

# ARTNEWS



SINCE 1902

SPECIAL ISSUE: WOMEN  
IN THE ART WORLD

MAURA REILLY CRUNCHES  
THE NUMBERS

LINDA NOCHLIN: FEMINISM  
THEN AND NOW

YOKO ONO TALKS MOMA

JUNE 2015



**32.3% full**

# TAKING THE MEASURE OF SEXISM: FACTS, FIGURES, AND FIXES

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In the 45 years since Linda Nochlin provocatively asked in *ARTnews*, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” we have regularly revisited the question, wondering whether, as Nochlin argued, institutional power structures have made it “impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men,” or whether it is a matter of what constitutes “greatness” and how we measure it. We have assembled comparative statistics from recent years and have sought assessments from leading scholars and critics. Above all, we have asked women artists themselves to reflect on their progress and suggest what could be done to improve matters.

BY MAURA REILLY

Despite encouraging signs of women's improved status and visibility in the art world, there are still major systemic problems.

Do not misunderstand me: women artists are in a far better position today than they were 45 years ago, when Linda Nochlin wrote her landmark essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" published in the pages of this magazine. Access to "high art" education, to which women have historically been denied, is now possible for many with financial means. (According to the *New York Times*, in 2006 women represented more than 60 percent of the students in art programs in the United States.) Moreover, the institutional power structures that Nochlin argued made it "impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men, no matter what the potency of their so-called talent, or genius," have been shifting.

But inequality persists. The common refrain that "women are treated equally in the art world now" needs to be challenged. The existence of a few superstars or token achievers—like Marina Abramović, Tracey Emin, and Cindy Sherman—does not mean that women artists have achieved equality. Far from it.

The more closely one examines art-world statistics, the more glaringly obvious it becomes that, despite decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the majority continues to be defined as white, Euro-American, heterosexual, privileged, and, above all, male. Sexism is still so insidiously woven into the institutional fabric, language, and logic of the mainstream art world that it often goes undetected.

## The Museums

Last fall, artnet News asked 20 of the most powerful women in the art world if they felt the industry was biased and received a resounding "yes." Several were museum directors who argued that the senior management, predominantly male, had a stranglehold on the institutions, often preventing them from instituting substantive change. According to a 2014 study "The Gender Gap in Art Museum Directorships," conducted by the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), female art-museum directors earn substantially less than their male counterparts, and upper-level positions are most often occupied by men. The good news is that, while in 2005 women ran 32 percent of the museums in the United States, they now run 42.6 percent—albeit mainly the ones with the smallest budgets.

Discrimination against women at the top trickles down into every aspect of the art world—gallery representation, auction price differentials, press coverage, and inclusion in permanent-collection displays and solo-exhibition

programs. A glance at the past few years of special-exhibition schedules at major art institutions in the United States, for instance, especially the presentation of solo shows, reveals the continued prevalence of gender disparity. Of all the solo exhibitions since 2007 at the Whitney Museum, 29 percent went to women artists. Some statistics have improved. In the year 2000, the Guggenheim in New York had zero solo shows by women. In 2014, 14 percent of the solo exhibitions were by women (Fig. 1).

There are signs of improvement throughout France and Germany, but parity is nowhere in sight. Of all the solo exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou since 2007, only 16 percent went to women. In 1980 it was 1.1 percent, in 1990 it was 0.4 percent, and in 2000 it was 0.2 percent (Fig. 2).

In the UK the Hayward Gallery comes out with the worst mark, with only 22 percent of solo exhibitions dedicated to female artists over the past 7 years. Whitechapel Gallery is at 40 percent—thanks to its feminist director, Iwona Blazwick. Tate Modern has granted women artists solo exhibitions only 25 percent of the time since 2007 (Fig. 3). Fortunately Tate Modern's 2015 exhibition program features three solo exhibitions dedicated to female artists—Sonia Delaunay, Agnes Martin, and Marlene Dumas.

Permanent-collection displays at major art institutions are also imbalanced. Granted the opportunity to reinstall collections at museums, many curators are not daring enough to reconfigure the hegemonic narratives in ways that offer new perspectives on old stories.

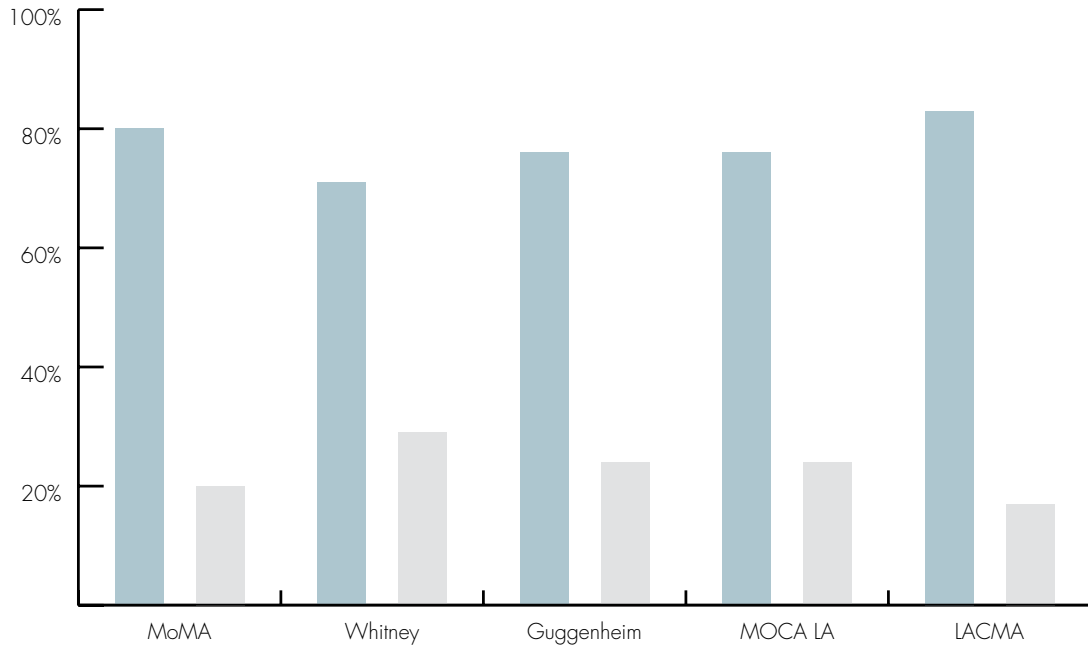
In 2009, however, the Centre Pompidou took the bold step of organizing the nearly two-year exhibition "elles@centrepompidou," in which the then head of contemporary collections, Camille Morineau, reinstalled the museum's permanent collection with only women artists. During its run, attendance to the permanent collection increased by 25 percent.

"Elles" was a particularly revolutionary gesture in the context of France. As Morineau explains, it "was a very un-French thing to do. In France, nobody counts the number of men and women in exhibitions. Very few people notice that sometimes there are no women." It took her six years to convince the then director, Alfred Pacquement, that it was a sound exhibition proposal. The show meant the Pompidou had to broaden its holdings of women artists through purchases and donations.

"Elles" was a radical gesture of affirmative action—but one that was not long-lasting. In the subsequent post-"elles" re-hang of the permanent collection, only 10 percent of the works on view are by women—exactly the same as it was pre-"elles." Moreover, the acquisition funds

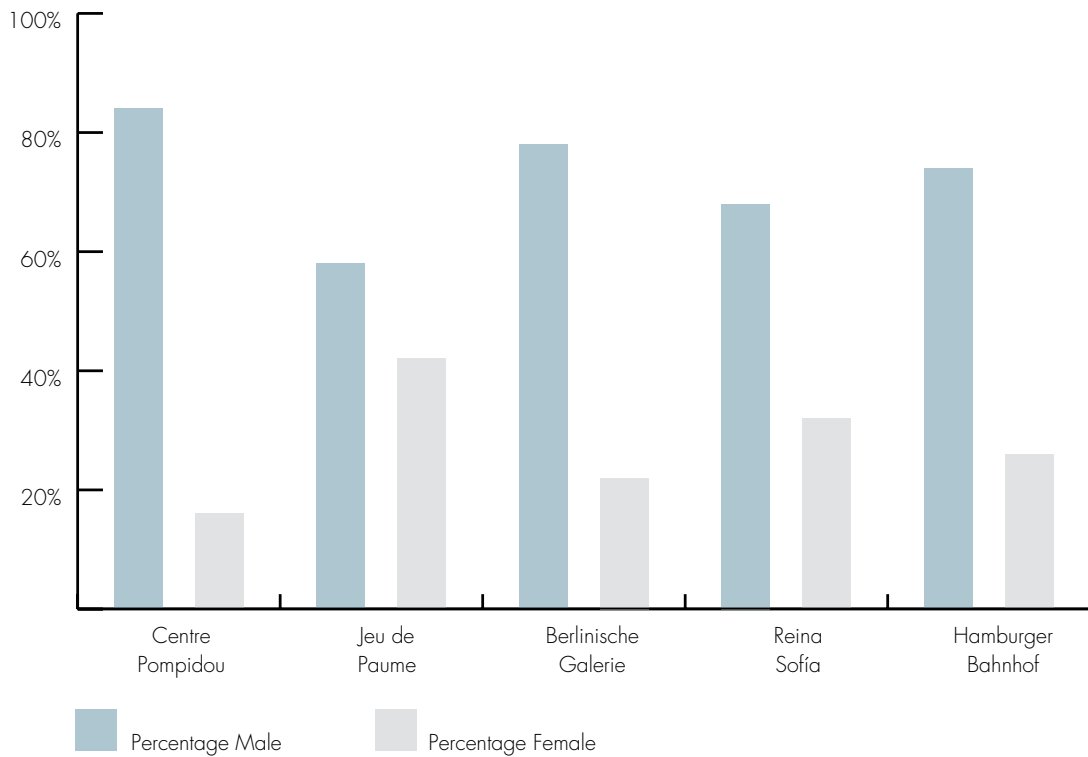
PREVIOUS SPREAD Cara Despain's 2014 poster for Micol Hebron's Gallery Tally project representing the overall percentage of women artists represented in New York and L.A. galleries.

*Fig. 1 Percentages of Solo Exhibitions at American Institutions, 2007–2014*



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*Fig. 2 Percentages of Solo Exhibitions at French and German Institutions, 2007–2014*



for women artists almost immediately dried up.

The Pompidou is not alone in perpetuating discriminatory practices. As of the Guerrilla Girls' last count, in 2012, only 4 percent of artists on display at the Metropolitan Museum were women—worse than in 1989.

It's not looking much better at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 2004, when the museum opened its new building, with a reinstallation of the permanent collection spanning the years 1880 to 1970, of the 410 works on display in the fourth- and fifth-floor galleries, only 16 were by women. That's 4 percent (Fig. 4). Even fewer works were by artists of color. At my most recent count, in April 2015, 7 percent of the works on display were by women.

