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## HOLLY SOLOMON

An Interview by Donna Cameron

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### ARTISTS IN THE 1990's:

LUCIANA AMIRGHOLI • FRANK BRUNO • JUDITH CARLSON-DE ANGELO  
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# Holly Solomon: The Media Is Magic



PHOTO CREDIT: DONNA CAMERON

“**H**ow do you describe magic?” **Holly Solomon** asks, from her chair in her office which appears to be brimming with it. “Well, words can’t,” she answers. “That’s why we need the plastic arts.” This year marks the third anniversary of the Holly Solomon Gallery at its current location: 172 Mercer Street, at Houston Street, in SoHo.

A maverick art dealer who also produced and acted in “98.5”, an historic film about art and art-making in the Vietnam War Era, Holly Solomon was born in 1934 in Bridgeport, Connecticut and was educated at Vassar and Sarah Lawrence. She consolidated her life-long interests in the theater, art collecting and alternative-space sponsorship in 1975. That year, with ex-husband Horace, she opened the Holly Solomon Gallery at its first New York location, 392 Broadway, in SoHo.

“Don’t forget, we were the gallery that really started ‘environments’,” she says.

Solomon made art history in 1977 when she introduced *Pattern & Decoration* (P & D) at the Basel Art Fair. P & D was immediately controversial because it challenged what was the prevailing Conceptual and Minimalist trends in art.

Solomon continues, “*Pattern & Decoration* was just an exploration. It was a new formal idea of how to put together a canvas. It was also talking about other cultures – for us to respect other cultures, and not think that we were imperial and better than – we were different than...”

An Interview by Donna Cameron

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*“Art is not about normalcy. It’s about life. For me, art teaches me and nurtures me, and that’s the most important thing. To focus people into a new understanding of life is the opportunity of an artist.”*

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Innovation continues to be presented at the Holly Solomon Gallery, with artists who merge the performance elements of theater, video, and still photography with some of the more traditional idioms of painting, drawing, and sculpture, such as **Nam June Paik, Laurie Anderson, William Wegman, Robert Kushner, and Kim MacConnel.**

**DC:** The Holly Solomon Gallery opened in 1975 to represent artists whose work addressed changes in painting trends. Have your goals changed much since then?

**HS:** There was a group of artists whom I had seen because I had a place called 98 Greene Street (a non-profit space). I had worked with them since the 1960’s. With the Vietnam War, a change occurred in American Art. The issues that were political had to do with the sexual revolution, where men’s and women’s roles were being questioned. And, I felt, we were getting a different kind of artist. They wanted to stay out of the war, so they were staying in college and getting degrees in various other interests and then becoming artists. No longer was the media the message. Artists who were interested in the media *did* the media. Warhol was very important then, doing TV programs on cable, movies, working on *Interview*. I felt it was time to open a gallery because there was something new to be said.

I’m still interested in narration as a force. I continue to have artists who are adding to this kind of vocabulary. Do I think the young people are going to say something else? Yes. They have a different kind of struggle. In the 1960’s and 1970’s SoHo was expanding, so the artists then were really involved with architecture. Of course, that’s no longer the case. But (the late) Gordon Matta-Clark has flourished, and those ideas have flourished. And, I still represent Gordon Matta-Clark.”

**DC:** What makes an artist special?

**HS:** We all do try to teach people to reach into their own lives, because our own life experience is probably more fantastic than the fantastic or anything else we can imagine. However, making that into something which will attach itself to another person so that experience is of value to somebody else is the privilege and the punishment of the artist. It’s a lonely occupation.

**DC:** Do you agree that the "Art Scene" in New York is dead, or does New York continue to be the 'epicenter'?

**HS:** Well, we heard that Cologne was going to be the center, we heard that Paris was going to be the center, and we've heard that Texas is going to be the center. But right now New York is still the center. Not where you have to make art. But where you have to show it. If you are a young artist and you want to know if your art is "equal to but not the same as" the test is still New York. I think it will change, though because of the real estate problem. Art is our most precious commodity. And what does this City do to nurture its art activity? Nothing. Except make it more and more difficult to keep people here who are really the worker bees - musicians, artists, librarians, teachers...

**DC:** Do you think there's a dicta now, in the 1990's?

**SH:** We have AIDS to deal with. We have a new sense of media... I think science is the narrative today. Science is of great interest to me now. We are going to live to see the day when men have babies. When women have babies without wombs. This is a new sexual revolution. It means that women don't 'have a clock.' And the people who have envisioned this will be the people who will be remembered for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are going to have Revisionism.

**DC:** Revisionism?

**HS:** Yes. Revisionism. Art is not about normalcy. It's about life. For me, art teaches me and nurtures me, and that's the most important thing. To focus people into a new understanding of life is the opportunity of an artist.

**DC:** Who are the collectors in the 1990's?

**HS:** The collectors that I knew are now older. They have amassed their collections. They are now working with museums and auction houses. Young people who are collecting now have to be either very, very rich or they really have to sacrifice. People focus now much more. They'll come in and ask to see a Nam June Paik, a Kim MacConnel, a William Wegman. Collecting in the 1990's is very specific. It's not about risk-taking, it's about money and where you spend it. It's about priorities.

**DC:** What are your views about Art via Internet?

**HS:** I question it. How do we convey the real quality of art through Internet? Unless, of course, the purpose of it is Internet. The art object maintains and gives off an energy. That's why the museums and galleries are so important. If it's any good, I usually find, it doesn't work in a slide or photograph. And, that includes a photograph of a photograph.

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*Donna Cameron is a filmmaker and visual artist whose work is represented by the MoMA's Circulating Film and Video Library. Her one-person show "Sequences of a Multiple Artist" is being presented at Fordham University at Lincoln Center, 60<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbus Avenue, New York, NY, October 24-November 26.*

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