

## Introduction

Marie Warsh

Books are a valuable tool and resource for those involved and interested in artists' legacies; they are often the sole access point to an underrecognized, historical artist, offering the only substantial documentation of their artwork. As part of Soft Network's mission to imagine and implement new legacy models, the book remains critical. It not only provides a space for engaging with these artists, but also for sharing and reflecting on the work being done to preserve and shape their legacies.

This book about the artist and filmmaker Susan Brockman (1937–2001) is the first in a series that will focus on Soft Network's core offering, the Archive-in-Residence. During this funded, multiyear program, we collaborate with an artist's estate to articulate a set of needs and goals and then work together to address and accomplish them. The "residency" takes place at our combined office, storage facility, and exhibition/program space in lower Manhattan, where the estate archive and collection "lives" during this period. Although the work is particular to each estate, it often involves archiving, cataloging, and digitization; research and new scholarship; conservation and preparing artworks for exhibition; making the archive and collection accessible to curators, contemporary artists, and art historians; and presenting a series of exhibitions and public programs.

The Archive-in-Residence program is central to the purpose of Soft Network, which was formed in 2021 to address the ever-growing need for both resources and networks of support for those who work with artists' estates and other legacy workers. In addition to the residency, Soft Network manages AFELL (Artist Foundations & Estate Leaders List), an online discussion group and community for legacy workers; collaborates with other organizations on public programming; and provides sliding-scale consulting for artists' estates.

This inaugural Soft Network publication is also the first book to focus on Susan Brockman who, despite being involved in various downtown New York art scenes during the 1960s–90s, never sought nor received much critical attention. Brockman



Title unknown, 1991. C-print with acrylic paint, 20 × 24 inches.

After further research, we were excited to learn that *Women Artists Here and Now* also included two nights of film screenings by an experimental, feminist film collective called Women/Artist/Filmmakers (W/A/F). Established in 1973 as a cooperative fund-raising and support group for artists interested in experimental film, the core members of W/A/F included Susan Brockman, Doris Chase, Martha Edelheit, Silvianna Goldsmith, Nancy Kendall, Maria Lassnig, Carolee Schneemann, Rosalind Schneider, Olga Spiegel, and Alida Walsh. On August 24 and 26, 1975, all ten members of W/A/F screened short, experimental 16mm films. In an article in the September 1975 issue of *Women Artists Newsletter*, Edelheit reported, “the turnout was standing-room . . . and the technical aspects went surprisingly smoothly, considering that the first evening required eight projectors and a sound system we’d never used before.” Edelheit’s article listed all the films screened over the two evenings with short descriptions of each, giving the impression of a technically sophisticated program with films ranging in subject from the experience of being a female artist to an erotic exploration of female bodies and experimentations with nature and sound.

We continued to learn more about the members of W/A/F and were particularly interested in Brockman, our curiosity piqued by the description of her film *Depot*: “B&W, The ‘female’ waiting for her ‘train,’ in 19th century and art deco nude poses. Filmed on a single set, with humor, tenderness and yearning.” From Edelheit, who became one of Brockman’s closest friends after meeting in W/A/F, we learned that Brockman had a younger brother, Richard, who lived on the Upper East Side; his wife, the filmmaker Mirra Bank, had also been very close to Susan. When we contacted Bank, she eagerly responded and agreed to look through the boxes that constituted Brockman’s archive for a copy of *Depot*. Coincidentally, she and Richard had just moved this material out of storage. We had hesitated to ask Brockman’s family to look for the film, as they had indicated that her materials were not organized. We also anticipated that the film would be in a degraded condition, and we had neither the time nor resources to address this. So when Bank opened the first box and discovered a perfectly fine copy of *Depot* right at the top, we took it as a sign to proceed further with our exploration.