Many positive changes at MoMA have to do with the MoMA Women's Project (MWP), an initiative begun in 2005, not from within MoMA, but at the suggestion of donor Sarah Peter. Curators have done in-depth research on the women artists in the museum's collection, where the ratio of male-to-female artists is about 5 to 1. The Modern Women's Fund, a funding group of trustees and collectors, is now the umbrella for a series of ongoing initiatives, including educational and public programs, targeting acquisitions of work by women artists for the collection, as well as major solo exhibitions dedicated to women artists. The aim is to reassess the traditionally masculinist canon.

One hopes that these subtle yet historic improvements in representation for women at MoMA will continue given that there has been a changing of the curatorial guard, with only one woman, Ann Temkin, continuing to head a department (since 2008). Perhaps the museum will take the opportunity of its upcoming Diller Scofidio + Renfro expansion to exhibit more work by women artists in its permanent-collection galleries. Internal and external pressure might be put on them to do so. In the meantime, the museum is featuring women in three major solo shows opening in the spring and summer of 2015—Björk, Yoko Ono, and Zoe Leonard.

## Biennials & Documenta

Women are often excluded from exhibitions within which one would think they would play major roles. While the 12th edition of Documenta, directed by Roger M. Buegel in 2007, included 53 women out of 112—a promising 47 percent—Okwui Enwezor's edition, in 2002, praised for its postcolonial curatorial strategy, included only 34 women out of a total of 118 participating artists—29 percent. Of course, that's far better than Catherine David's edition, in 1997 (Fig. 5). The first female director included less than 17 percent women, reminding us that some women curators, even at the highest administrative levels, are not as attuned to parity

as one might hope. Female arts professionals are often biased in favor of males; that, too, is part of the problem.

The statistics for the last few editions of the Venice Biennale are similar to those from Documenta, demonstrating recent improvements, but continuing problems. While the 2009 edition featured a promising 43 percent women, in 2013 that figure dropped to 26 percent under curator Massimiliano Gioni. This year's biennale comes in at 33 percent (Fig. 6).

The Whitney Biennial saw a positive shift in 2010, under curator Francesco Bonami. But 2014's was particularly contentious (Fig. 7). Within a month of its opening, a group of artists organized a protest show, the "Whitney Houston Biennial: I'm Every Woman," which featured 85 woman artists.

## The Press

Women still get less coverage than men in magazines and other periodicals. Male artists are also, more often than not, featured in the advertisements and on the covers of art magazines; for instance, in 2014, *Artforum* featured a female artist only once on its front cover. Consider the September 2014 issue of *Artforum*, which featured Jeff Koons on the cover: of the 73 advertisements associated with galleries in New York, only 11 promoted solo exhibitions by women—that's 15 percent.

It's worse when one compares how many articles and reviews dedicated to solo exhibitions prefer males to females. In the December issue of *ARTnews*, for instance, of the 29 reviews, 17 were devoted to solo shows of men artists and 4 to solo shows of women artists.

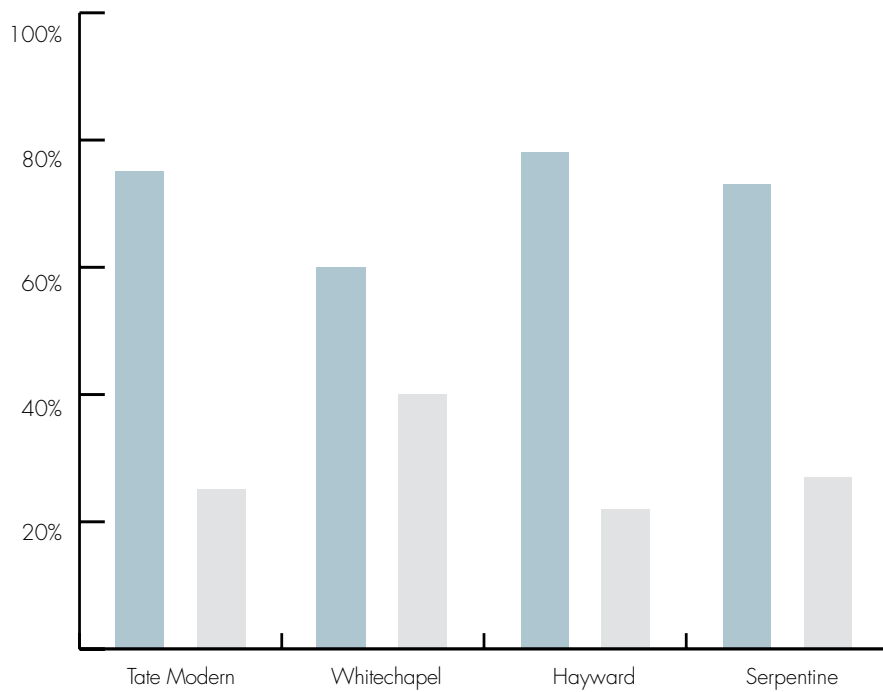
Year-end "best of" articles demonstrate what Katha Pollitt called in 1991 the "Smurfette principle," which found that most children's programs, like the "Smurfs," have a majority of male characters, with just one female included in the group. This was certainly the case with the "Best of 2005" issue of *Artforum*, in which only 11 of the 69 solo-exhibition slots were granted to women. That's 7.6 percent. However, in just ten years there was a marked improvement. In *Artforum*'s "Best of 2014" issue, 36 women artists were highlighted out of 95 solo shows; that's 34.2 percent.

## The Market

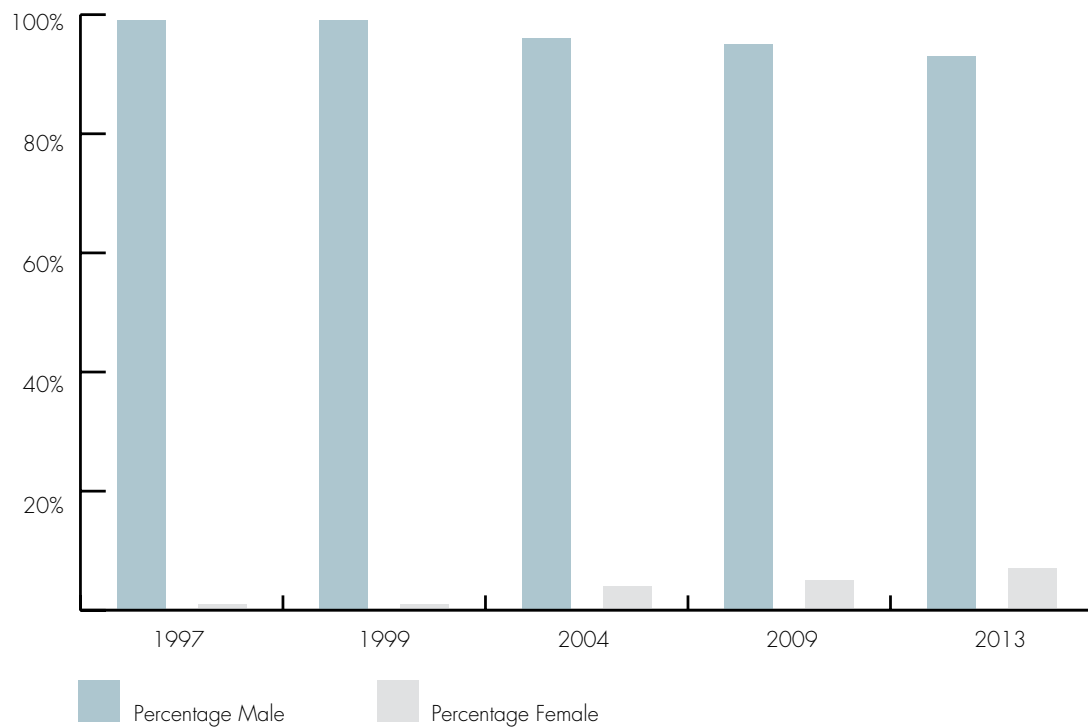
The availability of works by women artists at galleries has a tremendous impact on the amount of press coverage they receive; the market remains an arena where women are particularly unequal.

Unlike in 1986, when the Guerrilla Girls made their famous report card, there are now some New York galleries representing women 50 percent of the time, or

*Fig. 3 Percentages of Solo Exhibitions at United Kingdom Institutions, 2007–2014*



*Fig. 4 Museum of Modern Art in New York, 4th- and 5th-Floor Permanent Exhibition Displays*



more, including PPOW, Sikkema Jenkins, Zach Feuer, Tracey Williams, Edward Thorp, Salon 94, and Galerie Lelong—as the Pussy Galore feminist art collective has made clear in their “update” of the Guerrilla Girls poster (Fig. 8).

In 2013, artist Micol Hebron, propelled by the preponderance of male artists in gallery ads in *Artforum* and in galleries themselves, started the project Gallery Tally. Over 1,500 artists have participated in it. Each artist calculates gallery statistics and then designs a poster showing male/female percentages. By Hebron’s estimation, approximately 30 percent of the artists represented by commercial galleries in the United States are women. (A recent audit of the galleries in London demonstrates similar figures: in 2013, East London Fawcett examined the artists represented by 134 commercial galleries in London and found that 31 percent were women.) In its report from October 2014, Gallery Tally looked at over 4,000 artists represented in L.A. and New York—of those, 32.3 percent were women. “There is still a real problem with who’s getting opportunities, who’s getting shown, who’s getting collected, who’s getting promoted, and who’s getting written about,” Hebron says.

The December 2014 issue of *Vanity Fair* featured an article titled “Prima Galleristas” (a.k.a. “The Top 14 Female Art Dealers”). What was left unsaid was how few of these “galleristas” actually support women artists. Indeed, all but one of them—Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn—represent women less than 33 percent of the time.

At auction, the highest price paid to date for a work by a living woman artist is \$7.1 million, for a Yayoi Kusama painting; the highest result for a living man was an editioned sculpture by Jeff Koons, which sold for \$58.4 million. The most ever paid for a work by a deceased woman artist is \$44.4 million for a Georgia O’Keeffe painting, versus \$142.4 million for a Francis Bacon triptych. (One of the many reasons for the almost \$100 million difference was articulated by O’Keeffe herself, “The men liked to put me down as the best woman painter. I think I’m one of the best painters.”)

Such numbers contribute to how women artists are ranked, in terms of their market viability. The annual list *Kunstkompass* (“Art Compass”) purports to announce “the world’s 100 greatest artists.” It bases its statistics on the frequency and prestige of exhibitions, publications, and press coverage, and the median price of one work of art. In the 2014 edition, 17 of the 100 “great artists” are women. *Artfacts.net* does its own ranking based on art market sales. In their 2015 report 11 women made it into the top 100 slots. In 2014 *Artnet.com* revealed a list of the “Top 100 Living Artists, 2011–14,” examining the last five years of the market, with five women listed. Each year *Artprice.com* draws up an international report on the

contemporary art market, as seen through the prism of auction sales, and presents the top 500 artists according to turnover. In its 2014 report there were just 3 women in the top 100.

