

## ***SisterSerpents Records*** ***1979-2001***

**Creator:** SisterSerpents

**Extent:** 3 linear feet (7 boxes)

**Language:** English

**Repository:** Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago

### **Administration Information**

**Access Restrictions:** None

**Usage Restrictions:** SisterSerpents retain all copyright for materials created by the organization.

**Preferred Citation:** Identification of item, date, Box #, Folder #, SisterSerpents Records, Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago.

**Provenance:** Mary Ellen Croteau, founding member of SisterSerpents artist collective, donated these materials to the Women and Leadership Archives on July 20, 2011. (WLA2011.52)

**Processor:** Kristin Emery, August 2011

**Processing Information:** Addendum incorporated and finding aid updated by Laura Berfield, May 2025.

**Separations:** 1.5 linear feet of duplicate or extemporaneous material removed. Mary Ellen Croteau designated some materials that were transferred to her personal papers at the WLA.

**See Also:** Mary Ellen Croteau Papers at the Women and Leadership Archive, Artemisia Gallery Records at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

### **Administrative History**

SisterSerpents is a radical feminist art collective that was formed in 1989 in Chicago, IL. SisterSerpents' work was generally done anonymously; however, among the founding members were Chicago-based artists Mary Ellen Croteau and Jeramy Turner. The group was most active from 1989 through 1998.

SisterSerpents' members carried out multiple public art operations including poster and sticker campaigns all over Chicago. They held annual art exhibitions and performances, which included women artists from all over the country who had responded to calls for submissions that SisterSerpents placed in art magazines and *Ms. Magazine*. SisterSerpents' art has been exhibited in Chicago, New York, Germany and Denver, CO. Members have represented SisterSerpents on numerous panels that addressed women's issues and have given talks on topics of interest. They have also been interviewed by a number of authors and researchers, usually on the topic of using art for political activism.

SisterSerpents' art was highly political and often very explicit. The members used art as an ideological weapon to shock and frighten, to inspire women and to do away with the patriarchal system that oppresses women. SisterSerpents strove to address political and feminist issues through their art such as reproductive rights, eradication of rape, institutionalized misogyny and sexism, and the oppression of women in society. They often used anger and humor to make poignant statements regarding these topics. Several of their posters are included in the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum's permanent collection.

### **Scope and Content**

The SisterSerpents records span the period of 1979 to 2001, with the vast majority of material pertaining to 1989-1996. The records contain material related to the art, exhibitions and activities of the SisterSerpents radical feminist artist collective, and are comprised of documents, newspapers, photographs, slides, videocassettes, audiocassettes and some three-dimensional objects. The materials are arranged alphabetically by subject.

#### **Series 1: Administrative, 1979-2001, undated, Boxes 1-3**

This series contains biographical and administrative information about SisterSerpents, including resumes, manifestos, mailing lists, memos, exhibit material, posters created by SisterSerpents, artists' statements by members of the group, presentations given by members of SisterSerpents, subject files pertaining to issues relevant to the group, information about related groups, and newspaper clippings which include interviews with group members, promotional articles about exhibits and reviews of SisterSerpents' art and exhibitions. It also contains several years' worth of *MadWoman Magazine*, published by SisterSerpents.

##### **Subseries 1.1: General, 1979-1996, undated, Boxes 1-2**

Includes exhibit materials, news clippings, posters, publications, subject files, and other general administrative materials

##### **Subseries 1.2: Correspondence, 1989-2001, undated, Box 3**

Contains correspondence both sent and received by SisterSerpents. There is general correspondence, submissions by artists, letters to the editor, hate mail, requests for art, requests for interviews, prospectus requests. There is also correspondence regarding exhibitions, and rejection letters from galleries around the world.

