film Center, Mercer and Houston Streets, Greenwich Village. Running time: 1 hour 24 minutes. This film is not rated.
CAN women follow their artistic instincts and still function as wives and mothers? Pamela Tanner Boll's articulate documentary "Who Does She Think She Is?" answers that question with a qualified "Yes."

She profiles five women of varied backgrounds – an actor, two sculptors, a painter and a printmaker – most of whom manage (despite staggering odds) to successfully juggle their nurturing and artistic needs.

In all but one case, husbands, children and wives appear satisfied with their lives.

As it happens, Boll is her own best example: She is an artist, writer, filmmaker, feminist activist – and a wife and mother of three sons.

Running time: 84 minutes. Not rated (nothing objectionable). At the Angelika, Mercer and Houston streets.
Tracking Shots

Who Does She Think She Is? Documents the Everywoman Home/Work Struggle
By Robert Wilonsky
Tuesday, October 14th 2008 at 1:47pm

Pamela Boll’s documentary—about five women who heeded their instinctual desire to make art over the fears and protests of their families—is also a call to arms: Rise up, ladies, with those chisels and paintbrushes and pens! Varied in birthplaces and backgrounds, these women all grapple with the same dilemmas: how to nurture others (husbands, children) without destroying the best part of themselves (otherwise known as: I’d rather be in the studio than the kitchen). The film could have been about any woman’s home/work struggle—it arrives in theaters a week after the publication of a study that shows schools are loath to acknowledge and promote women with mathematic proficiency—but by limiting herself to an actor, a painter, sculptors, and a printmaker, Boll gives herself plenty to work with; when the stories drag, and they occasionally do, the art's there to inspire and uplift.

Details:
Directed by Pamela Boll
Opens October 17, Angelika
October 17, 2008, 11:11 pm

Who Does She Think She Is? — A Close-Up On Women in the Art World

Why are there so many women in art school, but a tiny percentage represented in major galleries? Why does a woman have to choose between having a family and practicing her art? What are some of the hurdles that women face in the art world?

These are a few of the questions filmmaker Pamela Tanner Boll tackles in her new documentary “Who Does She Think She Is?” which hits select theaters Friday, Oct. 17. The film follows five female artists and examines the choices they make to achieve their professional and personal goals.

WSJ: What inspired your film?

Ms. Boll: I started thinking about it in 2003. I heard about Mary Torres (one of the artists featured in the film) from a friend. I heard she lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby, lived in the desert, was married with a baby.

WSJ: What themes did you find when speaking with the women artists in the film?

Ms. Boll: The main theme that connected all the women was the idea of giving yourself permission to do what you’re called to do. It’s one thing to stand up for your work at work, but to stand up for your vision even outside that is very difficult. (Women are) stressed about feeling selfish for wanting to do their own work.

WSJ: Why do you think it is so difficult for women to stand up for their work?

Ms. Boll: When I had my first kid, my world changed. That happens to women and we never hear about the positive. We hear about how hard it is. We create a dichotomy between work and family. For women, they’re woven together in a way that’s different than for men. The best work comes out of that loving presence where you’re really paying attention to the people that you love. That gives you energy.

WSJ: In the ’90s, you worked on Wall Street. What kind of gender issues did you notice there?

Ms. Boll: I was the only woman there. It was awful. The guy I worked with didn’t think he needed an assistant [female], so he was resentful of my being there. I was a setup for disaster. There were some nice guys there, but they felt constrained around me. I quit in 1994 when my husband got into Stanford’s Graduate School of Business. That was the first time I thought—should I write a marketing business or take care of this amazing person? No contest. I had three boys in three years. It was the scariest thing I ever had done.

WSJ: What is the current state of affairs for female artists?

Ms. Boll: I think that those issues of inequality were solved by the feminist revolution in the ’70s, so people are shocked by the statistics. Only 4% of the new shows at the Museum of Modern Art (in New York) are by women. The art world isn’t a welcoming place for women. It’s no different than other professions. When you get to a certain level it drops off.

WSJ: Why is that?

Ms. Boll: We’re still in a culture that values men’s work over women’s. An artist I spoke with told me a story about a man who was excited about buying one of her paintings. Then she ran into him in Chelsea with her kids in strollers and he said, “Oh, you’re just a housewife.” She called the deal off. A lot of women still don’t advertise the fact that they have kids because they don’t want to be just a mother. You’re asked to cut off a vital part of yourself. You get dismissed.