When we first started researching Brockman in 2021, Edelheit, Schneider, and Spiegel were the only living members of W/A/F that we could locate. We started to get a sense of the context in which Brockman and her cohort worked by consulting primary documents and talking with these women, as well as other people who had been close to the artist, including filmmaker Sandy Daly, who lived with Brockman at the Chelsea

PERFORMANCE-AUG 29 8 PM LIL  
PICARD CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN  
FRANCES ALENIKOFF & DANCERS  
WOMEN ARTIST FILMMAKERS INC  
AUG 24 & 26 CONTRIBUTIONS

# WOMEN ARTISTS HERE AND NOW

ASHAWAGH HALL, SPRINGS  
OPENING AUG.23, 5-8 PM  
AUG.24-SEPT.1, 12-5 PM

LYNDA BENGLIS ELAINE DEKOONING  
PERLE FINE AUDREY FLACK  
JANE FREILICHER BUFFIE JOHNSON  
JOYCE KOZLOFF FAY LANSNER LI-LAN  
BETTY PARSONS LEATRICE ROSE  
MIRIAM SCHAPIRO JOAN SEMMEL  
HEDDA STERNE JANE WILSON  
PHOTOGRAPHY-DOROTHY BESKIND  
TRACY BOYD ANNE SCHWARTZ

*Women Artists Here and Now* poster, 1975. Made by Joyce Kozloff. Courtesy Joyce Kozloff and Joan Semmel.





**Above and opposite:** Stills from *Depot*, 1975. 16mm film, sound, black and white, 11 min.

## Lost and Found: Inside Susan Brockman's Photo Archives

Marie Warsh



Title unknown, c. 1995. C-print with acrylic paint, 16 x 20 inches.

One of the great pleasures of working with artists' archives is how they can provide a window into the idiosyncratic ways in which an artist organizes their work and all the various materials they work with. An artist's archive can feel at once intimate and remote: it provides not only clues to a process of thinking and creating but also evidence of secret systems, so internalized or intuitive that the artist had no need to document them. Susan Brockman's archive of photographic materials is both revealing and mysterious, full of the playful energy of her ceaseless experimentation with image-making.

A goal of the Brockman Archive-in-Residence was to assess and organize approximately fifteen years of her work, spanning 1983–99. The archive contained a range of photographic materials including 35mm slides, 35mm color negatives, 4 x 6 inch prints made by a photo lab, C-prints that she had printed herself, and collages with C-prints. The goal of this organizational project was to better understand the work in order to share it and make it accessible. Because of the variety of photographic media and the multiple versions and states of many of the prints, it was sometimes difficult to determine what was finished work.

However, trying to “find” it proved to be insightful. Our exploration of the archive was how we learned about Brockman, both her life and her work, and the process opened up new possibilities for engaging with her archive that can be applied to other existing archives as well.

My first task was to organize her 35mm slides, most of which were stored in the rectangular, orange boxes that had been provided by her photo lab and on which she had labeled the subject matter of the contents. Most of the slides were shot in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, a town on Cape Cod. Many boxes contained photographs of a flea market there, while even more focused on the landscape—beaches, sunsets, and dunes—and her dog, Dutchess, in this landscape. It became clear from her labeling, and from examining some of the slides themselves, that these boxes contained not







**Re/Animation:**  
**Selections from the Archive of Susan Brockman**  
Sara VanDerBeek







## A Chronology of the Life and Work of Susan Brockman



Self-portrait, Chelsea Hotel, 1967. Courtesy Estate of Susan Brockman.

### 1937–1953

Susan Naomi Brockman was born on July 15, 1937, in Brooklyn, New York, to Ruth and David Brockman. Her father was an accountant and lawyer and her mother had been a teacher before she married. She was raised in the Manhattan Beach neighborhood of Brooklyn with an older sister, Jolie (1933–1995), and a younger brother, Richard (b. 1947). Brockman studied ballet as a child and was active in sports, especially tennis.

### 1954

In the fall of 1954, Brockman moved to Ithaca, New York, to attend Cornell University and study art. At the end of her first semester, her mother, who had suffered from bipolar disorder, committed suicide.

### 1955–1958

Brockman continued her education at Cornell, studying painting, drawing, art history, modern dance, and physical education. She graduated in 1958 with a degree in painting.

Brockman's father remarried, and the family moved to the Upper East Side of Manhattan. They also purchased a house in East Hampton, known as the Woodhouse Playhouse. It had been built in 1916 by the Woodhouse family as a space for gatherings and performances. Her father and stepmother were active in the arts and soon restored public events at the Playhouse, organizing concerts and plays.

### 1959–1960

After graduation, Brockman studied theater with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio and was involved in various productions, including the New York Shakespeare Festival production of *The Merchant of Venice*.