#### **Series 2: Audiovisual, 1989-1994, undated, Boxes 4-5**

This series contains audiovisual material pertaining to the art and exhibitions of SisterSerpents, as well as some of the panels and presentations in which members participated. This series includes negatives of exhibits as well as some posters and photographs, as well as a few social events put on by the group. There are three videocassettes (VHS tapes) that show a performance, a panel on using art as a weapon and an interview on *American Art Forum*. There are two identical audiocassettes that contain a panel that was put on by SisterSerpents at the 1992 Women's Caucus for Art National Conference on the subject of radical feminist art. There are three boxes of slides that contain images from various exhibitions, as well as close-ups of the artwork that was in these exhibitions.

#### **Series 3: 3-D Objects/Oversize, 1990-1995, undated, Boxes 6-7, FF**

This series contains two woodblock stamps of the SisterSerpents logo that were used in creating posters and stationery. The series also includes full-sized newspapers that did full-page spreads on SisterSerpents or their art and exhibitions. Of special interest is an edition of the Industrial Workers of the World newsletter that contains a centerfold of the SisterSerpents' famous "Consider a Fetus" poster.

**Subjects:**

Artemisia Gallery  
Croteau, Mary Ellen  
Feminism and art  
Feminism and art--History--20th century--Exhibitions.  
Feminism and art--United States--20th century.

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
		<b><i>SisterSerpents Records, 1979-2001</i></b>	
		<b>Series 1: Administrative Records 1989-1996, undated</b>	
		<b>Subseries 1.1: General, 1979-1996, undated</b>	
1	1	Administrative	undated
1	2	Administrative: Inter-Office Memos	1990-1991
1	3	Administrative: Mailing Lists	1991-1994, undated
1	4	Artists' Statements	undated
1	5	Audience Reactions	1990-1991, undated
1	6	Exhibit Materials: ABC NO Rio 10 years, 7 Days	1990
1	7	Exhibit Materials: Berlin 37 Räume	1992
1	8	Exhibit Materials: Entry Forms	1992, undated
1	9	Exhibit Materials: Hall of Shame	1996
1	10	Exhibit Materials: Home Improvements: Demolishing Domesticity	1994
1	11	Exhibit Materials: Proposals	1989-1991, undated
1	12	Exhibit Materials: Piss on Patriarchy, Piss on Passivity	1992
1	13	Exhibit Materials: Rattle Your Rage	1990
1	14	Exhibit Materials: SisterSerpents at The Edge	1993
1	15	Exhibit Materials: Snakefest '91: Art Against Dickheads	1991
1	16	Exhibit Materials: Used Boyfriend Auction	undated
1	17	Exhibit Materials: Women's Caucus for Art National Conference	1994
1	18	Exhibit Materials: Your Message Here	1990
1	19	Newspaper Clippings	1991, undated
1	20	Newspaper Clippings	1991-1992
1	21	Newspaper Clippings	1993-1994
1	22	Posters	1991-1992, undated
1	23	Posters: Event Fliers	1991-1994, undated

