

STUDIO XX: Celebrating Women Artists in the Age of Technology

by Sheri Zernentsch

At Studio XX our motto remains, Everything in Moderation Except XX! Studio XX is a digital media centre for women located in Montreal, Quebec. Conceptualized in the summer of 1995 and realized barely nine months ago as a centre (we got an office!), we are a women's intervention group offering women access to new technologies. We conduct forums for critical discussion on topics affecting women and technology, workshops that teach basic software, computer and Internet skills, and offer a space where technological knowledge can be shared and applied to various art practices and fields of interest.

Engagement in critical discussion takes place at a number of Studio XX events, including *Les Femmes Branchees: Show and Tell Salon*, an informal gathering where women working with various technologies can showcase their work to an audience; on our on-line magazine ('zine) entitled *Double X*, a hot link off of the Studio XX homepage, and on *XX Files*, a weekly radio show broadcast in Montreal.

Women artists at Studio XX are utilizing tools of technology to express their thoughts on issues, to make policy demands and to gain a place within other artist communities. We offer an outlet where women art practitioners who just want to know more about the existing technologies and their uses can engage in critical, but non-judgmental conversation about these tools. All of these women, whether engaging directly with technology or simply honing a knowledge base, are integral to the social and political fabric of who we are at Studio XX. As women we are varied culturally, socially, racially, and linguistically, and as artists, scholars, parents, and citizens we aim to open up opportunities that enable as many women as possible to participate in and contribute to community endeavours.

Kathy Kennedy, Patricia Kearns and Petra Mueller are women artists who are using and exploring various forms of technology, specifically audio, film and the Internet, to advance women's interests and

create feminist empowerment. They are just three out of the many women artists who are contributing their time, energy, creativity and brain power to the workings of Studio XX.

PROFILE: Sound Goddess, KATHY KENNEDY

Kathy Kennedy is one of Studio XX's founding members, and as a composer, Kathy's attention to XX centres largely around the need to give women access to audio equipment and Internet facilities. Since 1991, Kathy has been the director, arranger and composer of *Choeur Maha*, a women's choir based in Montreal. She is a trained vocalist and teaches in the Contemporary Dance Department at Concordia University. Her work as a sound artist in the electroacoustic domain has primarily addressed issues of the voice and its mediation by the interface of technology. Her experience as Executive Producer of *Choeur Maha's* CD, *Different Angels*, is a clear example of the ease at which she merges music practice with new technologies.

Evident in Kathy's most recent work is her careful consideration of time and space in the audio realm. She has applied this to her work with both *Choeur*

Maha and Studio XX, creating forms of social protest in our daily lives; the importance of creating music and performance art which reaches out to everyone, not just an elite art audience.

Over the past five years, Kathy has viewed her art practice as being about the creation of social liaisons and social spaces, aiming to facilitate forums for discussion, discovery and community building through music practice. For Kathy, the collective process is as important as the musical piece itself. Studio XX is an obvious extension of her work with groups of women musicians who support, teach and empower each other; XX being an obvious offshoot of this way of thinking. Her work with *Choeur Maha*, as with Studio XX, is not simply about empowering women, breaking old stereotypical images of the female singer as passive or decorative, but it is also about enhancing women's communal strengths. Rather fittingly, Kathy describes Studio XX as a coming to life of a Matisse painting; the ultimate

