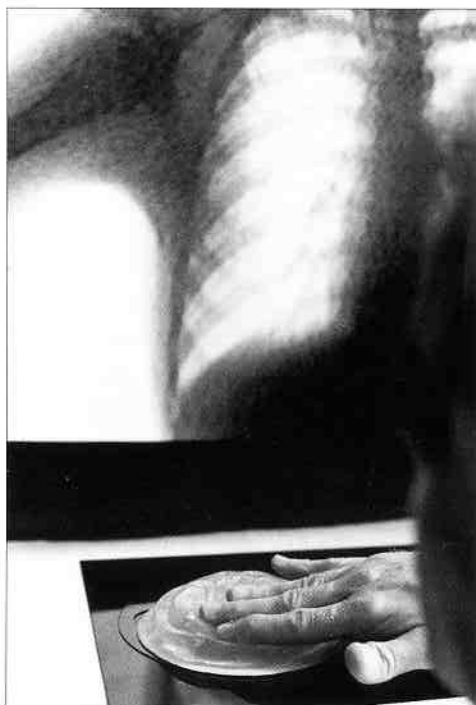


NEW

[**D**ⁱ/_s]

Order





Barbara Hammer, *8 in 8*, 1994, image from video installation (cat. no. 37)

Current studies state that one in eight women will develop breast cancer and that it is the number-one killer of women between the ages of forty and sixty-five. Despite the statistics, many women still refuse to think or talk about breast cancer. If they do, discussions are made all the more disturbing by the anxiety-provoking, contradictory information presented in the media. In *8 in 8* Hammer focuses both on the media's handling of the topic and the personal case stories of eight women.

As statements by the women reveal, each had a different experience but all went through some common ordeals regarding how they responded to the discovery of their cancer, their treatment by doctors, and how breast cancer affected their self-images. Because Hammer has diversified her selection to include women who are white, African American, Latina, Asian, lesbian, hearing impaired, old, and young, she has insisted on opening the dialogue to a broad spectrum of the population. This diversity also emphasizes that very little is actually known about the nature of the illness, where and whom it strikes, or when and why.

Significantly, some of the comments of the women focus on their attitudes toward the breast in terms of sexuality.

Barbara Hammer

In her video installation *8 in 8* (1994) Barbara Hammer addresses the question of identity by exploring the ways that contemporary American society and women deal with breast cancer.

As society has made the breast into one of the primary icons of a woman's sexual identity, this is not surprising. Indeed, the breast has been fetishized in advertisements, films, and fashions. The fear of losing one or two breasts and the reality of living with only one breast or none at all is therefore not just a personal dilemma with medical and health ramifications, but an issue that has many socio-psychological dimensions.

In her installation Hammer has arranged eight video monitors (each with a different case story) in a circle. To view the videos, spectators must enter the circle. They are thus set in the center of the breast cancer discourse. They not only listen and watch but are invited to touch the silicone breast models (situated in front of each monitor) that activate the videos. Hammer has placed the models within the installation in order to make touching an integral part of her display, and to call attention to the fact that many women resist doing breast self-examinations because they have been indoctrinated by parents, teachers, and clergy with the message that people should not touch their own bodies.

An additional element of the installation lies on the floor in the center of the the circle. It is composed of a monitor

playing a videotape of excerpts from television broadcasts about breast cancer, and a pile of bones imprinted with newspaper headlines referring to new discoveries or revised data on the illness. As the media announcements reveal, the information the public receives is full of contradictions, and, moreover, is presented in a tone that approaches hysteria. By conjoining the headlines with a death image, and by organizing the video as a disjunctive series of statements giving inconsistent facts and constantly changing advice, Hammer intensifies awareness of the media's inadequate, fear-mongering treatment of the "killer disease." Again it becomes evident that the phenomenon of breast cancer intensely affects the ways women are viewed by society and the ways they view themselves.

Barbara Hammer

8 in 8, 1994, images from video installation
(cat. no. 37)

