

## Call for Complimentary Consultation

# Is Pacific Standard Time Trying Too Hard?

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Woman's Building Image Archive, Otis College of Art and Design

The first day of the second year of the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW) at the Woman's Building in 1974

My first official night of Pacific Standard Time started at a reception at Otis Art Institute's main gallery, where intrepid actress Lily Tomlin, the same Lily who filled Altman's *Nashville* with wry emotion and played opposite Dolly and Jane in *Nine to Five*, loudly announced "We're all listening now," by which she meant, "would everyone please shut up?"

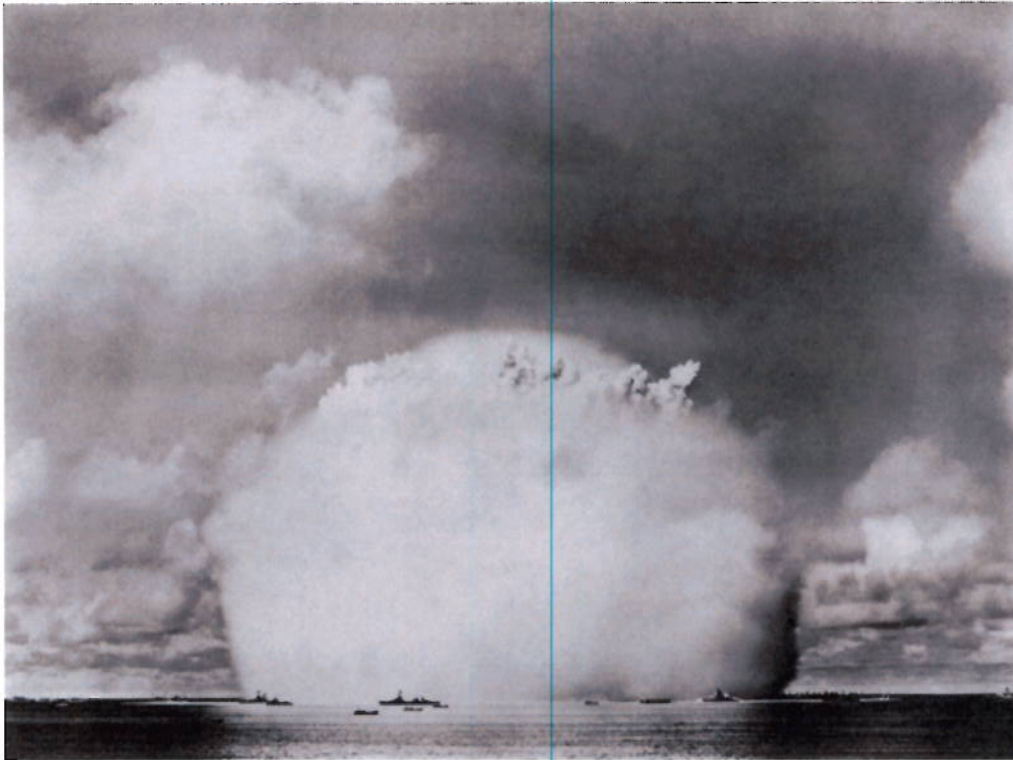
People did shut up and gathered in a semi-circle around Phranc, a self-described "All-American Jewish Lesbian" troubadour with a sound sort of like Arlo Guthrie's, who began to sing about Hillary Clinton's fashion faux-pas -- "Hillary doesn't have a clue, she's too busy working for me and you."

Like a number of the other women there, Phranc wore an eyebolt necklace. Designed by Sheila de Bretteville, co-founder of the Woman's Building, a feminist art center these women, including Phranc and Tomlin, hung at in '70s or '80s L.A., the necklace signified solidarity, "strength without a fist." "Mine has original feminist crud on it," said Phranc after finishing her first song, "just to put everything in a feminist context for you."

The exhibition at Otis, "[Doin' It In Public](#)," basically is feminist context. It's a sea of original fliers, posters, letters, and other ephemera documenting the 20-plus year run of the Woman's Building. The

main point seems to be: "See, we did this, it was ambitious and it was important."

Most PST exhibitions I've seen so far, especially those in institutions, have something to prove. Part of that comes with the territory. Museums and non-profits had to pitch their plan for revealing SoCal art's celebration-worthy uniqueness to the Getty Institute if they wanted funding. So the "we did it first" rhetoric abounds, and the narrative I've caught wind of most is that because art was less established here during the post-WWII era our artists were free to do just about anything, from starting feminist art centers to appropriating satellite technology, like artists in the [18th Street Center](#) show did -- *first*.



Courtesy of the Conner Family Trust, San Francisco

An image of a mushroom cloud from Bruce Conner's *Crossroads*, a 1976 film on view at MOCA.

MOCA's Paul Schimmel titled the show he curated at The Geffen Contemporary "[Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981](#)," and, given the pitch he made at yesterday's press conference, the aim is to show that even though artists were living under the same "big black" shadow of the post-Nixon, post-Vietnam era they kept "an extraordinarily expansive" sense of "what was possible." This sense was so expansive, it turns out, that the exhibition would take you a full day or two to thoroughly get through. There are gems in shows like MOCA's and Otis's for sure, like Lyn Foulkes' gritty portraits of defaced presidents and Eleanor Antin's politically perverse paper doll reenactments, but it's never quantity that makes a story compelling.

The best PST exhibition I've seen this week is still under construction. Called "[She Accepts the Proposition](#)," it features work originally shown between 1967 and 1978 in the galleries of a handful of ambitious, optimistic women dealers who never managed to make art commercially viable. Hosted by Santa Monica's elite Crossroads school, it doesn't officially open until October 15.

Right now, only one piece is installed in the school's small exhibition space, William Leavitt's *Wind Sound*, which debuted in Eugenia Butler's gallery in 1970s. A radio transmitter sends the sound of two kinds of wind, "Forest Wind" and "Garden Wind," across to a transistor radio hung on the opposite