SHARING CIRCLES: CAROL NEWHOUSE AND THE WOMANSHARE COLLECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 16-DECEMBER 30, 2022

Donna Pollack, Untitled photograph (Clockwise from top: Dian, Billie, Sue, Carol, Nelly), circa 1975–1976. Gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries. [Carol, Billie, Nelly, Sue and Dian pose together in a tree.]

Produced by the Department of Learning & Public Practice
Wexner Center for the Arts
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Fig. 1 [A pen and ink illustration of a house set within a row of deciduous and evergreen trees.]
GUIDE INTRODUCTION

This learning guide is intended for all ages. It’s also meant for all learners, whether you have seen the exhibition in person yet or not.

Links throughout the guide are always bolded and underlined. Clicking them will send you to a new browser window, where you can learn more about themes, stories, and works in the show.

This exhibition and the learning guide contain nudity and deal with subjects of sexuality. This learning guide features select works from the exhibition and is not a comprehensive survey of all works.

To see the works in Sharing Circles: Carol Newhouse and the WomanShare Collective, make sure to stop by the Wex before it closes on December 30, 2022.

Keep up with the Wexner Center for the Arts here:
Facebook
Instagram
Twitter

If you post about the exhibition or this learning guide, make sure to use #WexArts so we’ll see your content!

Finally, please take this survey to share your thoughts on this guide!

Fig. 1 [A pen and ink illustration of a house set within a row of deciduous and evergreen trees.]
ABOUT THE EXHIBITION
SHARING CIRCLES:
CAROL NEWHOUSE AND THE WOMANSHARE COLLECTIVE

September 16–December 30, 2022

In 1974, Carol Newhouse, Billie Miracle, and Dian Wagner formed WomanShare, a lesbian centered community in Grant’s Pass, Oregon. They sought to create a world deep rooted in female relationships and expression and separate from patriarchal systems of power. The trio, soon joined by Sue Deevy, Nelly Kaufer, and other residents and visitors, followed a collective life in which they made decisions about their community together. This exhibition explores WomanShare through Newhouse’s lens. She photographed the women as they fixed cars, built houses, pulled weeds, interpreted dreams, and made their own lives. Exhibition cocurated by Associate Curator Daniel Marcus and artist and Ohio State professor Carmen Winant along with Curatorial Research Assistant Raechel Root and Graduate Curatorial Intern Arielle Irizarry. [1]

CAROL NEWHOUSE

Carol Newhouse (b. 1943) is a photographer, activist, and social worker. She photographed the Women's Land movement and contributed to influential feminist and lesbian publications. She was an instructor at the Ovular workshops with other creatives such as JEB, Tee A. Corinne, and Ruth Mountaingrove, and built a new language of lesbian depiction. Today, she lives in California, where she still participates in WomanShare and continues her career as a social worker.

Dyke
A historically derogatory term used to describe women who present masculine traits. “Lesbian” and “dyke” are not synonymous terms. [3] Many of the lesbians of WomanShare and similar collectives called themselves “land dykes,” reclaiming the label as a positive self identifier.

Gender roles
Gender roles are behaviors and characteristics deemed more acceptable for a certain sex to display. For instance, women are often expected to perform more domestic labor like cooking, cleaning, and providing care. WomanShare members regularly struggled with and defied gender roles, performing “masculine” tasks like carpentry, plumbing, and fixing cars.

Intentional Community
This is an accurate term to describe WomanShare and other lesbian formed communities. This is not the same as a cult or a commune. Cults involve religious veneration, and communes involve the sharing of everything in participants’ lives. [4] The women’s lands did not revolve around religion, and the WomanShare members wrote often of the importance of individuality within collectivity.

LGBTQIA+
"Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual.” The “+” leaves room for other genders and sexual identities. The members of WomanShare in the 1970s did not use this term: the acronym “LGB” became widespread in the 1990s and has expanded since. [5]

Patriarchy
Feminists understand the patriarchy to be the systems of power in our lives – the government, financial institutions, social life – that are and historically have been controlled by men, affording less power and value to women and people of other genders.

