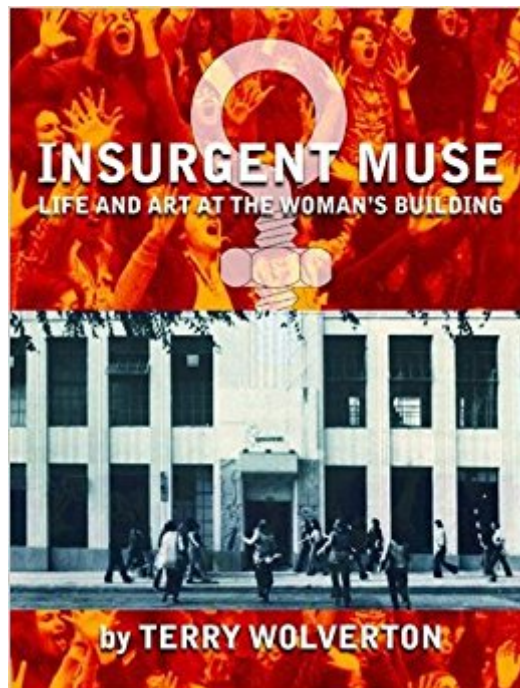




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Insurgent Muse: Life And Art At The Woman's Building



Synopsis

In the 1970's, the West Coast feminist arts movement coalesced around the Woman's Building in Los Angeles. Founded by artist Judy Chicago, the Woman's Building was conceived as a "public center for women's culture." Women from across the country were drawn there to be part of a community engaged in the exploration of what a female-centered culture might mean. In *Insurgent Muse*, Terry Wolverton chronicles her own 13-year involvement in the Woman's Building. Arriving as a young art student in 1976, she stayed on to become a teacher and co-founder of the Lesbian Art Project and, eventually, the Building's executive director. Her journey is emblematic of many women who sought to redefine themselves in the light of feminism—it entails confrontation with the damages of sexism, the pitfalls of utopian community, and the forces of social backlash. *Insurgent Muse* is a powerful testament to the importance of feminist thought and the ongoing need for it by women and men today. "The spirit of the legendary Woman's Building lives on in this unflinchingly brave and tender memoir. Terry Wolverton's *Insurgent Muse* is witty, heart-rending, superbly honest and deeply moving, providing an acute social analysis of a young life and a memorable era of feminism that fueled so much art and so many epiphanies. The great work of the Woman's Building deserves this book." —Lucy Lippard, author of *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* "The Woman's Building became a North Star on a dream map for women who were looking to redefine their lives and work. And its history is rich, splintered, groundbreaking—is the subject of a new book." —Los Angeles Times "As her memoir illustrates, being a woman artist in the mid-1970s was profoundly revolutionary." —Lesbian News "Her documentation of the ideals, debates, and out-and-out battles waged during this important time in the feminist movement will give young women both a surprising and relatable snapshot of the era. . . . An inspirational read." —Bust Magazine "Poet and novelist Wolverton describes her life and work at... the Woman's Building, a center for feminist art and culture in Los Angeles... provides an intimate look at the organizational struggles and triumphs. Recommended for public and academic libraries with extensive women's studies or art history collections, particularly on the West Coast." —Library Journal "Is any individual life a representative life? Terry Wolverton's seems to be in so many ways. Her searingly honest memoir tells what it was like to be a woman, an artist, a lesbian during those heady, storm and stress decades of the 1970s and '80s. It's all here—the multi-lover dyke dramas, the intersection of personal and political, the Coming Out and Recovery and remembering sexual abuse movements, the rise and fall of a women's cultural center, the Woman's Building in L.A. Wolverton has a poet's sense of the complexities of

the interior life and an eye witness – her intimacy with that era. Anyone wanting to know what it was like to be a woman, an artist, a lesbian at the end of the last American century will find this book indispensable." - Rebecca Brown, author of *The Terrible Girls* and *The Dogs* (both published by City Lights) Terry Wolverton is the author of the novel *Bailey's Beads*, two collections of poetry, *Black Slip* and *Mystery Bruise*. She has also edited numerous anthologies of gay and lesbian fiction, including *His and Hers* (Vols I-III). Web content composed with the free instant HTML code editor.

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Customer Reviews

In 1973, artist Judy Chicago founded the Woman's Building in Los Angeles, "a public center for women's culture." During its existence (it closed in 1991), the Building was the backdrop for "a collision of history and politics and art," serving as a home for galleries, theater companies, a bookstore, a travel agency, a coffeehouse, a magazine, a thrift shop and NOW offices. Wolverton arrived at the Woman's Building in 1976, as a 22-year-old student. During her 13 years there, she worked as "a teacher, program director, exhibiting artist, publicist, typesetter, newsletter editor, grant writer, board member, development director, and eventually, executive director." In this astute retrospective account, she charts the Building's early "brazen, heady days" through "the years of backlash" to its "eventual demise" (due to financial and other problems). Her tale is profoundly personal and political, blending memoir with historical record and recounting not only Wolverton's love affairs with women and search for belonging in the lesbian community, but also her grand affair with an institution. She also shows an uncommon capacity to report both disappointments and triumphs with neither condescension nor glorification. Twenty years after the Building's heyday,