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1	24	Posters: Fetus Poster	1989
1	25	Posters: Images	undated
1	26	Posters: Text	undated
1	27	Presentations	1990-1993, undated
2	1	Publications: Madwoman Magazine	1990-1993
2	2	Publications: Madwoman Magazine	1994-1995
2	3	Related Groups: Girl Vigilantes	1989-1990, undated
2	4	Related Groups: HAGS	1991, undated
2	5	Related Groups: Live Turkeys	1994-1995
2	6	Related Groups: Miscellaneous	1982, 1992, undated
2	7	Related Groups: Northwestern University Protest	1989
2	8	Stickers	undated
2	9	Subject Files: Abortion Rights	1989-1990, undated
2	10	Subject Files: Feminist Theory	undated
2	11	Subject Files: Feminist Theory	1979-1991, undated
2	12	Subject Files: Political Art Theory	1986-1992, undated
2	13	Subject Files: Pornography	1979, 1990, undated
2	14	Subject Files: Pro Life Literature	1982-1992, undated
		<b>Subseries 1.1: Correspondence 1989-2001, undated</b>	
2	15	Artist Submissions	1990-1993, undated
2	16	General	1989, undated
2	17	General	1990
2	18	General	1991-1992
2	19	General	1993-2002
2	20	German Exhibit	1991, undated
2	21	Hate Mail	1990-1991
2	22	Interview Requests	1992-2001, undated
2	23	Letters to the Editor	1989-1994, undated
3	1	National Design Museum	1994-1995
3	2	Prospectus Requests	1989, undated
3	3	Prospectus Requests	1990
3	4	Prospectus Requests	1991
3	5	Prospectus Requests	1992, 1994
3	6	Rejection Letters	1991, undated
3	7	Sent	1991-1995, undated
3	8	Solicitations for Artwork	1990-1994
		<b>Series 2: Audiovisual, 1989-1994, undated</b>	
4	13	SisterSerpents: Radical Feminist Art [audiocassette tape]	1992
4	14	SisterSerpents: Radical Feminist Art (duplicate) [audiocassette tape]	1992
4	1	Demolishing Domesticity [negatives]	1994
4	2	Miscellaneous [negatives]	undated

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4	3	Snakefest '91: Art Against Dickheads [negatives]	1991
4	4	4 <sup>th</sup> of July Weenie Roast and 5 <sup>th</sup> Birthday Party [photographs]	undated
4	5	Contact Sheets [photographs]	undated
4	6	First Supper, Misc [photographs]	undated
4	7	Miscellaneous [photographs]	undated
4	8	Miscellaneous Artwork [photographs]	1991-1992, undated
4	9	SisterSerpents at The Edge Exhibit [photographs]	1993
4	10	Snakefest '91: Art Against Dickheads [photographs]	1991
4	11	Snakefest '91: Art Against Dickheads Opening [photographs]	1991
4	12	Transparencies [photographs]	undated
4	15	<i>American Art Forum</i> [VHS]	1992
4	16	SisterSerpents Panel Discussion: <i>Art as a Weapon</i> [VHS]	1990
4	17	<i>SisterSerpents Set History Straight</i> [VHS]	1991
5	1	ABC No Rio Show [slides]	1990
5	2	Altered Fetus [slides]	undated
5	3	<i>Art Against Dickheads</i> Show [slides]	1988-1991
5	4	Artemisia Show [slides]	1991, undated
5	5	Denver Show ( <i>SisterSerpents at The Edge</i> ) [slides]	1993
5	6	Fetus Poster [slides]	1989
5	7	Filmmakers Gallery Exhibit/ ABC No Rio Art [slides]	1989-1994, undated
5	8	Guild Complex Window Installation [slides]	1989
5	9	<i>Home Improvement: Demolishing Domesticity</i> Show [slides]	1994
5	10	July 4 <sup>th</sup> Show [slides]	1990
5	11	<i>Piss on Patriarchy, Piss on Passivity</i> Show [slides]	1992
5	12	<i>Rattle Your Rage</i> Show [slides]	1990
5	13	<i>Rattle Your Rage</i> Show [slides]	1990
5	14	SisterSerpents Lecture [slides]	undated
5	15	<i>SisterSerpents Set History Straight</i> [slides]	undated
5	16	SisterSerpents Artwork [slides]	undated
5	17	Stickers and Articles [slides]	undated
5	18	Street Posters [slides]	undated
5	19	Unidentified [slides]	undated
		<b>Series 3: 3-D Objects and Oversize, 1990-1995, undated</b>	
6	1	SisterSerpents Woodblock Stamp-Large	undated
6	2	SisterSerpents Woodblock Stamp-Small	undated
7	1	Newspapers	1990-1995, undated
FF-1	1	Posters: Altered Fetus	undated
FF-1	2	Posters: Fetus Poster	1989
FF-1	3	Posters: Homage to John Heartfield	1989-1990

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FF-1	4	Posters: Miscellaneous	1991, undated
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