Wimmin/Womyn
To decentralize the masculine from language, some 1970s Second wave feminists and lesbians changed the way they spelled and understood the word “woman.” Other alternatives include “Womon,” “We’moon,” and more. [6]
WomanShare was not the only project of its kind. Similar communities in the women’s lands included Cabbage Lane, Oregon Women’s Land (OWL), and Rootworks. [6] So many women came to the area that a portion of Oregon’s Interstate 5 was labelled “The Amazon Highway.” Learn more about that here.

The Amazons were mythological female warriors in ancient Greece. They rejected men and boys, and were known for their fierceness and bravery. [7] Many feminists in the 1970s identified their cause with the legend of the Amazons.

Read more about the Amazons here. How are they like the residents of the women’s lands?

Read a poem here by Billie Miracle of WomanShare, centered on a vision of women warriors. What emotions and images stand out to you and why?

The members of WomanShare stressed the importance of female relationships, bodies, and autonomy throughout the pages of Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare collective:

“I HAVE DISCOVERED SOME NEW FORMS OF INTIMACY. GROUP HUGS. GROUP KISSES. DREAM CIRCLES. WOMEN.” [8]

Native WomanShare, the form WomanShare takes today, welcomes nonbinary, trans, and two spirit members, not just cis women. Read more about Native WomanShare on page 15.

Daily life at WomanShare in 1976 included:
- Carpentry, cooking, gardening, cleaning
- Writing, photography, and artmaking
- Workshops, visits, and retreats
- Collective decision making meetings, talking about conflict, work, and more
- Visits to the nearby town for supplies, car maintenance, etc. [8]
WOMANSHARE

Class differences took up a lot of space in Country Lesbians; the women struggled when Dian had the money to purchase the land but was hesitant to add others to the deed. She eventually reached peace with the decision and did so. Dian wrote of the struggle between the women when it came to finances:

“I REALIZED HOW MY WORDS SOUNDED LIKE A WAR, A POWER STRUGGLE. I WATCHED MYSELF THINKING MY HABITUAL THOUGHTS LIKE, “I DON’T WANT TO BE VULNERABLE TO THEM.”” [8]

Is it ever possible to fully remove yourself from power structures? From society?

The women also navigated differences in race, sexuality, gender, and more. Although most women's lands, including WomanShare, were predominantly white, the women discussed the need for diversity. However, Black feminists often hesitated to join the rural separatist movement:

“BLACK WOMEN’S ALLIANCES WITH BLACK MEN HAD BEEN CRITICAL TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE... THERE WAS ALSO THE ISSUE OF SONS. TO MANY WOMEN OF COLOR, CUTTING OFF ONE’S CHILD — ALREADY VULNERABLE TO RACIST VIOLENCE — WAS INCONCEIVABLE.” [6]

There are illustrations throughout the book by Billie Miracle. Draw your own illustration, below, of whatever comes to mind as you read this guide and explore the exhibition.

Fig. 3 [A pen and ink drawing of a window with a trailing plant hanging in a planter next to it. Mountains are seen through the window in the distance.]
SHARING CIRCLES

As a form of group mediation, the practice of sharing circles was adapted from the consciousness raising methodology of Second Wave Feminism. Read more about it here.

Sharing circles were essential to building community as the emphasized listening, dialogue, and sharing, especially of emotions and feelings. The women participating could mediate on topics like land, power, and conflicts while empowering one another. [9]

While it was a common mediation practice at WomanShare, other communities also used sharing circles. Learn more about the Indigenous origins of the sharing circle here.

“WE ARE FINDING THAT CREATING A NEW WOMEN’S CULTURE, A NEW SOCIETY, MEANS FINDING NEW WAYS TO DO MOST THINGS AND THAT TAKES TIME. LOTS OF TIME! IN THE MEANWHILE WE STILL HAVE TO FIND WAYS OF RELATING TO THE LARGER WORLD OR, AS WE HAVE COME TO CALL IT, THE OUTSIDE WORLD.” [8]

What is the significance of a circular shape?

Carol Newhouse, Untitled photograph (WomenShare workshop - making beads/necklaces from the clay on the land - summer 1974), 1974. Gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in. Image courtesy of the artist. [A group of women sit in the shade of a tree around two low tables.]
Newhouse didn't consider herself a documentarian or a photojournalist; she took pictures of her daily life and of the women she saw every day. Her images also now show these women to the world, through Newhouse’s lens.


Read about the male gaze here. How might someone liberate themselves from the male gaze? Is it as simple as having a woman take the photograph?