Amy Cappellazzo, an art advisor and former head of post-war and contemporary art at Christie’s, believes the market is “steadily improving for women at a faster clip in the last five years than in the previous 50 years.” As for the fact that we are still far from parity, she adds, “of course, we cannot go backward and fully amend the iniquity and inequality of the past.” Ultimately, she says, “there are aspects of markets one can influence, but there are vast other parts that are like the weather—good luck!”

## What Can Be Done?

If we cannot help others to see the structural problems, we can’t begin to fix them. What can we do to promote just and fair representation in the art world? How can we get those in the art world to recognize, accept, and acknowledge that there is indeed inequality of the sexes? How can we go about educating disbelievers who contend that, because there are signs of improvement, the battle has been won?

Linda Nochlin urges women to “be fearless, speak up, work together, and consistently make trouble.”

Let’s not just talk about feminism—let’s live it. Don’t wait for change to come—be proactive. Let’s call out institutions, critics, curators, collectors, and gallerists for sexist practices.

If, as feminist theorist Hélène Cixous argues, women are spoken of and for, but are very rarely allowed to speak themselves, then it is imperative that women become speaking subjects, rather than silent objects. If a “well-adjusted” woman is silent, static, invisible, then an unruly, speaking woman is the loud woman-on-top violating the “natural order” of things. Similarly, in her new book *Women in Dark Times* (Bloomsbury, 2014) Jacqueline Rose argues that feminism today needs a new, louder, bolder, and more scandalous language—one that “does not try to sanitize itself.”

Cultural critic bell hooks also emphasizes the importance of women standing their ground, and urges all writers from oppressed groups to speak, to talk back, a term which she defines as the movement from object to subject. “Speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act—as such, it represents a threat.” To talk back is to liberate one’s voice. However, as Sarah Ahmed cautions, to “speak out” or “call out” an injustice is to run the risk of being deemed a “feminist killjoy,” and a complainer. (In her



Fig. 5 Documenta Participants, Various Editions, 1959–2012 (with names of artistic directors)

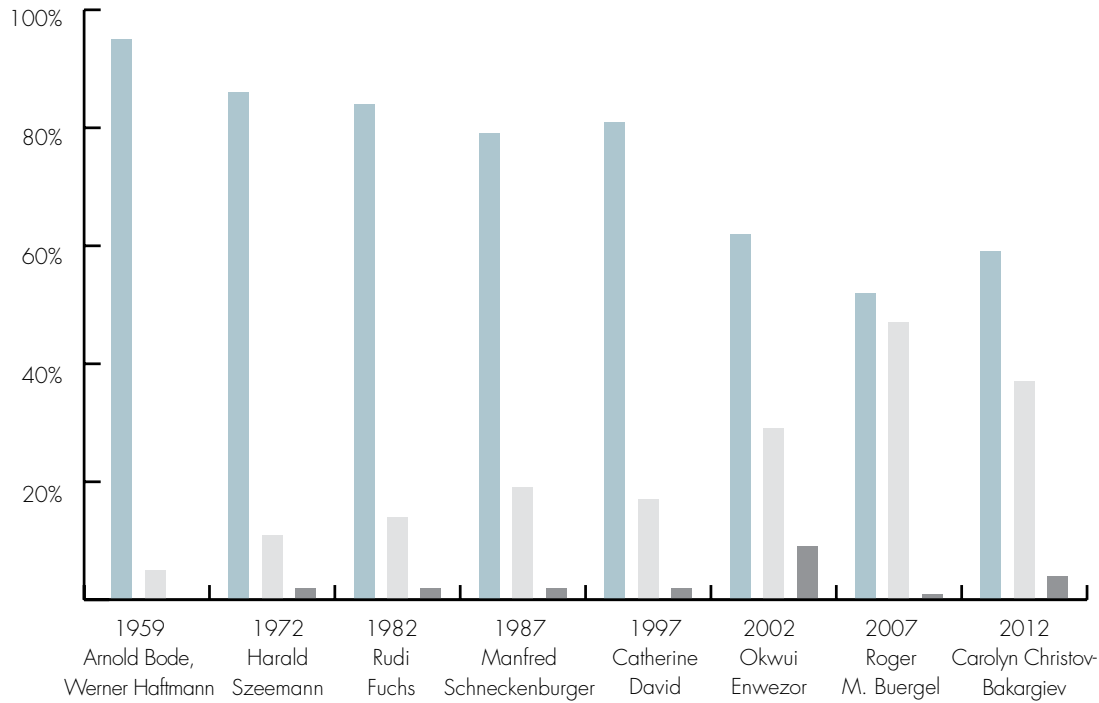
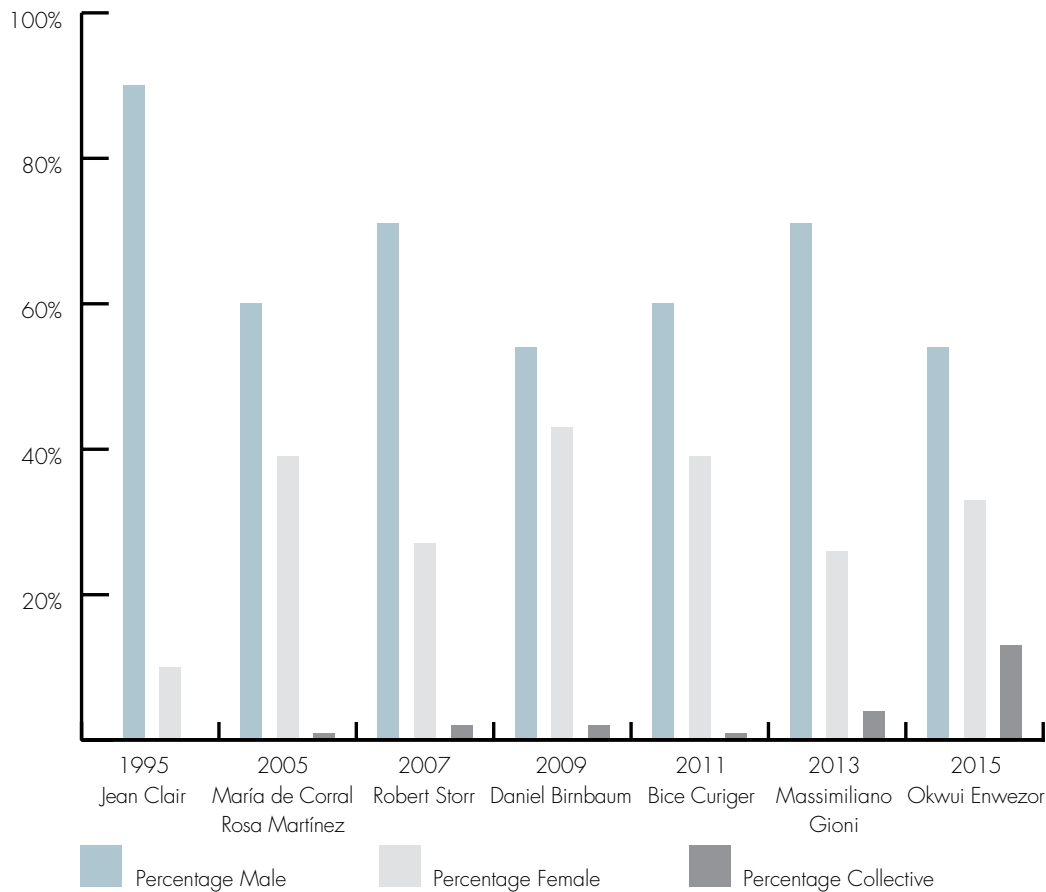


Fig. 6 Venice Biennale Curated-Exhibition Participants, 1995, 2005–15 (with names of artistic directors)



2014 TED talk, “We Should All Be Feminists,” Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie responded to such accusations by declaring herself a “happy feminist.”)

We can and must draw on the history of feminism as a struggle for universal suffrage. If, as Adichie declares, a “feminist” is quite simply “a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes,” then it is a concept that many can readily embrace. Indeed, the year 2014 saw an unprecedented number of celebrities “come out” as feminists—Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, John Legend, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Ryan Gosling, Laverne Cox, among others—demonstrating not, as some skeptics propose, that feminism is being dumbed down, but rather that the quest for equality has moved across the bastions of academia to everyday discussions.

We can and must build from the historiography of feminist and women’s art shows, which for over four decades have either directly or indirectly addressed concerns of sexism in the arts. Beginning in the 1970s with landmarks like “Womanhouse” and “Women Artists: 1550–1950,” through the 1980s and 1990s with “Bad Girls” and “Sexual Politics,” to the more recent “WACK!” and “Global Feminisms,” exhibitions have functioned as curatorial correctives to the exclusion of women from the master narratives of art history, and from the contemporary art scene itself.

We can and must continue to organize conferences, launch feminist magazines, like *Ms.*, *Bitch*, and *Bust*, and run blogs like the CoUNTess, an Australian website run by Elvis Richardson that started in 2008 and is soon to embark on a year-long data-collection study titled *Close Encounters*, funded by the Cruthers Art Foundation. When complete, *Close Encounters* will be the first online resource to establish a benchmark for gender representation in contemporary visual arts in Australia.

We can continue to establish and participate in feminist coalitions such as the Women’s Caucus for Art and the Feminist Art Project. We must continue to start feminist collectives and artist-run initiatives like A.I.R. Gallery and Ceres Gallery in New York; ff in Berlin; Brown Council in Sydney; Electra Productions, the Inheritance Projects, and SALT in London; FAG (Feminist Art Gallery) in Toronto; and La Centrale in Montreal. We can establish and participate in direct-action groups fighting discrimination against women, like Women’s Action Coalition, which was hugely vocal and influential during the ’90s, Fierce Pussy, the Brainstormers, and, of course, the Guerrilla Girls.

Feminist manifestos generate publicity, which pushes the conversation forward. In 2005 Xabier Arakistain launched the *Manifiesto Arco 2005*, which demanded equality in Spanish museums. It was symbolic—none of the museums acted on it—but it did garner international press.

Teachers can and must offer women’s and feminist art courses and teach from a feminist perspective to present a more inclusive canon. Similarly, participation in feminist curatorial initiatives like “fCu” (Feminist Curators United) or “If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part of Your Revolution” (a curatorial group from Amsterdam founded in 2005 by curators Frédérique Bergholtz, Annie Fletcher, and Tanja Elstgeest) moves academic feminism into the public sphere.

We can hold collectors accountable. If one encounters a private collection with few women in it, one might consider sending a Guerrilla Girls “Dearest Art Collector” postcard, which reads, “It has come to our attention that your collection, like most, does not contain enough art by women. We know that you feel terrible about this and will rectify the situation immediately.” Art collectors have the power to demand a broader selection than what they’re being offered by most gallerists.