WSJ: What surprised you about making the movie?

Ms. Boll: One new thing that came out was I stopped worrying about being a good wife and mother and just let it be. One of my sons helped film. My kids are much more understanding of who I am and so is my husband. When I told my family in 2003 I was going to make a movie, (my husband) said the idea I was going to get a camera and interview my friends. I said, “No, I am going to make a big, beautiful film.”

WSJ: What is the film’s takeaway?

Ms. Boll: The film is a call to say, “This isn’t good.” We can have a much better world if we hear from women more. We won’t hear from them if they’re so beaten down by daily lives. They won’t be writing, telling stories, painting, creating. They’ll barely be able to make it out of bed. If you can improve the lives of women, you can improve the lives of everyone.

Readers: What’s your feeling on these women artists and the choices they’ve made? Would you consider giving up an unfilled career to pursue a passion? Why do you think women aren’t more ubiquitous in the art world? — Mary Altman

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Read more: Uncategorized
Shifting Careers

October 14, 2000, 9:30 PM

Artist/Mother, an Uneasy Marriage

By MARCH ALDHAER

Image: We have 80 percent female students at the School of Visual Arts. But in the real world, we have 70 to 80 percent male artists in galleries and museums.

These statistics, cited in a new documentary film, sound alarmingly like the numbers released by organizations that track the presence of women in the highest echelons of professions like law, journalism, engineering or finance. Yet, outside the art world, few people talk about the difficulties that female artists face when rising up in the ranks. As in these other fields, experts say the reason there are fewer women at the top is largely because of the difficulties in establishing or maintaining a career while also raising children.

The new film, "Who Does She Think She Is?" provides a nuanced look at the sacrifices and challenges facing female artists who become mothers. The stories of the diverse artists profiled in the film mirror those of many professional women — they struggle with periods of not making art; they watch their marriages fail when their commitment to their artistic talent doesn't mesh with a partner's vision of a wife; they do work they don't really want to do to stay afloat financially. The film will leave you wondering whether art schools will follow the lead of business schools in offering on-ramping programs for alumnae working to combine raising families with making art. Obviously, words can only do so much when talking about art. So have a look at the film's trailer.

The film was directed by Pamela Tanner Boll, an artist, filmmaker and activist, who was the co-executive producer of "Born into Brothels," and features commentary from smart thinkers like Courtney Martin, who visited Shifting Careers earlier this year for an intergenerational conversation about feminism with Deborah Siegel.

This film is a great companion to the exhibit on Louise Bourgeois that just ended at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art in New York.
Creativity and Procreation Don't Have to Be Mutually Exclusive

New Documentary on Women and Art Raises Issues That Have Also Plagued Our Industry

by Teresa Joczi

Published: October 20, 2008

Hands off your keyboard. Can you name five female artists?

The question is posed in the film "Who Does She Think She Is?" which premiered in New York last week. The doc is a timely look at women and the creative life from director Pamela Tanner Boll, co-executive producer of Oscar winner "Born Into Brothels," and co-director Nancy Kennedy, an editor whose credits include Sundance winner "Why We Fight."

Boll follows the paths of five female artists who are also mothers, a dual role that has proved untenable for most women through most of history and that proves challenging, to say the least, for the subjects of the film. "Who Does She Think She Is?" poses the bigger question of whether women really do still have to choose between having a family and being what you would call a working artist. In it, we see the subjects struggling with the work and guilt involved in balancing self-expression and family care. We hear from academics about the devaluation of women's child-care role and the historical suppression of female creativity. And we're presented with stats: Women make up 80% of art-school classes but about 20% of working artists. From 2001 to 2004 the percentage of female artists among exhibitions at the Guggenheim was 11%, at the Tate Modern and LACMA it was 2%, and at the permanent collection at MoMA it was 4%.

Sound familiar? Like many industries, advertising isn't a model of gender equality, and it's in its creative precincts where the imbalance is most pronounced. We know that women are not underrepresented in ad schools, but — hands off your keyboard (not that a search would really help here) — can you name five female executive creative directors?