The Ovulars: At Rootworks, the lesbian community started by Ruth and Jean Mountaingrove, women gathered for experimental photographic workshops called the Ovulars. Here, women collaborated; brainstorming, talking, and creating images together in the wilderness, using low tech facilities. [11]

Out of the Ovulars came the publication, The Blatant Image, a magazine of feminist photography. It focused on lesbian presence and issues from 1981–1983. [10]

• How do we use portraits in our lives today?
• Compare the two forms of portraits taken by Carol on this page. What’s communicated about the women in them? What can you tell about them and their lives?

Learn more about lesbian photography in the 1970s:
• "A Rare Look at the Radical Lesbian Movement of the 1970s," by Stephanie Eckardt
• "11 Archival Photographs of Lesbians In the 1970s Living Their Lives," by Donald Padgett

Read more about the language of photography on page 12.
SHARE VOICES

OK. I’m saying to myself—I can live with her or without her. It’s very tough, jaw-set hard, pose the flower closes, my insides fold into themselves, layer upon layer, I wonder if it gets easier the more I do it. I hope so.

OK. I’m saying to myself, what do you want an open relationship for anyway? It’s so much easier to rely on the old shit, habits are not easy to break and emotion patterns are woven with heavyduty thread and I think about being alone.

OK. I’m saying to myself. You can always be a hermit, is it easier to live with it or without it. Sometimes I just don’t know. The warmth’s nice, my insides get all shook up and I think my mind is getting crazier and my body keeps wanting more.

24 November 1974
—Sue, County Lesbians (pages 48–49) [8]
REMAKING & RENAMING

Some new terms were used by the women to decenter the masculine, and center the feminine:

**HISTORY → HERSTORY**

“I suppose the herstory of our collective began in 1962 when Dian and Carol met in college.” [8]

**SEMINAR → OVULAR**

Seminar, from semen, genitive seminis or seed. [12] For the Ovular workshops, the women changed the root of the word to the feminine ovule.

**WHY DO THE ROOTS OF LANGUAGE MATTER?**

Some feminist photographers changed terms to lean away from phrases of power or violence. The violence of photography was a debated topic during this time, and still is today. [13] Many members of the Ovulars were familiar with Susan Sontag's essays *On Photography (1977)*, which explores the topic in depth. Read more about it here!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORIGINAL TERMS</th>
<th>ALTERNATIVES</th>
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| • Capture or take a photograph; photo shoot
• Subject of a photo: as in subject and ruler |
| • Make a photograph
• Embrace an image
• Use a camera |

“To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed.”—Susan Sontag [14]

What does Sontag mean?
What is the relationship between photographer and subject like? What does the photographer owe the subject, if anything?

Fig. 5 [A pen and ink illustration of a house set within a row of deciduous and evergreen trees. The trees and house are the same height and the house sits just right of center.]
"But being women and city people, most of us did not have the country survival skills like plumbing, auto mechanics, carpentry, and gardening, so we had to put out lots of extra energy to learn these skills as fast and as well as we could." [8]

Living on and off the land, the residents of WomanShare address their day to day needs through learning and sharing skills. The occupants of WomanShare physically constructed the buildings and homes on the land. In chapter 4 of Country Lesbians, Nelly reflects on learning how to use a chainsaw and the empowerment of reclaiming masculine tools—disrupting the societal norms of those who had access to carpentry skills. They also reflected on the realities of physical and manual labor in managing the dwellings and the land, being mindful to maintain its natural roots.


The hexagon was built at WomanShare and, over time, occupied by different members.

Why do you think the house was built in the shape of a hexagon?

What shape would you build your house?

Check out the Woman's Carpentry Book, a book written by women for women.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE COLLECTIVELY?

The term "community" holds a strong significance. It emanates a sense of belonging and provides both a feeling of togetherness and comfort.

List 5 words describing what community means to you

What connections can be made between "community" and "collective?"

In Country Lesbians, Carol, Billie, Dian, Sue, and Nelly reflect on what collectively living means. What are the similarities and differences between both quotes below?