We can also hold museum boards accountable. Boards have acquisition committees to whom curators present objects for possible purchase. With the majority of boards composed of male members, a curator’s task is all the more difficult if s/he is presenting work by a woman artist for consideration. If museum collection policies were modified to attend to gender discrepancies, then perhaps acquisitions could be more justly made.

Not only do we need to ensure that women’s work is purchased, we need to continue to curate women-only and feminist exhibitions as well as ones with gender parity. “In order to address . . . disparity, curators need to work much harder, and become much more informed, especially when examining art from other contexts that they are not familiar with or not living in,” says Russell Storer, senior curator at the National Gallery in Singapore. “Curators need to become aware of what women are doing, how women are working, the kind of ideas and interests that women are dealing with, and that can be quite different to what male artists are doing.” This is not affirmative-action curating, it’s smart curating.

And, yes, we need to keep crunching the numbers. Counting is, after all, a feminist strategy. In 2013, the *New York Times Book Review* responded to data showing it infrequently featured female authors by appointing Pamela Paul as its new editor and making a public commitment to righting the balance.

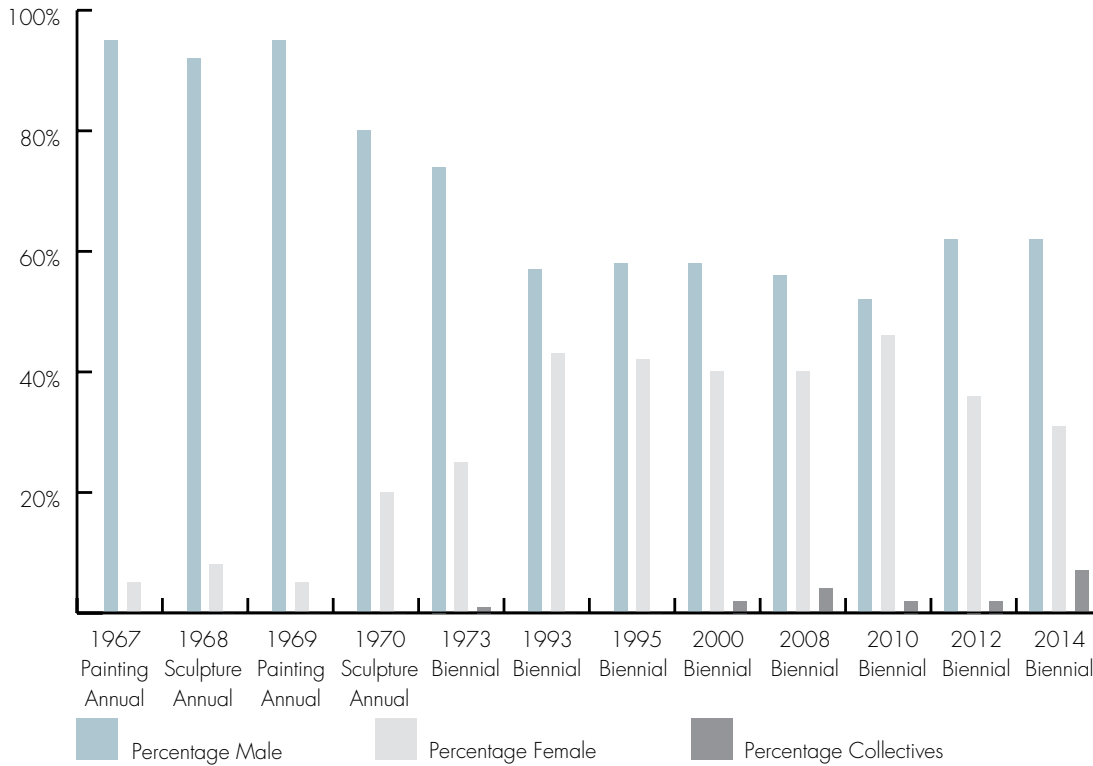
This is what we need to do in the art world: right the balance.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM The Guerrilla Girls’ 1986 “Report Card” alongside Pussy Galore’s 2015 version.

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*Maura Reilly is an author and curator based in New York. In 2007, she co-curated, with Linda Nochlin, the exhibition “Global Feminisms,” for the Brooklyn Museum.*

Fig. 7 Percentages for Whitney Biennials and Annuals, Various Years



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Fig. 8

## GUERRILLA GIRLS' 1986 REPORT CARD

GALLERY	NO. OF WOMEN 1985-6	NO. OF WOMEN 1986-7	REMARKS
Blum Helman	1	1	No improvement
Mary Boone	0	0	Boy crazy
Grace Borgenicht	0	0	Lacks initiative
Diane Brown	0	2	Could do even better
Leo Castelli	4	3	Not paying attention
Charles Cowles	2	2	Needs work
Marisa del Rey	0	0	No progress
Allan Frumkin	1	1	Doesn't follow directions
Marian Goodman	0	1	Keep trying
Pat Hearn	0	0	Delinquent
Marlborough	2	1	Failing
Oil & Steel	0	1	Underachiever
Pace	2	2	Working below capacity
Tony Shafrazi	0	1	Still unsatisfactory
Sperone Westwater	0	0	Unforgivable
Edward Thorp	1	4	Making excellent progress
Washburn	1	1	Unacceptable

Source: Art in America Annual 1985-6 and 1986-7

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD  
 532 E GUARDIA PLACE, #237, NY, NY 10012  
 E-MAIL: GUERRILLAGIRLS@YOHOGIRLS.COM  
 © Guerrilla Girls 1986

## PUSSY GALORE'S 2015 REPORT CARD

GALLERY	% OF WOMEN	GALLERY	% OF WOMEN
303 Gallery	41%	Matthew Marks	16%
Alexander & Bonin	29%	Marlborough	16%
Mary Boone	13%	Metro Pictures	33%
Leo Castelli	15%	Pace	16%
Cheim & Read	36%	Petzel	35%
Paula Cooper	29%	Postmasters	39%
Derek Eller	15%	PPOW	53%
Zach Feuer	50%	Andrea Rosen	29%
James Fuentes	33%	Salon 94	50%
Gagosian	15%	Tony Shafrazi	5%
Marian Goodman	22%	Jack Shainman	26%
Casey Kaplan	23%	Sikkema Jenkins	50%
Paul Kasmin	11%	Sonnabend	31%
Anton Kern	21%	Sperone Westwater	8%
Lehmann Maupin	41%	Edward Thorp	50%
Galerie Lelong	61%	Tracey Williams	58%
Luhring Augustine	21%	David Zwirner	27%

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **PUSSY GALORE** KICKING IDIOCY IN THE ASS

© Pussy Galore 2015

## ELEANOR ANTIN

*Born in 1935, lives in San Diego, California*

Several years ago I was on a panel at the home of a collector couple. They had a garden where they served food to a crowd of art-world people. It was all relaxed and nonhierarchical; the hosts sat in a corner and seemed to be having a good time. After the panel, a woman in the audience had a question. She was the director of the art gallery at a small college and wanted to do an all-women show, but there was protest about it and she didn't know if it was a worthy thing to do. At that moment, our hostess leapt onto the stage and began to talk about how she and her husband had amassed a large and important collection without ever considering the sex of the artists. They chose out of love of the work, and for the artists' achievements and critical importance. The artists' sex was irrelevant and should never be considered. It was demeaning to artists to consider such things. When I couldn't take it anymore, I interrupted. "Wow! You certainly got all worked up by that question. Before this you were minding your own business. When this single question got you so worked up, you jumped into the discussion to tell us what pure art lovers you and your husband are. Why did this simple question freak you out so much?"

I turned to the woman who had asked the question, and said, "We have been having all-women shows for some time. Some of them are good. Some aren't as good. Probably some suck. But by and large, they are

interesting and necessary. Since it seems like a big deal to your colleagues, your college is probably a small one off the beaten track. I'll bet you have a number of good, serious artists working quietly in your area. I'm sure you have some at your school. I'm sure some of your faculty fit the bill. If you think a show of women artists would generate interest and discourse, perhaps political awareness, go for it. It's a great idea. It will at the very least allow artists not used to public attention to see their work in a larger context and learn what other people like them are doing, to perhaps even discover what, if any, similarities there are among the women. You might discover one or two really powerful artists. Just remember, don't stick only to your school. Track down artists, young and old, who live and work in your area. Maybe some of them will learn more about their work and their lives. Maybe they'll get together with other artists and do other shows." I ended by congratulating her and wishing her luck. People started filing out. Our hostess looked shocked and suddenly seemed bedraggled. It occurred to me that she had probably planned a short farewell speech. I cheerfully went into the next room and joined the other guests devouring her shrimps and lobsters.

Eleanor Antin, *Judgement of Paris (after Rubens)*, 2007, from the "Helen's Odyssey" series.



## LYNDA BENGLIS

*Born in 1941, lives and works between New York City, Santa Fe, Kastellorizo, Greece, and Ahmedabad, India*

I feel that whatever I do has to do with my being a person who happens to be a woman. But I think the political issue is a great issue, although I'm not involved with the economics. I'm involved with the ideas.

Nevertheless, I think we, as women artists, have to make our demands. And I think I do everything for myself that I possibly can within that situation. I'm lucky enough to have always had outlets for my work. But also, I've assumed power. You have to carefully sift out the important things that don't necessarily apply to your life in order to get to more important things, in order to go on, to make your own rules and not be a victim. Worrying takes a lot of energy, and it's negative.

For my part, if I see something good being made by a woman, I'd like to buy it. I have a collection that seems to be fairly balanced. Right now, around my bedroom at Prince Street, I have three women artists whom I admire. But I do have other art.

When I was teaching at the University of Rochester, I went to San Francisco for a college art conference. Paul Brock, who was the dean of CalArts, saw me and said, "Oh, I'm at CalArts. It's a new school. We have a new building. You know, it's the Disney school." He added, "We have a feminist movement." He was married to Miriam Schapiro, and Judy Chicago was teaching there. He said, "You're somebody who is really doing something." I couldn't believe he said that, as if the other women weren't. That really irritated me. So I came, I gave that talk, but when I got there, I found that it was scheduled on the very day that the women artists were opening the 1972 exhibition "Womanhouse." There was only one woman at the conference.

Nothing's different today, but there are more women artists, and there are more people in the arts. I've managed to do what I pretty much wanted to do. And I encourage my students to do what they feel like doing. I advise them about life, and I feel equally about what they're doing and how to help them approach what they're faced with, whether they're a man or a woman. My women students at CalArts are very good. I'm even thinking about commissioning a work from one of them. I think women should support women, absolutely, but I support the guys, too.

My L.A. experience has been very, very good. I was also part of a situation where Dorothea Rockburne and myself and Martin Friedman were invited to the new Walker Art Center to do a commission, and I made a work that Hilton Kramer happened to like. He said, "That's the best thing since Louise Nevelson." So, you know, women are

compared with other women, and that's OK, too.

