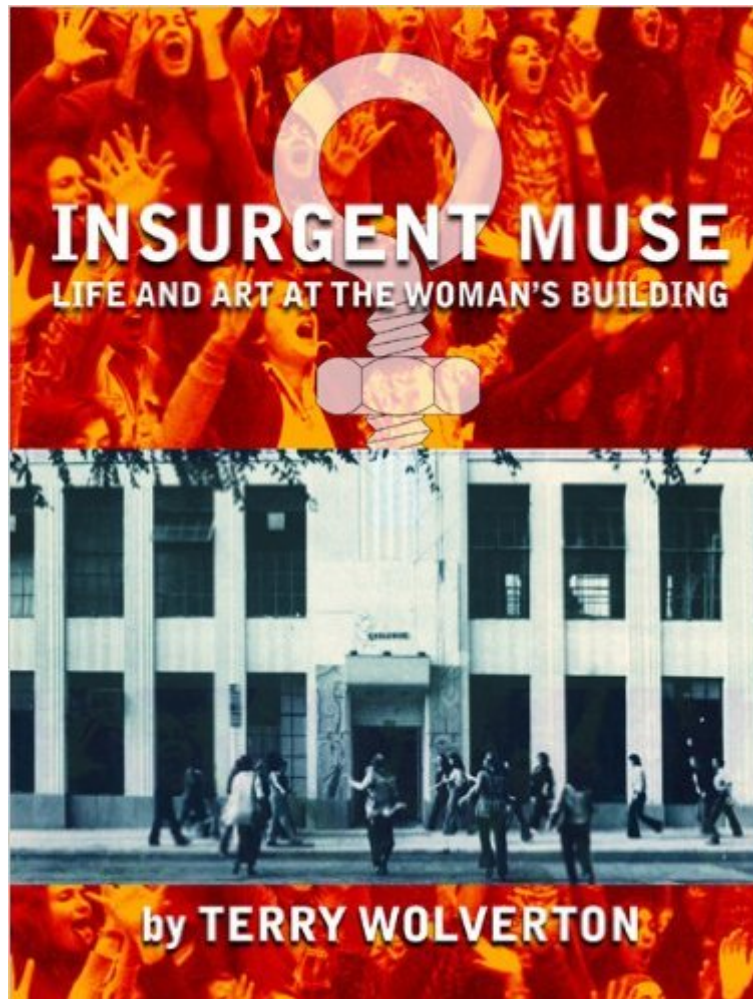


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# Insurgent Muse: Life And Art At The Woman's Building



## Synopsis

In the 1970s, the West Coast feminist art movement coalesced around the Womanâ€™s Building in Los Angeles, founded by artist Judy Chicago. Arriving as a young art student in 1976, Terry Wolverton stayed on to become a teacher and co-founder of the Lesbian Art Project, and eventually, executive director. Her journeyâ€™ emblematic of many women who sought to redefine themselves in the light of feminismâ€™ entails confrontation with the damages of sexism, the pitfalls of utopian community, and the forces of social backlash. Terry Wolverton is the author of the novel *Baileyâ€™s Beads*, two collections of poetry, *Black Slip* and *Mystery Bruise*. She has also edited numerous anthologies of gay and lesbian fiction, including *His and Hers* (Vols I-III).

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## Customer Reviews

What wonderful stories are within these pages! The history of the Women's Building in Los Angeles is fascinating too! Women came across the country just to be there, including Wolverton. The author is a great writer and she includes a lot about her personal life at the time. I found it very interesting. Because of the women and the times, the Building was such a vibrant and alive place that is still thought about and studied today. I remember when going there myself, something very significant happened every time. It was nothing short of magical and so is this book!

A woman has to search high and low to find any book that comes close to Wolverton's *Insurgent Muse* when looking for a truly feminist history of women and art in this country. Wolverton takes the feminist discourse course by blending in her own story with very honest critique and appraisal of the

influence of Los Angeles' Women's Building on helping women bridge the gender gap in visual and performing art. True to the notion that "the personal is political" Wolverton recounts her own journey from the Midwest and her own journey on her way to becoming a self-realized artist and person. I think some of her points along the way are very important and do blend with feminist literary criticism, for example, that the developing woman and the developing artist are most often one and the same, that these two stories cannot be separated out from a woman's personality. Though, it must be said of *Insurgent Muse*, the best thing about it is just that it is a damn good read. Historical and feminist criticism, many times, can be so dry and theoretical (on purpose, you think. Maybe academics think they get brownie highbrow points for that.) that many women are discouraged from reading it. Wolverton's book blends theory, personal history, historical anecdote into something that is insightful, informative, and enjoyable!

I found Terry Wolverton's memoir about her time at the Los Angeles Women's Building not only poignantly informative but also funny as hell in all the right places. She seemed to me to approach her memories and experience there with a sincere sensitivity as well as a sense of humor about the general self-seriousness of youth. Never poking fun at the accomplishments or goals of either the women's movement itself or the feminist art movement within it, she still manages to make an historical (though personal) account of an important time feel like a clear and simple story that a smart, witty friend is telling you. I found *Insurgent Muse* to be an insightful, sometimes grave, often amusing, always loving account of one woman's coming of age in a time when some specific expressions of feminism were themselves just being born. And as a younger generation feminist myself, I loved reading about the trailblazers who took their own explorations and discoveries seriously enough to create a reality they wanted to live in, both artistically and otherwise.

Terry Wolverton's *Insurgent Muse* is one of the most powerful, moving memoirs I have ever read. Once I started reading, I literally could not put the book down and stayed up way past my bedtime to finish it. Wolverton writes with insight, courage and humor about her own coming of age as an artist, her coming out as a lesbian, and her experiences with the Los Angeles Woman's Building, not only as an institution but as a vision of a creative, collaborative community of women. Anybody who is interested in the connections between art and politics, especially how artists get politicized and how political art gets made, should read this book. Though there's no happy ending to this story - in that the Woman's Building is no more - I found *Insurgent Muse* incredibly inspiring and an important reminder that art DOES matter and that sisterhood - however chimerical it sometimes seems - can

indeed be powerful.

In writing about herself and the "glory days" of the Women's Building in Los Angeles, Terry Wolverton has given us a deeply personal and moving account of women's struggle for recognition, not only in the arts, but in society, in life and in one's own eyes. "Insurgent Muse" ultimately becomes the story of the redemptive nature of creative expression.

This book is really two books in one. A fascinating look at a pivotal moment in time for women in the arts woven together with the story of the author's own growth and evolution as an artist and a person. A must read for anyone who is interested in modern feminist history.

I saw Wolverton speak at a California Studies Conference and felt astonished that an organization like the Women's Building existed in Los Angeles and isn't better known. Her memoir will correct that, melding her passion for bringing a dream to reality with her attempts--not always successful--to change lesbians' own ideas of how they are in the world. This is a beautifully wrought and constructed book and worth reading as a woman's journey even if you have no special interest in Los Angeles, lesbians, art, or feminism. Ms. Wolverton's work serves to remind us that the personal IS political and that one person really can make a difference.

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