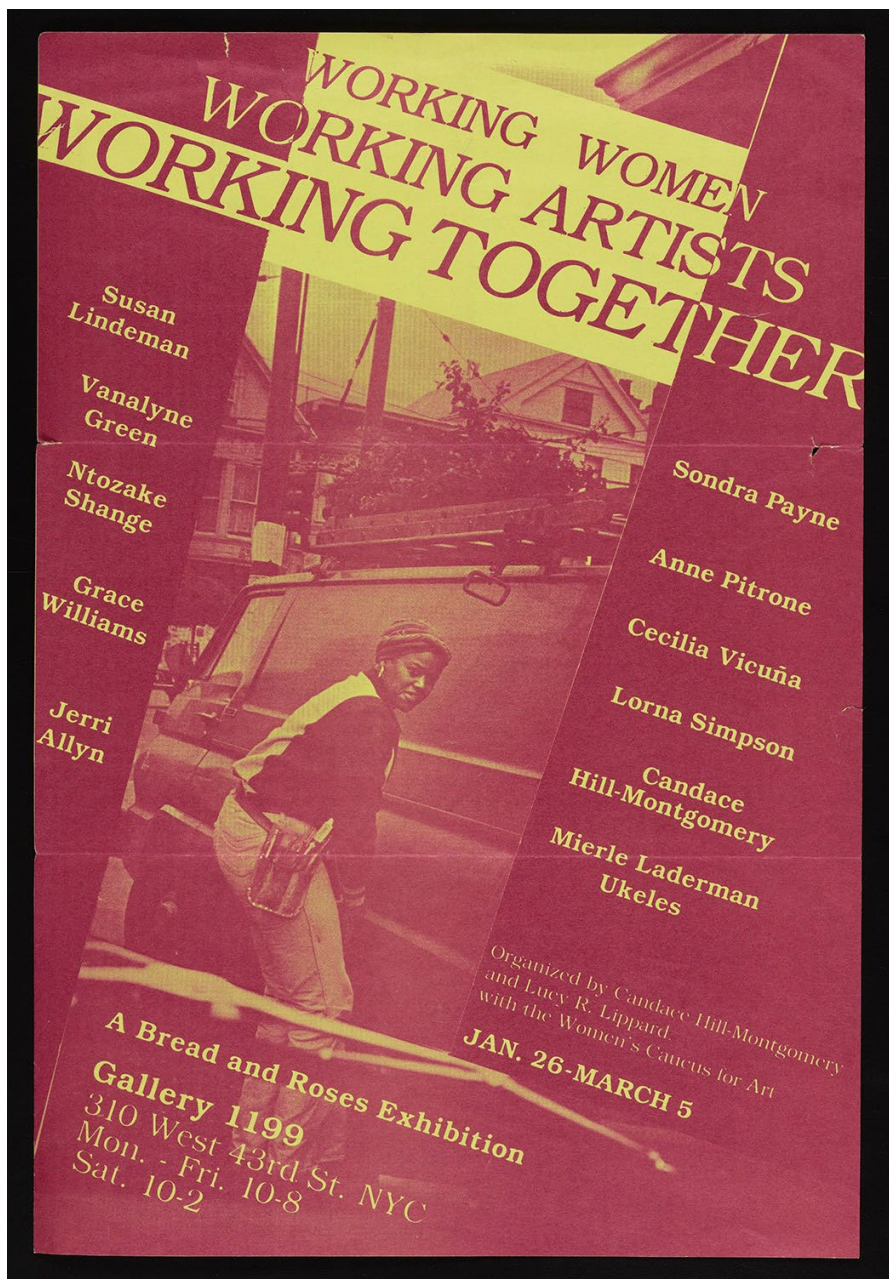


The theme for this show was suggested by its context. District 1199 is a national hospital union. Its members are 85 % women, 70 % Black and Hispanic. Its Bread and Roses program is the best known (and best) union cultural project in the country. District 1199 has made a point of nurturing its members' creative needs, offering workshops and exhibitions in the union and in hospitals and nursing homes.

Extending this idea into the art community, we felt it was important to encourage artists to deal with workplace experiences and the relationships between women on and off the job. Most of these artists do wage-earning work themselves, as well as working at art-making and in the domestic domain. Some of them have collaborated before; others are trying it for the first time; some did not choose to collaborate directly, but those who did were excited by what emerged. Some are continuing to develop the relationships explored here, so several of the pieces in the show have become «works in progress».

Collaboration between artists and non-artists is a key element in progressive art of the early 1980s. The hard times resulting from a retrograde, union-busting national government indifferent to human needs demanded that artists, like everyone else, learn to work with others, and learn to take on an increased social responsibility for and sensitivity to the lives and needs of working people. Collaboration is a means by which to break down the conventional artworld barriers between artist and audience that are supported by intimidation, elitism, cultural differences, and esthetic misunderstandings. The spirit of what we hoped to do in this show was reflected in the walls of Gallery 1199, which were painted white, sky blue, and brilliant yellow in a conscious attempt to escape the sterile box where people expect to find art haughtily ensconced. (LRL)

there are no mothers done in this show interesting women are no longer using their moms as examples of personages in the workplace even though they may have looked at them forever workin' workin' no longer means just going out to work it means changin' your life making it your own story not a fight with dad about who's earnin' more babysitter fees just me not sittin' home cause I got a good man or I'm just doin' my thing women actually like working I think I do a working woman is no longer unusual workin' is not just like the men in some cases we're used to making the home right that may seem like the ultimate challenge for those who can't can I now work to make some place else better to live not for social security's sake who's thinkin' past the workin' to the retirin' except after workin' and cleanin' and cookin' can I retire to my bed in a little piece how can anyone want to fight after workin'