Nevelson is semi-forgotten, but I think we're having a resurgence with the museums. I remember somebody said to me recently, "You're too young! We're now showing women in their 80s and 90s and almost 100." And I thought, "Well, great. Good on ya!"

I think that it's a great time, that we have a gathering new wave here. A new old wave. The water's always been there, the light source has always been there, and women really do have the light source.

Lynda Benglis, *Swinburne Egg I*, 2009.



## COCO FUSCO

*Born in 1960, lives in New York City*

It is important to pay attention to statistics when evaluating women's representation in exhibitions, museum collections, and gallery rosters. Those figures tell us a great deal about the depth of institutional commitments beyond the rhetoric spewed out to the media and to funders.

As for my own experience, I don't know if I am viewed primarily as a woman artist. I think I am viewed first and foremost as an outspoken person of color, and then as a person who is something of an interloper in the world of art, since I did not go to art school, and I write criticism and have an academic background.

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There are times when I feel that males in positions of authority view me as a threat because I am female and not complicit in their sexist bullshit—these are the guys who fear mature female success, screw their female art students whenever they can, and treat female colleagues as subservient to themselves. They refuse to acknowledge and respect female talent, and they employ mafia-style tactics to undermine female advancement. Their methods range from damning with faint praise to refusing to accept women as their bosses, or secretly organizing the “demise” of female peers through the circulation of negative rumor. I have seen all of that happen, and it has taught me never to believe that feminism is accepted by men. Men in the art world are no more progressive than the rest of society—they just pay lip service to whatever is politically correct when they need to.

Taking all of that into account, as an artist, I am not sure that my being a woman has been more of a determinant in my career than have the other aspects of my identity.

Unfortunately, the nature of the art business is exclusionary. Works are deemed valuable not by popular choice but by virtue of the decisions of a tiny elite, and I don't see that changing anytime soon. This is what distinguishes the art economy from that of film or literature, where popular demand is extremely important to determining one's success. However, I do think that there is much to be done in art education. In the United States, decent art education is for the most part a luxury afforded to very few. Art schools are among the most expensive institutions in higher learning. That alone creates a very unlevel playing field.

And, finally, it's important to remember that women in power use the same sexist tactics as men against other women. In other words, men are not the only adherents to patriarchal principles.

*Coco Fusco, Observations of Predation in Humans: A Lecture by Dr. Zira, Animal Psychologist, 2014.*

## CHITRA GANESH

*Born in 1975, lives in Brooklyn, New York*

The majority of my colleagues are women. Because my work opens up narratives to offer alternative representations of sexuality and eroticism, it is considered feminist.

I bear the legacies of being a woman artist and at the same time using imagery that many people would consider foreign or inaccessible in an American cultural context.

At a moment when so much is contingent upon an artist's market success—inclusion in biennials and museum shows, attaining gallery representation, higher-level grants and commissions, and mainstream visibility—it is difficult for artists whose cultural materials, art-historical referents, or formal approaches are not readily apprehended in the context of the mainstream market. I experience some of this in the reception of my work, with its combined presentation of figuration, sexuality, dark-skinned bodies, and seemingly “foreign” influences that a viewer located in the West might not be able to connect to American history or Western art history. Because of its apparent “illegibility,” support for my work is at times more institutional than commercial.

It is only within the last ten years that African American artists have garnered mainstream institutional attention in the United States. And for those of us whose parents are foreign born, it might take a few more decades to attain legibility and recognition as “American.” “America Is Hard to See,” the new Whitney Museum's inaugural exhibition, for instance, includes one artist of South Asian descent in a roster of over 400 participating artists.

I read an interesting article about the “unrecognized woman artist” which points to how prevalent this narrative is: it says “She is unrecognized,” not “We didn't recognize her,” and so evades naming the structures that produce this lack of recognition.

At this moment, popular entertainment merges with the consumption of contemporary art via art fairs, blockbuster shows, and the like. How can the imbalance be addressed when the subject of a MoMA retrospective is the female artist Björk? Not that art needs to be esoteric, but what is considered “art for the people” needs to be broadened and reevaluated.

There's still a struggle between the specific and the universal in categorizing contemporary art. The universal remains an unmarked, transcendent category, while marked categories are specified, of “special interest” rather than broader appeal, and with less institutional power. Many remark upon the fact that contemporary

art never gets called white male art, but women artists, African American artists, or queer artists seem to be labeled as such in order to qualify their work. Many have expressed a desire to buck these categories, to “just be able to make whatever I want”—everybody from my students in their 20s to extremely renowned artists who have been working for decades.

It has been eye-opening and a relief to exhibit my work outside of the United States—most places have a much richer, longer sense of history and have likely had a relationship with or awareness of the South Asian subcontinent from centuries past. In India specifically, I feel liberated from the burden of having the “Indianness” of my work be the first and foremost engagement. There, my work is able to breathe differently and transmit via other channels, and can be approached and engaged as being, for example, about temporality, iconicity, science fiction, nostalgia, rather than being placed within a specific identitarian context. Everything we're discussing here is only the tip of the iceberg.

Chitra Ganesh, *The Fortuneteller*, 2014.

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## CLEOPATRA'S

*Curatorial group founded in 2008, based in Brooklyn, New York*

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Our generation lives in a more clouded/coded world, where we all know “what’s right” to some extent and yet inequality persists. A socialized political correctness keeps much outright discrimination at bay. Cleopatra’s age group is one that remembers a (which-wave?) riot grrrl. (Internally and externally, there is a winking reference to that era.) A lot of likeminded girl-power press is dropped upon Cleopatra’s, though we have never clearly stated any feminist mission or criteria. Do we self-identify as feminists? Sure. How does one perceive us now that that label is upon us? Many people introduce us as an all-female-led project—people have asked, “You only show women, right?” The answer is far from that and yet there is still some efficacy to the name, the fact that we are women speaking more than our statistics do.

We might add that the number of women working in the art world, attending art schools, etc., has increased dramatically—maybe a key difference is that we’re able to participate more as service workers and students, but that it’s incredibly hard to move past these entry or staff roles. We’re now encouraged to take part, but often so schools and galleries can make money off us.

In a recent tally of all artists and practitioners Cleopatra’s has worked with, 47 percent are women. We’ve done about 98 projects; 22 percent of exhibitions have been either solo-female or all-women exhibitions,

32 percent of exhibitions have been either solo-male or all-men exhibitions—that leaves 46 percent mixed shows that are pretty much 50/50. Not bad stats but we could do better. That’s without even trying—and not counting—until seven years into a ten-year project. Does it make a difference that we are all women running the place when the stats come out a bit more equally? We’re not sure.

People might find hope looking at the stats of small spaces and institutions off the beaten path. These secondary institutions are making an attempt, but like the women artists who don’t get shown, the women-run spaces don’t get attention.

Hands down the biggest observation that we have made in the role of being four perfect targets for artists to approach, pitch projects to, ask for a studio visit, etc., is that probably nine out of ten people to hit us up are men. We call them squeaky wheels. Squeaky wheels get grease. More women artists need to approach venues and curators, pitch projects, ask for the studio visit, etc., and become patrons of the types of spaces that they want to see exist, that have the programming that includes them. They need to approach people who already support women and make sure to go to those shows and help promote those spaces. It’s a reciprocal relationship.

Janice Guy, *Untitled (Wicker Chair)*, 1979 (both).



## K8 HARDY

*Born in 1977, lives in New York City*

It's important that we continue to talk about the reality of the sexism in the art world. There's a code of silence that envelops you once you get closer to being an insider. It's crass to talk about sales, because artists are above sales. I feel so lucky to have had the success I've had that I'm hesitant to complain on a public platform. I'm not really sure if men feel this way, or if this hesitation and minimizing gratefulness is part of the female brainwashing. Of course, there's an exception for everything, and this is part of what makes sexism in the art world so slippery. Art is so circumstantial, but the figures relay the reality.

At the moment, my work is in a few museum and private collections. However, I am not in the game of making six figures a year from being collected, or anywhere near that. Despite all the press and exposure I have, and despite having had my work in innumerable art fairs, it seems incredibly difficult to accumulate the momentum of really being collected or exhibited.

I feel like I've been hitting the glass ceiling for four or five years. I can't make enough money to hire an assistant, and I can barely cover my studio expenses. I'm responsible for making a lot of decisions that don't lead me toward commercial success, and the integrity of my work is my priority, but I rarely see a man with similar credentials making so little.

The most frustrating difference is that my male peers have many more solo shows, which are necessary to developing their careers and developing as artists. They are in kunsthalle exhibitions all over Europe. I recently had my first solo show at one of these institutions. It was in the basement, and the extremely macho male painters were upstairs in the exhibition space. According to this institution, this was a fair placement because of the male artists' numbers overall, their statistics. Our experiences

K8 Hardy, *Form #21*, 2010, from the "Position" series.



were not part of the consideration, so you can't even get close to equality with ambitious numbers.

It's not my goal to be as rich as my male peers. I don't care so much about that. I want to work and I want to survive, and I believe my audience expects as much from me.

The biggest inequity in the art world develops out of race and class privilege. The elephant in these numbers comes down to race and to the fact that we are really considering mostly white men and white women.

This is one reason I participated in founding the group W.A.G.E. ([www.wageforwork.com](http://www.wageforwork.com)). Artists need modest fees and rights that enable them to exhibit and survive without losing their jobs or the income from the time they need to take off from work. This is a small divide that few can pass without the privilege of education or class.

## DEBORAH KASS

*Born in 1952, lives in Brooklyn, New York*

I was raised in a very middle-class post-war world. In this generation, white middle-class mothers did not get the respect fathers did. It was just like *Mad Men*—those were the values I grew up with. It's what was on TV, in the movies and advertising. My sister and I cleared the dishes while my brother sat after dinner. It was the '60s, pre-civil rights and the women's movement. No one taught us girls how to be in the world.

Luckily, I had my grandmother. Her parents were Hungarian immigrants who didn't speak English. They lived in a firetrap in the Bronx along with their five children. My grandmother hocked her engagement ring at 20 and opened a clothing store, worked 18-hour days, and made a successful business. She was not cuddly and wise. She was smart and tough. She ran the family, she was the boss, she was our Tony Soprano and just as complicated. I adored her.

When I went to art school, there were almost no women teachers. The only women in the art-history books were Mary Cassatt and Georgia O'Keeffe. Every artist in history was white and male.

I was on the young end of feminism. I really bought it hook, line, and sinker. It changed my life.

When I got to New York in 1974 or '75, to me the most interesting work was being done by women. There was no hint of a problem being a woman painter. I saw Pat Steir, Elizabeth Murray, Mary Heilmann, Faith Ringgold, Susan Rothenberg, Louise Fishman,

Harmony Hammond, Lois Lane, Joan Snyder—a seemingly endless number of women painters. What they were doing *mattered*.

The question is, how much have we lost since then?