"Collectivity means not having to always struggle alone. Collectivity provides a support system through which I can deal with the heaviest issues in my life — money, sex, and the work on the physical plane that needs to be done. It provides an outside barometer through which I can analyze my growth emotionally, spiritually, and politically."
—Nelly (page 139)

"Collectivity means learning to build and fix things, to make a garden, to make money without oppressing myself or other women. If I am to do all the physical things I want to do, including making myself healthier and stronger, I must have other women to help, teach, and encourage me."
—Billie (page 128)
The women’s lands are not the beginning or end of queer presence in American rural areas. Between 2.9 million and 3.8 million LGBT people live in rural America; that’s 5% of the rural population and 20% of the LGBT population. [15]

Check out:

- **Country Queers**, which exists to tell queer stories and connect people with each other.
- **2019 Movement Advancement Project** report about LGBT people in rural areas and key issues.
- **LGBTQIA+ Community Centers across the country on this map.**
- Issues affecting lesbians today at the **National Center for Lesbian Rights.**

To learn more about the women’s lands, you can start with these sources:

- **The Eugene Lesbian History Project**, through the University of Oregon
- **Listen to the Suzanne Shanbaum song, "Fury,"** which references the women’s lands and feminine rage under capitalism
- **“A Tribute to the Artistic Communities of Oregon’s Lesbian Lands,”** by Raechel Root
- **“On Wimmin’s Land”** by Sasha Archibald
- Read the story of WomanShare yourself in **Country Lesbians.** You may have to use local library resources to track it down!
In 2020, Lycan El Lobo Coss (they/them) and Bianca Fox Del Mar Ballara became residents and land stewards at WomanShare, and initiated NativeWomanshare, aimed at supporting queer BIPOC and Two Spirit people. The land will be utilized as a residence and a setting for Native ritual, art, gatherings, and culture preservation. [16] **Check out their work on their Facebook page.**

Forest fires, made more frequent and intense by climate change, are now a huge challenge for Native Womanshare. Fox and Lycan constantly clear brush, keep growth sparse, and scan the hills for signs of fire.

- How does climate change impact other safe spaces?
- Are there any social issues that are untouched by climate change today?
- How does climate change intersect with trans rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, or women’s rights?

**LEARN MORE:**
- "Indigenous Fire Stewardship."
- "Once-ignored Indigenous knowledge of nature now shaping science"
- Native Womanshare website

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Carol Newhouse moved to the Bay Area in the late 1970s. She’s been a social worker for decades, and works today at **Rainbow Community Center**. Her involvement with WomanShare has never ended; she and Billie are now doing the work to pass on the land to Lycan and Fox.
Carol took photograph after photograph of her surroundings and of herself.
- Take a self portrait every day for a week, showing your different mood and surroundings each day.
- Photograph yourself after a conflict or tough moment. What feelings do you show? Is it hard to show them to the camera?

Billie drew a map of WomanShare which is included in Country Lesbians.
- How do you draw a map of the place where you feel most yourself? Where would you pick, and what would you include?

Carol sent a scrapbook to her grandmother, documenting her life on the land.
- How do you document your life? How do you show your loved ones what's happening in your day to day?
- Find photos, papers, tickets, stickers, or receipts from around your house and create an impromptu scrapbook page of your life right now.

Make one of the recipes below and eat like the authors of Country Lesbians did!

**ACTIVITIES**

If you try any of these activities, share them online with the hashtag #Wexarts!

Linda Koolish, *Untitled photograph (Portrait of Carol Newhouse circa 1975)*, ca.1975. Gelatin silver print, 10 x 8 in. Collection of Carol Newhouse. [Carol Newhouse poses for a portrait in front of a wood wall. She has short blonde hair, wears a dark turtleneck, and hooks her thumb in the front pocket of her black pants.]

Fig. 8 [A hand written recipe for “Sue’s fresh hot sauce.” The ingredients, tomato, onion and jalapeno, are drawn along the bottom.]

[A hand written recipe for “banana smoothie.” Bananas and a glass of fruit juice are drawn on the bottom.]
REFERENCES

REFERENCES


List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 1.

Figure 2. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 65.

Figure 3. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 21.

Figure 4. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 170.

Figure 5. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 7.

Figure 6. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 119.

Figure 7. Nelly Kaufer, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 154.

Figure 8. Billie Miracle, Original illustration from Country Lesbians: The Story of the WomanShare Collective (Grants Pass, OR: WomanShare Books, 1976), 117.