

Interview with Betsie Hollants

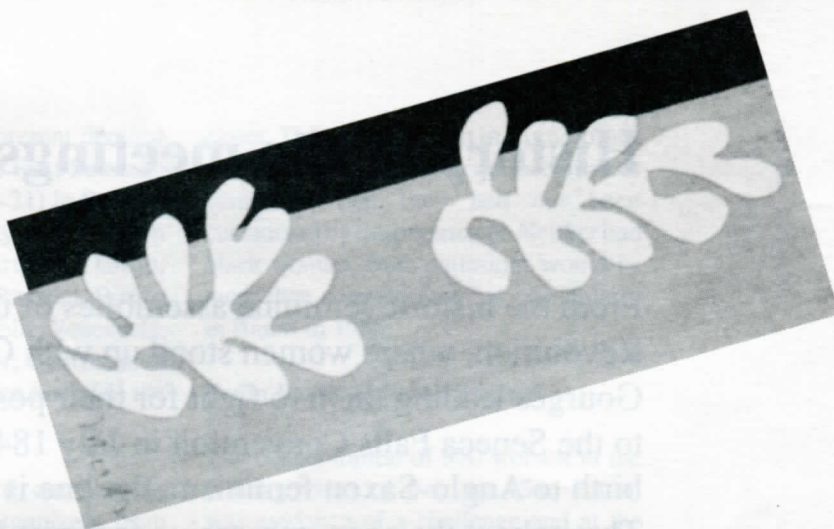
## “We would never have forgiven ourselves for not speaking out”



Betsie Hollants is a beautiful, warm Belgian woman of eighty-two. For the past thirty years she has lived in Mexico, organizing the Intercultural Documentation Center (CIDHOC) in Cuernavaca, which promotes contact between leaders in Latin America and countries outside the region. “Women are the key problem in Latin America,” she says. “We must work towards women being included in all activities in their countries, including government”.

In 1984 she founded VEMEA (Old Age in Mexico: Study and Action) whose objective is “to create awareness of the problems of old age; to make people aware of the rights that correspond to this stage of life and encourage old men and women to get organized and to be present when decisions that concern them are made.”





“Where I have made myself really visible among women has been in Latin America, traveling all over the region to make contacts. I have visited almost every country several times and for long periods. I have seen how women are treated everywhere, with incredible lack of respect and injustice. That is why, after several years working in CIDHOC, I said to my colleagues: “If we don’t speak out about the position of women in Latin America, in a few years time we won’t forgive ourselves for this negligence”.

In my opinion, this is a key issue. I recall something which a sociologist who died a long time ago once said (I forget his name just now, he was of Russian origin and lived in Argentina); he said that in Latin America women would soon be as important as the proletariat were in Russia. And I believe this to be true. For example, I think it’s important that we continue making an effort, as was done for this Meeting, to unite women from countries where their situations are so different, women of such different cultures and

ages. I ask myself if men would have been able to do something like this to talk about the interests and difficulties of men and their families...because women don’t speak only about themselves, they also talk about their family and the social situation.”

*W in A : You have talked about the Women’s Movement in Latin America. Do you think that the Feminist Movement here has developed differently to the European one?*

**B.H. :** Fortunately it has its own characteristics and it is developing much more. In the United States, for example, it has become too sophisticated and it seems they are already getting tired.

This morning I was talking to a European journalist who knows the Movements in Europe very well, and she told me that it was very difficult for her to understand the people here who are very Catholic. I replied that yes, perhaps they were, but they are trying to work democratically; they are talking about what’s happening

to them and that’s where we should start, not with overly formal institutions.

A large part of Latin America is poor, and this is what has to be taken into account here, the hope of achieving human well-being. The women of the continent haven’t been educated, so we don’t talk in academic language, fortunately. What use is research if it doesn’t lead to realizations, in actions for peace?

*W in A : Did you know Frida Kahlo?*

**B.H. :** No, she was before my time. Besides, I have always been outside sophisticated circles, and Mexican artists, as happens everywhere, move in such circles.

*W in A : Where do you live in Mexico?*

**B.H. :** I live in Cuernavaca, far from institutional, formal or artistic circles. I try to live with the ordinary people.

*c.g.d.*