It was a real shock to suddenly see men completely dominate painting's discourse and the new market of the early '80s, when Ronald Reagan became president. My male peers were really in sync with the values of the times. I think the women weren't ready for the business that art was to become by 1980, but it was obviously something the men understood. You can go through every movement in the '80s, and there are virtually no women involved in them, neither Neo-Expressionism nor Neo-Geo. Painting was again entrenched in anachronistic clichés of genius and greatness. And people bought it! If you were a '70s feminist fighting the good fight, this seemed just historically strange. Painting in the '70s really challenged those clichés. I thought the world changed because of feminism. I was wrong.

Appropriation was a different story because it wasn't painting. In my fantasy those brilliant women said to themselves, "I'm not even going to try to paint. I'm going to figure something else out." Photography was then a marginal market activity. Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, Laurie Simmons, and Sarah Charlesworth made critical and radical work, arguably the most important work of the '80s. I am not sure any of them made the kind of money the male painters their age did.

I was hopeful for my generation, but we proved disappointing. I'm just terrified for my nieces. In four decades of my adult life women's wages went up a total of 10 cents per every dollar earned by men, to 75 cents. That is economic inequality and should be an embarrassment for everyone. It is discrimination pure and simple. Women should go on strike. Do all men really think they are entitled to 25 percent more of everything?

When the top hedge-fund people are women, when the president is a woman, when the top earners are 50 percent women, things will be different. Is that ever going to happen? Why not? There was a report by Oxfam recently that said at this rate, it will take 75 years to achieve equal pay for equal work. If Hillary Clinton wins, it's going to be fantastic for women in the arts. I would like to see the White House filled with women's art. That would be a good start.

Deborah Kass, *Who Blue Who*, 2014.





## CAROLEE SCHNEEMAN

*Born in 1939, lives in Springtown, New York*

What an amazement that the lost, buried, denied, deflected history of women artists has been irrevocably brought forward. This hard-won integration of feminist anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, religious studies, and our suppressed inheritance has vivified this great creative realm formerly identified as exclusively male. Complex electronic measurements have confirmed that the patterns of handprints in Paleolithic caves were made by women (probably using menstrual blood). Women artists had already recognized our marks from Paleolithic, Cycladic, up to and including certain Eurocentric artworks and the reluctant recognition of non-European aesthetics.

This richness was seized by feminist determinations in the 1970s when we founded independent galleries, activist journals, and public protests against our exclusion. These achievements took on unexpected power and relevance. Nevertheless, they remain fragile, precarious, subject to societal upheavals. We who have

the most functional aesthetic freedoms must extend our capabilities to aid and abet women and all artists whose lives are constrained, controlled, and often in danger.

In 1972, when I self-printed my feminist notes “Women in the Year 2000,” I could only hope that most of the creative intentions I described for our future might become possible, and they have now come to fruition in our culture. I am experiencing retroactive cautions given the degree of glamour, economic reward, and current cultural embrace of many things feminist which lack rigor, radicalization, and resistance. It brings to mind our feminist precedents, radical artists who died in poverty and hunger, such as Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. She might be considered the first body artist, an inspiration for Dada, Happenings. The immensity of her achievements was so shocking that they remain buried in some addendum on eccentric art.

Carolee Schneeman, *Flange 6RPM*, 2011–12.



## CINDY SHERMAN

*Born in 1954, lives in New York City and Sag Harbor, New York*

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While I agree that there have been great strides in making things better, we still have a ways to go before there's real parity. I am well aware that my prices aren't anywhere near those of my male counterparts, and while it annoys the hell out of me, I also think, How can I complain when I'm still doing so well? I was brought up to be self-sacrificing and more concerned with others than myself. I've never been super-competitive. Even in the hyped-up '80s, when I felt I was getting at least equal the praise of my male peers, my work sold for a fraction of their prices. But there was also the issue of photography versus painting, so my work would naturally be cheaper.

And then there's the theory that that is why so many women artists of my generation worked in photography, precisely because it didn't compete with painting.

I felt that my female artist friends and I were always supportive of one another, perhaps because we felt like underdogs, but there was also always a sense of having one another's back. I don't think that the guys back then had a similar support structure. Maybe for them it was always just about money and fame, and men are more aggressive toward those ends.

I've always sensed that women artists have to prove themselves exceptional in order to get their foot in the door, to be considered for something, whereas many, many mediocre men artists easily get by. Years ago, I

remember someone complaining about the number of mediocre women artists who were getting attention and I had to point out that it was only balancing out the proportion to mediocre men, who we take for granted.

The one part of Maura's essay that hit home to me was in the "What Can Be Done" section, when she quotes Cixous's statement that women need to become speaking subjects rather than silent objects. I've been asked many times to be interviewed for important radio or television programs, not to mention lectures, but I've always declined because I don't enjoy talking about my work and being in the spotlight (and have only agreed as a sort of quid pro quo PR for a major exhibition). About a year ago I was asked to do a major TV interview and was torn between a sense of duty and a lack of desire. As a woman artist, it's important to have a presence, to inspire other young women, and to discuss the disparity in the art world, but personally I did not want to do it, perhaps as a relic of my upbringing. It's not shyness; I just didn't want to be bothered.

I am hopeful that as time goes on and more households encourage both daughters and sons to assert themselves, we'll stop seeing men as being the pushy ones, hogging the attention, while women stand complacently in the shadows. Both examples need to be revised.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #550*, 2010/2012.

## SHAHZIA SIKANDER

*Born in Pakistan in 1969, lives in New York City*

Women's personal lives are often overemphasized in documentation and critical writing surrounding their work. My art has often been read as being by the "other" as a result of representing South Asian artistic practice in New York City.

The introduction of my work to the New York scene in the 1990s spurred curiosity and met with a great reception. My exhibition at the Drawing Center and inclusion in the Whitney Biennial, both in 1997, were among the first exhibitions of contemporary miniature painting in New York. Even though people were connecting with my work in miniature painting, they were unable to fully understand and contextualize artistic production from the region. The reviews from the time bordered on being ethnographic.

For example, *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter wrote a review of several shows of South Asian art in 1997 saying, "If you like New York City, chances are you'll like India. Midtown Manhattan at lunchtime and an Indian village on market day are surprisingly alike. Cars and bikes charge by; personal space is at a premium; the noise level is high; the sheer variety of people exhausting." He goes on to discuss the "Out of India" show at the Queens Museum, in which I participated. About its reception, Cotter wrote, "That audience is still, it is true, relatively small, but it will grow. At the moment Ms. Sikander must bear the unenviable burden of being a breakthrough figure, with work dynamic enough to capture the attention of viewers who have little direct knowledge of her sources. But there are other artists waiting in the wings to join her in an art world that is now global."

As Cotter accurately expresses, the lens shifts from the work to the individual: it became very tied to me, since there were so few South Asian artists in New York—it was as though the artist had to stand in for lack of visibility of related work. As a woman, I've often felt that readings of my work overemphasized my ethnicity. Furthermore, the complexity of my status as a transnational artist is often lost in the Pakistani-American bond that art institutions

often impose. In many of the interviews that I have been asked to participate in, interlocutors ask me more about my personal identity and relationship to Pakistan than about my artistic practice.



Shahzia Sikander, *Untitled*, 1993.

## MICKALENE THOMAS

*Born in 1971, lives in New York City*

One of the major shifts in the landscape since 1971 is that more women today are in positions of opportunity. We're able to run businesses, make money, and have careers independently of men. Things have shifted for women in the arts. If you think of Pat Steir's generation, there were so many fewer women recognized then. Not that things are perfect: if you asked a room of 20 people, maybe eight or ten of them would be able name the top female contemporary artists. And even though women make up a huge part of the art market, their prices aren't at all comparable to what men make. Still, I'm here as an artist, as a woman able to support myself solely on my art. Could I have done that in 1971? I doubt it.

Many of the disparities between female and male artists today are subtle. I've been included in publications where the names of the male artists are in big, bold letters and all of the women's names are in smaller sizes. With catalogues, usually, if there are two artists, the male artist goes on the front cover and the female artist goes on the back. The medium is the message, and these decisions are loaded with meaning that we respond to intuitively. If you see Jeff Koons in big letters and Kara Walker in a small font, you get a message about who is the more significant artist.

Because things have shifted for women in the arts, maybe we need to start thinking about how to use the positions we're in to make change. One thing we can change is the conversations we're having. If we're only talking about women artists in comparison to male artists, then we aren't talking about the theoretical, conceptual, and formal aspects of the art women make—the art itself. And when we talk about women in the arts, we need to think about all the sub-categories—women



of color, queer women—that create disparities again. Until the conversations change, we really aren't making progress.

And as women in positions of opportunity, we can think about how to extend opportunity to our peers. I wanted to do this when I put together my curatorial exhibition "Tête-à-Tête," which presented the work of (mostly women) artists who inspire me. It was a chance to put these artists on the radar of more writers and curators. The same artists are always being shown—even female curators and gallery directors mostly put men in their shows. Very few take risks, move beyond familiar circles, and act as the game-changers they could be. That's why I have so much respect for Helen Molesworth, chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles—she creates opportunities for women. I first met her when I was working at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, and a few years later she thought of me for her first big project at MOCA. She could have gotten anybody, so for me this was very courageous of her.

Mickalene Thomas, *Racquel* #6, 2013.

## BETTY TOMPKINS

*Born in 1945, lives in New York City and Pleasant Mount, Pennsylvania*

When I first came to New York in the late '60s, I was in my mid-20s. I would go around to galleries and talk to the dealers, or the person manning the front desk, and they would say, "Come back in ten years when you've found your own voice." But actually quite a lot of the dealers would say, "Even ten years from now, when you have your own voice, don't come back, because we don't show women."

Later, New York State passed a law that made it illegal for employers to ask a prospective employee what his or her thoughts were about having a family. I would have dealers to my studio, and this was clearly still something they wanted to know. And it was interesting to see them dance around the question, because they could no longer directly say, "What are your plans for a family?"

These days, we take it for granted that there are more women in the galleries and in museums, but when you look at the actual numbers, there has been little improvement. When I look at the numbers, I shake my head. Where is the "leaning in"? To me, "separate but equal" doesn't work, and you can see it in the statistics. We are still a qualified group—"women artists," "black artists," "artists of color." And that makes it lesser. But we can't just look at individual numbers or charts. We need to look at the big picture for any given artist. Where am I getting to show? Who's getting to look at my work? Who's writing about it? Who's buying it? You also can't just concentrate on how much money I am making.

My work is owned by one museum, the Centre Pompidou in Paris. I have never been in a show in a U.S. museum. I never know how much to attribute this to the fact that I'm a woman and how much to attribute to my subject matter, which presents a challenge for dealers. Luckily, I now have two terrific dealers—Gavlak in Los Angeles and Palm Beach and Rodolphe Janssen in Brussels—who are courageous and who like to have conversations about controversial work.