We've discussed the Whitler Female Creatives issue in these pages before, and you'll no doubt recall Neil French's famous bit of insight on the gender gap (female creatives, he said, can't hack the lifestyle and leave to "suicide something" before establishing big careers). There are many factors that contribute to the lopsided numbers — agency culture and the male energy that's traditionally pervaded the industry among them. But, as "Who Does She Think She Is?" asks, are making a life from creativity and creating and nurturing life mutually exclusive?

Artist and creative director are, of course, vastly different careers, but they are similarly all-encompassing. "It's human to create, to make things," says Boll. "When you get older though, it's hard for anyone to be creative for a living. For women, if you don't have a strong support system to back you up in terms of your kids, it's doubly hard. And in our society, that support isn't always there."

One can see some of the more obvious forms of sexism dissipating as new generations shed layers of gender baggage. But the motherhood/creativity tension remains.

Women, we are told, have power, as we make most of the purchasing decisions. But women are making these decisions because they are still the ones mainly charged with running a home. And while images of well-groomed celeb moms are now an inescapable blight, the reality is that most women are running their homes without battalions of helpers.

"Until we have some kind of system in place where women can afford to have good child care, it's going to be tough," says Boll. This is, of course, an issue that transcends job description.

"The film is about art, but it's really about the struggle that I think women are still in — to pay attention to their own cares, their own work, without being pulled into someone else's orbit, without feeling or being called selfish. We are still teetering back and forth on that edge."

~ ~

Teresa Joczi is the editor of Creativity magazine and Creativity-Online.com.
Women Making Art: A Time Guiltily Seized
By Cathy Malchiodi on October 01, 2008 in The Healing Arts

All artists pursue their calling at a price, but for women artistic creativity sometimes comes with intense sacrifice, guilt, ambivalence, and personal challenge. A compelling documentary film on women artists explores the barriers to the creative process and how art ultimately transforms women’s lives and those around them.

Like many female artists, I cannot begin to count the times I have been waiting for water to boil while thinking about the composition of a painting, or running back and forth from the studio to the stove to make dinner or the laundry room to put the clothes into the dryer. Certainly, artists of either gender may engage in this dance between the pursuit of art and the domestic life, but women in the arts know what I am talking about. One of my favorite authors bell hooks captures much of this internal struggle when she writes in Art on My Mind, “We worry about not giving enough of our care and personhood to loved ones. Many of us still labor with the underlying fear that if we care too much about art, we will be companionless, alone. And some of us who have companions or children make sure that when they come home there are no visible signs of our artistic selves present.”

bell hooks is correct—in spite of the feminist movement in both society and the arts, women are still conflicted about how to divide their energies between creativity and the home front. And they sometimes even wonder how these decisions about where to put one’s passion are killing the imagination and passion necessary to fuel their artistic creativity, dreams, and visions.

Filmmaker Pamela Tanner Boll has taken on these aspects of art in women’s lives in her documentary, “Who Does She Think She Is?” The film relates the stories of five women who are professional artists and mothers, the critical importance of art in their lives, and how both parenting and art making are often devalued in our culture. Boll was the co-executive producer of the acclaimed documentary, “Born Into Brothels,” about the lives of children in Calcutta’s red light district and the power of art and winner of the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Her current film is due for national release this month; take two minutes right now to enjoy this trailer.

Being a caregiver and being an artist have some things in common—neither is generally a paid position. And both are about engaging in something you love—the care of children, partners, and family and the deep desire to make art. What becomes challenging, as unfolded throughout Boll’s film, is that women are also expected to make money from their creative skills and talents while juggling roles of marriage/partnership, motherhood, art, and economic realities. Despite these hurdles, what becomes clear is that women and often those they care for strongly believe that it is all worth it, and that, in fact, the duality of artist and caregiver enriches everyone’s life, rather than diminishing relationships or creative passion.

Adrienne Rich once said of creating poetry that it is a time “guiltily seized.” While the moments are stolen, I know from myself, conversations shared with other women, and the stories told in Boll’s film that it is every bit worth the struggle. Women in the arts know that in the end it is not acclaim, praise or approval that we seek to obtain; it’s the irresistible journey to transform the self and live a life that is whole.

