

# Susanna Re-Membered

*A Photoessay by Lupe Rodriguez*



If I had to pick a painting in the history of art that has moved me the most, it would be Rembrandt's *Susanna* because it touches me both as a woman and as an artist. When Rembrandt depicted this Susanna, the figure of the nude was transformed from a purely decorative form to a psychological model. Because Rembrandt shows the elders spying on a woman at her most intimate moment, he makes an artistic declaration that this woman has been objectified and fragmented by the male gaze. It is significant that the skin of this nude is not the youthful blooming skin of a young woman, instead the model may have been his more mature wife.

I have chosen *Susanna* as the central focus because the strong women surrounding her understand and negate her suffering, dismiss the elders and *re-member* her. These women are my mentors and are growing into age knowing their wholeness.



Aida Da Graça, 62 years old

**"Regardless of my age, I feel happy. I feel myself young with plenty of energy, always ready to confront the realities of life."**



Elizabeth Topp, 47 years old

"I think it's quite normal to be anxious about aging. For all of us it means entering unknown territory, with its attendant fears. The reality for me has been that growing older has meant a time of much greater freedom. My children are grown and increasingly independent. I am free to develop my own person, in a way that I never had the courage to do when I was younger. I am discovering strengths and recognizing weaknesses. I don't need to apologize and explain as much as I used to. I wish I'd known ten years ago that getting older would be this interesting, because I have spent too much time in the past worrying about it."

Shelagh Wilkinson, 64 years old



"As we get older, many of us fret about the inability to remember — but the things we demand that our minds hold onto are often the very clutter that fragments us. What we need most, during these years, is the ability to centre the self and develop the inner strengths that a long life can provide... We must write our own revolutionary stories to live into."

**"It is now that I begin to feel the years in my body. But as long as I can be active and dance, I continue to feel young."**



**Dora Rodriguez, 64 years old**

**Clara Katz, 60 years old**

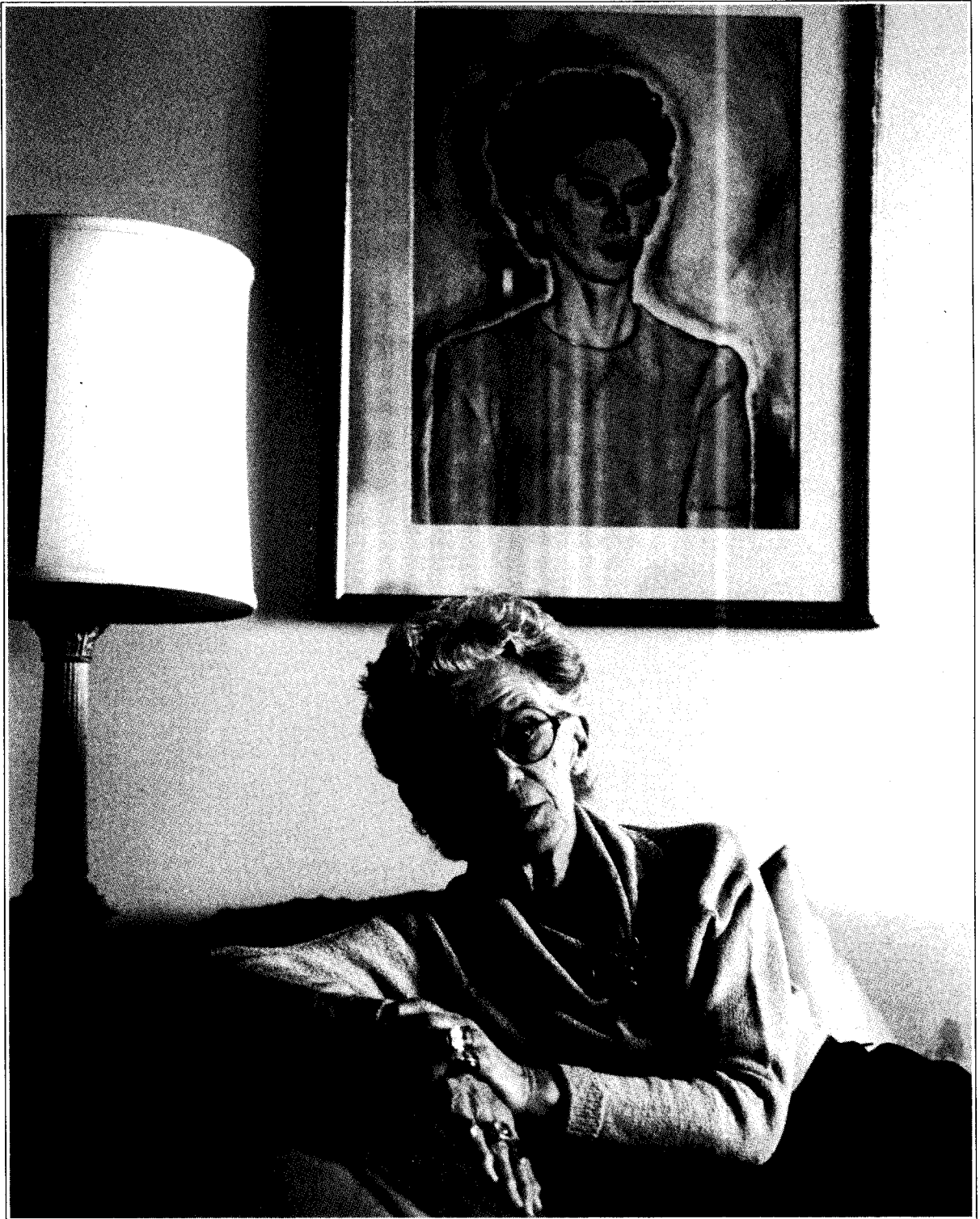
**" No meaning that comes from outside of ourselves is real. The most important things that each woman must learn, no one else can teach her. It is enough for a woman to accept her freedom, take her best shot, do what she can, face the consequences of her acts and make no excuses. At my best, I take full responsibility for what I do and for what I choose not to do. I see that there is no prison except that which I construct to protect myself from feeling pain, from resisting my losses. Life is not a rehearsal."**





Victoria LeBlanc, 42 years old

**"I have learned that our ease or grace in accepting the aging process is determined by our values. I have sought meaning in the inner life and welcome what time brings — the honing of mind and spirit, a greater plenitude of wisdom, self-understanding and joy. Especially joy. Now, at forty-two I have new life — his [our son's] pure joy in each of us; if we can touch it, we are ageless."**



Ray Godfrey, 78 years old

**"Rebecca West got it right. When she was in her nineties, she said: 'The only problem with getting old is that your upholstery wears out.'"**



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