A couple of years ago, I reread a book called *The Art Dealers*, which originally came out in the early '70s. The authors, Laura de Coppet and Alan Jones, talked to top dealers over a two- or three-year period. I was more than halfway through before any dealer mentioned a woman artist. I think it was either Louise Nevelson or Louise Bourgeois. I was three-quarters through before one dealer said that when she developed her gallery, she knew she wanted to show a significant number of women

and could develop a market for that. In the context of this book, and of the time, the word "artist" meant "male artist," and predominantly "white male artist." This morning, I reread Linda Nochlin's essay from 1971, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (I've always thought of it as one half of a double feature with Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own.") And it's exactly what Nochlin was saying, that in the general culture the word "artist" means "white man." I don't know how much of that has actually changed. Right now, we are in an age of rediscovery of certain artists. Why that is, I really can't say, but I am grateful for the attention I am getting. I feel appreciated for what I do and what I've done, but when I look at the big picture I still see a lot of tokenism.



Betty Tompkins, *Kiss Painting #8*, 2014.

## JAMIAN JULIANO-VILLANI

*Born in 1987, lives in Brooklyn, New York*

My experience with sexism in the art world has been validating in a way—almost positive, if you will. If I made the paintings I make as a man...that shit would not fly. It would be more offensive, or more easily dismissed, I think. Calling breasts “tits” and painting scenes of sex and violence is much more easily digested when it’s coming from a woman as opposed to a man. But maybe that’s another construct that creates yet another problem. The beauty is I’m allowed to think like a man and act like a man because I’m a woman, and I find it surprising people find that unassuming.

People don’t take painting as seriously when it’s coming from a woman, or someone of color, or anyone that isn’t a white man. Then things get ghettoized—people over-compensating in a lazy way by having “all women” or “all black” artist shows. It comes off as an apology or a favor instead of being legitimate. That is what highlights my frustration on this topic of sexism: the more we point

it out, the longer it continues to be an issue. The other artists you are talking to are historical and I can’t imagine the injustices they’ve witnessed, and I don’t know how well I can relate. But from my point of view, the short time I’ve been here, I just choose to ignore that shit and keep going forward and make it work in my favor.

It also seems like sexism is a huge conversation that, in the art world, is very insular. I sometimes think it’s hypocritical to complain in such a pretentious field where so few people are allowed in. Gender bias? What about education bias? Race bias? Class bias? All the other biases that we project in the art world? Why don’t we talk about the high capitalism we all participate in while shitting on it and maybe be a little more self-aware? You could get a whole family out of debt for the price of a piece of art.

Jamian Juliano-Villani, *Apparition of Master*, 2015.

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COURTESY THE ARTIST



## WANGECHI MUTU

*Born in Nairobi in 1972, lives in Brooklyn, New York*

It's important to notice how women are represented in exhibitions and other art infrastructures, and it's absolutely necessary to look at raw numbers in order to grasp the gender imbalance in any situation or context. The numbers can be shocking and glaringly honest, and without them people wouldn't be fully convinced of how uneven the playing field is.

But I think there are other ways as well to note the disparities—nuanced ways in which the absence of women is manifest—in terms of ideas, choice of imagery, type of work curated in exhibitions, and how the female form is presented. How often do women appear in art, and how do they sit and perform in the works? Is the figure always represented as docile, inactive, sexualized, or subordinate? Does she have an inferior role in a larger narrative that emphasizes the superiority of the male protagonist? Is her appearance stereotypical in terms of weight, skin color, hair texture, and facial expression? Statistics help document the unfair representation of women, but studies and analysis of conceptual and intellectual misrepresentation are also important.

My experience has been varied now that I'm traveling for my art and moving in and out of the United States. I find that I am more aware of my gender when I go home to Kenya. I tend to experience more explicit tensions or annoyances related to being female. When I'm in the States I feel more detached by virtue of my race and ethnicity.

What I do know is that I've tended to surround myself with a very strong, competent female work team. My art is the very center of my power of expression, and the last thing I want is to have the ideas I create and the environment in which the art is made sullied by sexist behavior.

I have limited control over the misogynists who inhabit our world, but in my home and studio I can create an environment without the “testosteronic” tendencies of some males. I can also make decisions about the kind of masculine behavior I need around my work/living environment that is conducive, loving, and supportive of the ideas I'm creating. Everywhere else the battle continues,

Wangechi Mutu, *Shy side-eye*, 2015.

and any person who thinks that women are free and gender balance has been achieved is living under a cushy delusional rock.

I often wish the art world was an ideal, enlightened, progressive, and more perfect place than the rest of the world, but sadly, I know that is not the case. So the way to create greater equality in the art world is to create and fight for greater equality in the whole “real” world, in all sectors, genres, generations, races, and professions. We all need to get hip to the fact that we must struggle to end unfair treatment toward anyone and end the oppression and the inhumanity that we still inflict on one another in order to create any kind of equality.



# MARTHA WILSON

*Born in 1947, lives in Brooklyn, New York*

My son's girlfriend, a sorority sister at American University, pondered my 1974 series "A Portfolio of Models," and then remarked, "It's still like that."



## The Goddess

Her presence is felt by both men and women, and every member of society past the age of five is aware of her. She is the fashion-model archetype, an implicit image of reference. She always looks perfect. She also smells wonderful at all times. She has "sex-appeal." However, she is asexual. We look but don't imagine. Whether she is intelligent is irrelevant.

## The Lesbian

She hates the goddess, because actually the goddess was invented by the men on Madison Avenue. She alone sees through goddessdom, but unluckily, her sexuality is so misplaced that the rest of society ignores her. Her intelligence is a flyweight issue in light of her emotional problems.

## The Housewife

This woman aspires to goddessdom, but she is compromised by some everyday realities: she can't spend all day on her face because she has to feed the kids. She can't starve herself bed-slat thin because she has to keep her strength up. Sex is a routine part of her life, whether it be an exciting one or an unpleasant one. If she wants to be kinky, she might swap. She is intelligent, but has convinced herself that she is fulfilled.

## A PORTFOLIO OF MODELS

These are the models society holds out to me: Goddess, Housewife, Working Girl, Professional, Earth-Mother, Lesbian. At one time or another, I have tried them all on for size, and none has fit. All that's left to do is be an artist and point the finger at my own predicament. The artist operates out of the vacuum left when all other values are rejected.

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*Martha C*



**The Working Girl**

She can only approach goddessdom insofar as her budget permits. She works very hard, and is given no credit for any brains she may or may not have. She relieves the drudgery of life by having a riproaring time in bed.



**The Professional**

She plays down her competence to get along. Perhaps she is not beautiful, but she is extremely well-groomed, approaching goddessdom at least by the cost of her outfit. Her sexuality is a point of debate: does her job fulfill her and make her a self-loving person, or does she succeed in her job because she is frigid?



**The Earth-Mother**

She claims she doesn't give a shit about the goddess. Actually, to be such a perfect mirror-reversal of her, in her workboots and braless peasant blouses, she is just as conscious of the goddess as the suburban queen. She flaunts her sexuality, not out of boredom, but because it is a natural function, god-given for us to enjoy. She has shelved her intellect for the time being, deriving fulfillment from working the land with her hands.



## GUERRILLA GIRLS

*Group formed in 1985, based in New York City*

When we started in 1985, dealers, curators, and critics refused to admit there was a problem. Some actually said that women and artists of color didn't make art that was "good enough." Now the bias is more coded. Tokenism, showing the same few women or artists of color over and over, is a huge distraction. The glass ceiling is so crushing you bang your head against it every day! And let's not get started on the subject of economic inequity. White male artists earn four to nine times more than

everyone else. If you follow the money to the 1 percent of the 1 percent who buy art and run museum boards, it all starts to add up. Artists are great, but the art world sucks. The good news is that lots of artists are rejecting this corrupt system. Like us, they're working to create an art world they want to live in.

Guerrilla Girls, *The Estrogen Bomb*, 2013–15.

## CARRIE MAE WEEMS

*Born in 1953, lives in Brooklyn and Syracuse, New York*

There's a reason Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* was so important. There have been wonderful changes for women artists in the past 40-some years, and I know these women now in a way that I didn't when my career began. As a student I went to the library to find books on women photographers and found there were very few—among them, Julia Margaret Cameron, Diane Arbus, Imogen Cunningham. That was what first stimulated me to do research trying to locate women artists. I did a lot of that work as an undergraduate. Since then, there has been considerable improvement. However, although women artists are now being exhibited more, their work is still not valued to the extent of the male artists'. We are still a psychological and cultural distance away from recognizing and valuing them.

One factor may be that women artists tend to be isolated. They more often work alone, while men tend to work in teams. Look at Gregory Crewdson, whose production process might involve 50 assistants, while Cindy Sherman works quietly in her studio with maybe one assistant.

And then there is cultural isolation. I'm always calling my male friends to task when they work on a project and call their male friends for advice but don't call me.

But all of this relates to larger problems. As a society we are still seeking ways to deal with gender disparity. The isolation of women is culturally imposed, and it's a situation in which they participate. Rising to the occasion is a tall order. I don't blame women. But I'm always trying to discern how we might be complicit in our own victimization. I'm aware of the ways in which we are isolated and realize how difficult it is to combat that.

Around the same time that Linda Nochlin wrote "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Alice Walker wrote the book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* (1972), in which she asked, "What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmothers' time? In our great-grandmothers' day? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood."

For my part, I find myself in constant battle with organizations, institutions, both male and female, about fair and equal treatment. I attempt in my work to negotiate the power imbalance. There is a certain lack of democracy, whereby women represent the womb of a democracy not yet born.

Only when we start to separate questions of feminism from the larger issue of democracy will we really be able to have the conversation in a way that doesn't cause a

large group of people to shy away from us. How do I do that as a black artist? As a woman? These are my ongoing questions. A whole generation was snowed by the idea of "political correctness." The term wore on us, and we backed away—we didn't want to appear "p.c." The term substituted for a movement. So how do we pose the questions in a new way?

The feminist movement, which has been displaced and undermined, depends for its survival on organizing—that is still true. But what do we organize around? There has been a splintering of groups: blacks are over here, gays over there—everybody trying to do his or her own thing. And in the midst of it all, you tend to lose the greater social connections among those groups. Feminism as a larger movement was destroyed because these people weren't working together and organizing around a larger principle of social change.

That is one of the ways in which the political right has won. At the end of the day, we are all human beings searching for equality in a challenging system. We need a narrative change. We need a new set of terms. And most importantly, we need to keep the conversation going. The extent to which you are willing to relinquish the conversation is the extent to which you've failed.

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Carrie Mae Weems, *Abbey Lincoln*, 2010, from the "Slow Fade to Black\_Set II" series.

# BLACK-SHEEP FEMINISTS

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In the '60s and '70s, a subset of feminist artists pushed the limits of body art, political correctness, and female sexual agency; today their work is more influential than ever

BY ALISON M. GINGERAS

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It is sometimes assumed that feminist art—the art made in the heyday of feminism’s second wave in the 1960s and ’70s—was monolithic. Nothing could be further from the truth. While there was general agreement about the existence of gender disparities, artists, like activists, differed widely in how they addressed them. Just as there were and are many feminisms, there were and are many branches of feminist art.

