

WOMEN WHO LOVED WOMEN

Holy Sappho! I guess you could say I'm starstruck. In my hands I hold a book of such wealth its simple existence is a milestone.

Tea Corinne has been quietly researching since 1975 to produce a collection of portraits accurately titled: **WOMEN WHO LOVED WOMEN**. She has shown them in poster form. Here at last is a book based on the shows. As A A Scout indicates on the inside front cover: "This book is worth the price for reference alone." And with at least one reference on each page, I couldn't agree more.

Before I describe the book, shall I tantalize you? Mercedes deAcosta, Yoshia Nobuko, Mazo de la Roche, Lorraine Hansberry, Radclyffe Hall, Rosa Bonheur...these are just a few of the women depicted. Of them Corinne says, "All of the women in this collection had major physical and emotional relationships with other women or lived ... 'variant' lifestyles."

She tells the story of her research in the Introduction. Of how she builds on the earlier work of Liza Cowan, Jocelyn Cohen and Nancy Poore. Of her own startled discovery of Jane Heap "who looked like a man wearing lipstick." How she questions why she hadn't ever heard of Heap, of so many other lesbian foremothers. Luckily for us, she worked to unearth our herstory, to reveal to us the significance of our past, "quite literally, to put it on our walls."

Assembling this collection is a herstory itself of determination and diligence. Obviously, it would not be easy to 1) identify possible candidates for a series called **WOMEN WHO LOVED WOMEN** (given the penchant of our society to destroy evidence of lesbianism) 2) satisfy oneself through actual documentation that these women did indeed live variant lifestyles 3) locate pictures of them. Once located, more work is involved. Who will give an artist permission to use pictures of sometimes famous, often respectable women for such a sinister purpose? The process Corinne describes, of photocopying, drawing on, erasing, dissolving and collaging, helped her past the hurdle of permissions. No, the book does not look like a twenty-five dollar coffee table picture book. Such a production is impossible as we just begin to emerge from our dark ages. But through good ol' lesbian single-mindedness and inventiveness, Corinne has reclaimed a big chunk of our past, has not only named names, but has shown us pictures of what we look like.

One of her most exciting accomplishments is the inclusion of so many women of color. She notes her continued search for pictures of women including Otake Kokichi, Miamoto Yurika, Wu Tsao. But she has already found: Gladys Bentley, Frida Kahlo, Ch'ui Chin. And she has taken such painstaking care to present them as strikingly as the white women, one hardly notices that white male technology tends to make people of color invisible (as I found out when I took my first Polaroid of a black friend).

Corinne has indeed made another huge segment of our herstory **VISIBLE**. Has made it **ACCESSIBLE**. Has made it **POSSIBLE** to hold in our eager lesbian hands, to see with our hungry lesbian eyes: our heroines, page after page, lovers often facing one another, in various walks of life, at various ages, in drag, out of drag, proud and defiant like Mabel Hampton, formal and staid like Edith Watson and Victoria Hayward. I am lucky enough to have some of these portraits in poster form on my living room walls, and I love to write my lesbian stories face to face with the apparently approving gaze of Carson McCullers, under Willa Cather's warm, encouraging smile, with Josephine Baker's decidedly variant, cocky self challenging my creative fancy...

WOMEN WHO LOVED WOMEN is a book for all lesbians. Looking at it validates our lives. Having it at hand as a research tool promises more and more, till I see an illustrated roadway into our past growing longer, and wider, more and more crowded - leading us down the road to full, proud, open lives.

The book is available from Giovanni's Room, 345 S 12th st, Philadelphia, PA 19107 (\$10). The posters are available from Pell's Womancrafts West, San Francisco, CA.

--Sunny Valley, OR