1 Poster of the exhibition *Working Women/Working Artists/Working Together*, 1982

hard all day how can the presidents want war after workin' hard physical mental
work makes you too tired for combat even plannin' it women want to work in peace
We work hard for our country makin' it right can't we ask the same Isn't everybody
tired tired of lookin' at changes and havin' others say no change no change stay
where you are you don't qualify you don't exist you like to work don't you? work
then just be quiet just be a good girl and don't rock nobody's boat take a boat trip
use your «excess» money to sail the seven seas buy some leather buy some mink silk
whatever your little heart desires Get a man to take care of the rent
phone bill
con ed
dry cleanin'
pooper scoopers
therapy
essential non essentials
men make more
find a good one another good one like mommy had move if you have to to Texas
I heard there were more good payin' jobs and men in Texas than anywhere or
Nebraska maybe do you know oil law? good money in that get credit for what you
do America's the land of multi ethnic opportunity. Don't get righteously indignant
ask I say quietly and with savoir faire I'll take you out for a nice dinner if you're just
nice one day this week after work I'll take you out I'll take you out I'll take you out
next week when I get paid again this week is shot essentials went up daddy what
do you think I should be when I grow up? I wanna design a new system where can
I get on the job training and loans that'll pay huh daddy huh? (CH-M)

Vanalyne Green's mural-sized grid of commentary and images is a work in progress dealing with the relationships between the artist (a temporary clerical worker herself), Jill Soderholm (in corporate management), Celine Keating (an organizer), and Rita Williams (a clerical worker). A warm and witty visual/verbal diary, *Waiting for Power* crystallizes feminism's concern to make the personal political, and vice versa.

Lorna Simpson's tender memoir of her relationship with Irene Silva, a domestic worker her own age, far from home and in need of support and friendship, took the form of a fabric sculpture, a lacy, delicately textured dress with a poetic text that is its verbal counterpart.

Candace Hill-Montgomery's work, also fabric and poetry, is harsh and funny. Written on a tablecloth and napkins, it is dedicated to an anonymous woman who runs a Harlem soul food restaurant and illegal numbers bank, and in doing so provides support and employment for her community. The work's title – *Free Dom with Purchase* – is a sardonic reference to Dom Pérignon champagne and how the independent economic system operates in America.

Sandra Payne made a collage in memory of the now-abandoned St. Louis hospital where she was born. Black handprints and marbleized paper provide an air of anger and nostalgia. Grace Williams made a complex collage sculpture from her conversations with Muriel Gittens, switchboard supervisor at 1199. Since «the switchboard is where everything comes together», she constructed her piece to correspond to communications within the union, noting that plans for computerization would dehumanize the operator's direct contact with the people she serves.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles also worked on the hospital theme, on a grand scale. Her multipartite installation was dedicated to the hospital workers who saved her daughter's life. A stretcher, an intravenous hookup, a thousand sheets, operating-room lights, Xeroxed time clocks, stories written by her child, and quotations from a book by Patricia Cayo Sexton of the Coalition for Labor Union Women (CLUW) were among her components. The dominant metaphor was that of time – working time and life-and-death time.

Susan Lindeman took a few hours in the working day of Marianne Shepherdson, a young carpenter in Massachusetts, as the subject of her acute narrative about workplace problems, in this case – a problematic lunchbreak. Writer/artist Anne Pitrone and her colleague Nancy Cheng have concocted an elaborate strategy to survive the boredom and hierarchies of their work as secretaries in the garment district. They coded their experiences into five silhouetted animal masks in a *(R)evolutionary Scale* from mouse to lion (via cat, dog and crab) that carries a subversive suggestion of worker power.

Jerri Allyn has worked with waitresses (and as a waitress) for several years now, first with a performance group at the Los Angeles Woman's Building, now with the hotel and restaurant workers union in New York. She designed a placemat, took it to Zoe Meyers at the union, who gave her the feedback on issues and possibilities of its use as an organizing tool. The work itself will continue and the placemats will eventually appear in local restaurants.

Ntozake Shange's large decorative and disturbing wall installation – *And We Work* – was dedicated to a number of single working mothers in New York, all women of color with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, as suggested in the panoply of objects on the wall which range from virgins to guns to frying pans and condoms. The images were taken from the women's and the artist's dreams.

Cecilia Vicuña exhibited photographic and text excerpts from a film made in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1980, entitled *What is Poetry to You?* This segment focuses on the responses given by a group of prostitutes. Among them is a statement that serves as an appropriate epigram for this show: «It comes alive inside me and it happens ... by trying for it, every human being, we all have the capacity to make what we want happen, don't we?» (LRL)

CANDACE HILL-MONTGOMERY is an artist working in New York.

LUCY R. LIPPARD is author of 11 books on contemporary art and a member of the *Heresies* Collective.¹

Notes

¹ Lucy R. Lippard and Candace Hill-Montgomery: Working Women/WorkingArtists/Working Together, in: Woman's Art Journal 3, Spring-Summer 1982, no. I, pp. 19–20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1357918>, last accessed on 6 May 2025.

Image Credit

¹ Amy Tobin: Women Artists Together by Amy Tobin – 50 Years in 50 Books, in: The Art Blog Yale 50, 12 October 2023, <https://yalebooksblog.co.uk/2023/10/12/women-artists-together-by-amy-tobin/>, last accessed on 30 May 2025.