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http://www.cathymalachiodi.com
Who Does She Think She Is? Valuing Women Artists in Our Culture

Who Does She Think She Is? is a terrific documentary that discusses the challenges, rewards and struggles of women artists in our culture. Director Pamela Tanner Boll introduces us to five women who I am convinced I would never, ever had heard about had this documentary not been made. They were all extremely interesting but the stand out is Maye Torres, a sculptor and painter based in Taos, NM. This is a woman born to create. You can see that while watching her in her studio, you can see that when she speaks, you can see that when she interacts with her amazing sons (who value their mom and her work in such an impressively sophisticated way). She could not do anything else with her life, yet she has never been valued -- either with recognition or with commissions -- as a male artist is.

It is well documented in the arts that women's work is undervalued and at times dismissed (see post from earlier this week: The Art World Doesn't Treat Women Equally) because the feminine sphere is deemed as "less than" the masculine sphere. Women artists, just like women activists, have been erased from history. This is not news, but its still interesting to see it played out in real life. Director Boll shows how these women balance their lives and their families and how these women are better artists for being mothers, and are better mothers because they can embrace their creativity. I thought it was really interesting and raised important questions about what we value in our culture and why.

Check out the trailer:

Director Pamela Tanner Boll answered some questions about the film:

Women & Hollywood: Why do you think this is an important film?

Pamela Tanner Boll: Because the "work world" still operates on an assumption that a "serious worker, serious professional" will work single-mindedly--more than forty hours a week. And this leaves no time, no energy for parenting. We say we value "mothering" yet we ask our families to cobble together sub-par child care arrangements--if both parents work full time. In the art world, this problem is compounded by the fact that art-making, often does not pay, is sometimes dismissed as a "hobby" and is considered an "extra." Art is the first program to be cut in the schools--yet art--whether storytelling, music-making, visual expression, sculpting--is what defines us as human AND that one needs NOT be a "genius" or "talented" to pursue these acts. We need NOT be a "genius" or "talented" to pursue the arts. To be expressive is human. And to express some of the experiences unique to women--is overdue.

W&H: How did you come up with the idea to make a documentary like this?

PTB: The film came out of my own experience of coming back to writing and to drawing only after the birth of my first child. I'd been a poet in college, won awards, but turned my back on the blank page and its bottomless demands, feeling it would be too difficult to keep imagining new worlds. And I was terrified of becoming a bag lady--unable to support myself--so went to work on Wall Street as a commodity trader. This was the 80s and women were supposed to have "serious" careers! Then I had a baby and the unending love and huge terror I felt for him plunged me back into writing--the only way I had truly ever been able to make sense of my experience and to mark the moments of my life. I am now the mother of three nearly grown young men. Beautiful. launched. But me? Even though I wrote stories and painted and had exhibits and readings--the work was always done in the cracks of family life. And I felt guilty, torn, never in the right place...so I set out to see how other women had handled this.

W&H: How do we help make the feminine sphere more powerful in our culture?

PTB: We make the feminine sphere more powerful by refusing, as a block, as a body-- to act as though our caring, our work in the family and for the family--is not work. Men and women need to stand up together and take back their lives--80 hours of work a week does no one any good in the long run. We have to start valuing work done in the home--monetizing the labor of love.

W&H: What are the goals for your film? Will you be showing it in schools?

PTB: Goals-- I want the film to start a conversation about living a life where one's heart, mind and body are more integrated. I want the film to inspire young people to sing, to write, to paint. I want older people to see that to sing, or tell stories or to sculpt--can energize and enliven one's self and community AND that one need NOT be a "genius" or "talented" to pursue these acts. We have done ourselves a disservice by allowing only those who are "gifted" or "talented" to pursue the arts. To be expressive is human. And to express some of the experiences unique to women--is overdue.

W&H: What message do you want to send through the title- Who Does She Think She Is?

PTB: How many times have I stopped myself from saying "who do I think I am." I think women are still sensitive to the criticism of standing out, calling attention to oneself. The good woman puts her needs aside for the sake of others. Or she risks being called selfish. This film shows women who give themselves permission to be at the center of their own lives, to dream their dream without turning their backs on the dreams of those they love.

Film opens in NY at the Angelika Theatre today. Director Pamela Tanner Boll will be at the 5 and 7pm shows today (Friday) and tomorrow for a Q&A following the screening.

Posted: October 17, 2008

More info: Who Does She Think She Is?