Wolverton conducted an informal survey and learned of today's young lesbian artists' lack of knowledge about their predecessors. She adroitly brings them-and other unknowing readers-up to speed through lively and detailed accounts of the germinal activities, exhibits, installations and performance art with which she was involved. With this work, Wolverton makes a welcome, major contribution to lesbian, feminist and art archives. Photos.Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Poet and novelist Wolverton (Mystery Bruise) describes her life and work at a time when she was intimately tied to the Woman's Building, a center for feminist art and culture in Los Angeles. Founded by artist Judy Chicago, the Woman's Building operated from 1973 to 1991. When Wolverton arrived there in 1976, she was a troubled young woman trying to make her way in the arts and in life; during the next 13 years, she became an accomplished artist and a leading force in the Woman's Building. Here she documents her personal struggles with addiction and relationships as well as her artistic and managerial accomplishments. Though primarily a writer, she was also a founder of the Lesbian Art Project and presented a number of performance art pieces. Wolverton provides an intimate look at the organizational struggles and triumphs of the Woman's Building as it moved from its culture of radical separatism to its appeals to the mainstream culture in order to survive financially in light of severe cuts in arts funding. Recommended for public and academic libraries with extensive women's studies or art history collections, particularly on the West Coast.Debra Moore, Cerritos Coll., Norwalk, CACopyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Beautifully observed; gracefully and powerfully written, "Insurgent Muse" is a very moving read. Part memoir, part herstory -- read the book to fully grasp this reference :) -- Terry Wolverton recounts the coming together of individual passion, mutual support and collective endeavor in the making and exhibiting of art. Female art. Created by women.This book reminds us that our creative spirits are indomitable. There was a very specific moment in time which paved the way for all that has come after. We do stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us -- and this book lets us know exactly what those shoulders were up to. A warm, insightful, intelligent, dramatic, amusing, gripping, suspenseful, powerful, hilarious, universal and inspiring read.

Wolverton knows how to reach the reader's heart. She takes the reader's hand and says, Come with me inside the Woman's Building, let me show you what we were and wanted to do. This story of Feminism will break your heart and sew it back up again making you ready to take what the

women before you have achieved and build a life and a world on their experience. After I finished *Insurgent Muse*, I just wanted to hug all these women of the Woman's Building and thank them for what they have done for us. :)

In a time when so many of us have forgotten that for women artists the path to being able to freely express their art and bring it to the wider public this book gives an important depth to understanding how far we have come. We see how these wonderful artistic souls came together to light the flame that illuminates women's art today. This book should be included in women's study curricula. So much attention is paid to the history of women's rise in politics, business and science that we often forget the struggles and triumphs of the women in art.

A woman has to search high and low to find any book that comes close to Wolverton's *Insurgent Muse* when looking for a truly feminist history of women and art in this country. Wolverton takes the feminist discourse course by blending in her own story with very honest critique and appraisal of the influence of Los Angeles' Women's Building on helping women bridge the gender gap in visual and performing art. True to the notion that "the personal is political" Wolverton recounts her own journey from the Midwest and her own journey on her way to becoming a self-realized artist and person. I think some of her points along the way are very important and do blend with feminist literary criticism, for example, that the developing woman and the developing artist are most often one and the same, that these two stories cannot be separated out from a woman's personality. Though, it must be said of *Insurgent Muse*, the best thing about it is just that it is a damn good read. Historical and feminist criticism, many times, can be so dry and theoretical (on purpose, you think. Maybe academics think they get brownie highbrow points for that.) that many women are discouraged from reading it. Wolverton's book blends theory, personal history, historical anecdote into something that is insightful, informative, and enjoyable!

I found Terry Wolverton's memoir about her time at the Los Angeles Women's Building not only poignantly informative but also funny as hell in all the right places. She seemed to me to approach her memories and experience there with a sincere sensitivity as well as a sense of humor about the general self-seriousness of youth. Never poking fun at the accomplishments or goals of either the women's movement itself or the feminist art movement within it, she still manages to make an historical (though personal) account of an important time feel like a clear and simple story that a smart, witty friend is telling you. I found *Insurgent Muse* to be an insightful, sometimes grave, often

amusing, always loving account of one woman's coming of age in a time when some specific expressions of feminism were themselves just being born. And as a younger generation feminist myself, I loved reading about the trailblazers who took their own explorations and discoveries seriously enough to create a reality they wanted to live in, both artistically and otherwise.

What wonderful stories are within these pages! The history of the Women's Building in Los Angeles is fascinating too! Women came across the country just to be there, including Wolverton. The author is a great writer and she includes a lot about her personal life at the time. I found it very interesting. Because of the women and the times, the Building was such a vibrant and alive place that is still thought about and studied today. I remember when going there myself, something very significant happened every time. It was nothing short of magical and so is this book!

Terry Wolverton's *Insurgent Muse* is one of the most powerful, moving memoirs I have ever read. Once I started reading, I literally could not put the book down and stayed up way past my bedtime to finish it. Wolverton writes with insight, courage and humor about her own coming of age as an artist, her coming out as a lesbian, and her experiences with the Los Angeles Woman's Building, not only as an institution but as a vision of a creative, collaborative community of women. Anybody who is interested in the connections between art and politics, especially how artists get politicized and how political art gets made, should read this book. Though there's no happy ending to this story - in that the Woman's Building is no more - I found *Insurgent Muse* incredibly inspiring and an important reminder that art DOES matter and that sisterhood - however chimerical it sometimes seems - can indeed be powerful.

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