

Cultural Daily

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I am no longer afraid of mirrors

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I Am No Longer Afraid of Mirrors

Sheila Levrant de Bretteville; Peace Press

Photograph by Hella Hammid

Los Angeles, California

1981

To commemorate the death of Betty Ford (1918-2011), an outspoken and gutsy Republican first lady who dared to break many national taboos—including talking about her breast cancer and her addiction to alcohol and pills. She also strongly supported a woman’s right to an abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment—both anathema’s to many Republicans.

In today’s cultural climate, where discussing addictions on talk shows is commonplace, and many wear pink ribbons to promote breast cancer awareness, it is hard to imagine that this openness has only developed over the last three decades. When Betty Ford was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1978, it was an unmentionable topic. It was not only kept secret from employers, but also from close friends and many family members. Breast cancer was considered a stigma, and following a mastectomy, many women felt ashamed and “no longer a complete woman.”

CSPG’s Poster of the Week shows feminist writer, poet, and teacher Deena Metzger triumphant and free, with the strength to reveal her mastectomy scar that has been camouflaged by a tattoo in the image of a tree branch in bloom. Describing the actual moment when the photo was taken, Metzger stated, “I just stood out there and opened my arms and said, yes to life.” This poster inspired many women—and their families—that life after cancer could be and should be celebrated and embraced without shame and without limits. Deena’s poem, inscribed on the poster, reads:

*I am no longer afraid of mirrors where I see the sign of the amazon, the one who shoots arrows.
There was a fine red line across my chest where a knife entered,
but now a branch winds about the scar and travels from arm to heart.
Green leaves cover the branch, grapes hang there and a bird appears.
What grows in me now is vital and does not cause me harm. I think the bird is singing.
I have relinquished some of the scars.
I have designed my chest with the care given to an illuminated manuscript.
I am no longer ashamed to make love. Love is a battle I can win.
I have the body of a warrior who does not kill or wound.*

On the book of my body, I have permanently inscribed a tree.

This poster and more than 100 others will be featured in “PEACE PRESS GRAPHICS 1967-1987: Art in the Pursuit of Social Change” at the University Art Museum (UAM), California State University, Long Beach, September 10 – December 11, 2011. The exhibition is a collaboration between the [Center for the Study of Political Graphics](#) and the UAM, and is part of the Getty’s regional initiative: Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945-1980, the largest collaborative art project ever undertaken in Southern California.

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