Even today, one of the most fractious issues within feminist political and artistic circles is the question of pornography and the politics of erotic representation. While much feminist art has been integrated into mainstream art history, artists who embraced a sex-positive attitude in their work have been systematically excluded from important exhibitions and catalogues devoted to women’s art. This subset—what I like to call the “black sheep” feminist artists—were in some cases actively subjected to censure in the ’70s. They are still largely overlooked within the legacy of feminist art as a whole. Artists like Anita Steckel, Betty Tompkins, Joan Semmel, and Cosey Fanni Tutti explored the extreme edges of feminist politics and sexualized iconography; for this reason, their work remains marginalized.

In 1973, Semmel joined Steckel’s newly formed Fight Censorship (FC) group. (Steckel, whose work

is completely overlooked today, may be best known as a political organizer.) In a 1973 press release, the collective described itself as “women artists who have done, will do, or do some form of sexually explicit art, i.e., political, humorous, erotic, psychological.” Under the banner “Women Artists Join to Fight to Put Sex into Museums and Get Sexism and Puritanism Out,” Semmel and her FC colleagues attempted to create a context for their practices, and pushed for wider acceptance of sexually explicit artworks by women. One of the things that made these artists controversial was their handling of the male body. As scholar Richard Meyer has written, they “eroticized the male body in ways that conformed neither to heterosexual convention nor to mainstream feminist thought at the time.... The art they produced reminds us that sexuality cannot be made to align with politics, including the politics of feminism.” In a 2007 interview with Meyer, Semmel said that she was trying “to find an erotic language to which women could respond, one which did not reiterate the male power positions and prevalent fetishizations in conventional pornography and art.” She “wanted to develop a language whereby a woman could express her own desires, whatever they might be, without shame or sentimentality.”



Cosey Fanni Tutti is best known as a cult figure in the UK. From 1973 to 1980, she exploded the comparatively tame conventions of “feminist” body and performance art by completely immersing herself as a model in the pornographic magazine business. Without announcing herself as an artist or delimiting the terms of her work as a “performance”—thereby depriving herself of the safety net of “art”—she posed in over 40 magazine “actions.” Since her famously censored show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, in 1976, Cosey Fanni Tutti remains relatively unknown in international circles.

Even within this sex-positive black-sheep subset of feminist art, there were conceptual and political rifts. Unlike Semmel, whose paintings were based on photographs of models taken in her studio, Tompkins culled the subject matter for her monumental, photo-realistic “Fuck Paintings”—tightly cropped scenes of heterosexual penetration—from hardcore pornographic photographs and, later, porn magazines, which were illegal in the United States at the time. Semmel objected to Tompkins’s appropriation of these images on the grounds that they form an exploitative, misogynist industry, and could not be redeemed, even through their cooption by a woman artist.

As contemporary debates about pornography rage on—can it be empowering to women or it is always exploitation?—it seems these artists’ time has come: recently, Semmel and Tompkins have gotten renewed attention, through exhibitions. Perhaps now we can acknowledge that their approach is one of the more radical contributions to recent art history.

While these women continue to be the black sheep who strayed from the established feminist flock, today they provide essential performative, discursive, and iconographic precedents for a host of contemporary art practices that explore hardcore, sex-positive terrain—from Jeff Koons’s “Made in Heaven” series to more recent porn-inspired work by John Currin. Despite being shut out of the mainstream canon of “feminist” art, these four artists represent the unsung matriarchal forebears for those artists who seek to push the limits of body art, political correctness, and (female) sexual agency.

Joan Semmel, *Centered*, 2002.

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# LISTING WOMEN

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Do lists gloss over problems or bring  
them into focus?

BY RUBA KATRIB

68 In March 2014, the *New York Times* ran the article “Study Finds a Gender Gap at the Top Museums.” Noting that women “run just a quarter of the biggest art museums in the United States and Canada, and they earn about a third less than their male counterparts,” the *Times* confirmed what many working in the contemporary art field had long known, but had seldom seen publically validated. Most of my female colleagues and I share our encounters with sexism in strict confidence, acknowledging that there is nothing worse than being perceived as female and complaining. Regardless, it seems safe to say that in the contemporary art world, women and women’s issues are now objects of interest—or so it would seem judging from all the recent lists promoting them.

While investigative articles such as that in the *Times* are infrequent, lists and rankings are abundant. Top women, women to watch, women artists and curators you need to know—you may not yet know these women, but you get the message: there are women working in the art world and some might be considered worthy of attention. They may even be *powerful*. Where notions of gender and success are concerned, the list, by virtue of its very format, embodies the crux of the problem: a litany of names and capsule bios, peppered with personal anecdotes and external endorsements, in lieu of analysis of enduring inequities and systemic biases.

To be clear, I have nothing against publicizing women’s accomplishments. Yes, please publicize women. The more people who are made aware that there are many

great women working in art the better. However, the biggest problem with lists is the most obvious one: an absence of nuance. And inclusion on them, especially the ranked ones, conforms to mostly patriarchal-defined notions of success. Would it be possible to make a list of “the most fulfilled artists you need to know”? Fulfillment is inherently subjective and based on individual values, while definitively presented lists of the powerful and up-and-coming alike act as authoritative assessments. Equity is essential, but the idea of being at the top, or of being on your way there, is flawed. As a feminist, I don’t see power and domination as personal goals. And I don’t identify my ambitions with “the top,” firstly, because the top doesn’t actually exist, and secondly, because I don’t feel aligned with how this myth is constructed today. Perhaps we could identify standards of success differently in the art world, especially as women.

Since we are increasingly inundated with gender-based lists and profiles, a question to ask is, Do they *do* anything? Do they have any tangible effect? Do they translate into deserved promotions and fair salaries? Or better, exhibition opportunities and press attention? Do they gloss over problems or bring them into focus? I am wary of lists in general. They conform to an oversimplified assessment, creating arbitrary inventories. And when based on gender, the crudeness of the list is even more glaring. You can browse the “100 Most Powerful Women in the Art World,” or you can browse *ArtReview* magazine’s “Power 100,” ostensibly a list of the 100 most powerful people in the global art world. In 2014, only three of the top ten on *ArtReview*’s list were women, revealing that, when tallying people, the numbers often just don’t add up.

Recently, I have been included in a few female-focused lists and profiles. Looking at these, I feel a mix of happiness and embarrassment. I’m thankful that someone was thinking of me and noticing my work. But I cringe at the unintentional, subtly infantilizing tone. When evaluated in the context of gender, even when praised, it’s difficult to ignore the subtext. I have encouraged and participated in female-oriented conversations, including the current one in this issue of *ARTnews*. It’s important to carve out these spaces of discussion, where we aren’t ashamed to talk about gender inequity in contemporary art. We do need more in-depth discussion. This very need is made



evident through the current acceptability, and vogue, of listing women as a separate category of artist, curator, director, or collector. However, these disparities are a serious matter affecting people's daily lives. In contrast to this reality, the superficiality and trendiness of the gender-based shout-out leaves me uneasy.

I wonder, are we more interested in women working in art as an abstract concept, or as complex individuals? And why are women being listed now? What do these news items say about the current state of gender relations? We might be ranking women, but are we hiring them, listening to them, promoting them, paying them fairly, encouraging them, exhibiting them, and recommending them? Are we supporting them? Are these lists indicative of change? Or is this just a passing trend?

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*Ruba Katrib is curator at SculptureCenter in New York.*

## ON SEXISM IN THE ART WORLD

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A "woman" is fine so long as she is white, not feminist, and plays the role of "artist genius"

BY AMELIA JONES

The art world, with its various marketplaces (the gallery, the auction house, the art magazine, the art school, the art-history or critical-studies department), is clearly not the same beast in terms of inclusion that it was in the early years after WWII or even in the 1980s and '90s. "Women's work"—both in the sense of art and labor—is now more accepted and respected than in the past.

Nevertheless, as the revised Guerrilla Girls-type statistics released recently by Pussy Galore demonstrate (Fig. 8), we have a long way to go before those in the art world identified as female (artists, curators, museum directors, funding officers, academics, art critics) are treated with equal respect as those identified as male. Simply put, works by women artists are still worth far less than similar works by men from the same generation and locale.

What interests me now, having worked as a curator, art historian, and art writer for 25 years, is the way in which patterns of exclusion occur, drift away, or morph into something else. In terms of feminism, for example, alternative institutions were being built in the early 1970s but slowly atrophied and disappeared by the late 1980s and early 1990s (for example, the Woman's Building in Los Angeles). The few major shows of feminist art in the 1990s—from "Bad Girls" of 1994 (appearing at galleries in New York, Los Angeles, Glasgow, and London) to Lydia Yee's 1995 "Division of Labor" at the Bronx Museum of the Arts to my 1996 "Sexual Politics" at the Hammer Museum—were largely ignored or panned by the mainstream art world, with the exception of Catherine de Zegher's highly touted 1996 "Inside the Visible," which included powerful work but presented it in an ahistorical, apolitical, and unthreatening fashion. Then, around 2005 to 2007, major museums in Europe and North America showed a renewed, albeit brief, interest in feminism, culminating in "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution" (curated by Connie Butler and originating at MOCA in 2007) and "Global Feminisms" (organized by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, also debuting in 2007, at the Brooklyn Museum). Camille Morineau's brilliant "elles@centrepompidou," which opened in 2009, was the finale, capping that burst of interest in feminist art on the part of the mainstream, but still mostly Western or Western-dominated, art world.

We are now once again hard put to find at the big institutions feminist shows or exhibitions of works addressing gender, sexual, and other interrelated social inequities. The larger, staid institutions move slowly and demonstrate little interest in supporting more shows devoted to work by women of the past or to current feminist art, or in implementing feminist value systems (which, in my view, must highlight issues of gender as they relate

to other identifications and political exigencies). They rarely attend to, or are called out for, ignoring inequities in exhibition and collecting practices. Meanwhile, commercial galleries and auction houses privilege work by artists who fit into “safe” categories (such as “white male painter” or “white male intermedia artist”). Clearly racist, classist, and geographically exclusionary, the system is also sexist and heteronormative: a “woman” is fine so long as she is white and not feminist and plays the role of “artist genius”; “gay” may be acceptable as long as the artist can be identified as male and white and fitting into a middle- or upper-class value system.

Always given top value is art that can be easily marketed, including not only discrete objects but also works created by figures who fit normative ideas of how a “great artist” looks and acts: Picasso, Warhol, Matthew Barney, even (weirdly) Marina Abramović. The body doesn’t have to be identifiably “male,” but the artist-subject has to fit into the masculinist category of “creative genius.” Barney and Abramović, while appropriating tropes and strategies, such as performance, from feminist and queer art and theory, freeze the performative into objects or spectacles that can be readily commodified. Again, a few “queer” tropes or “feminist” appropriations here and there are fine for the art world as long as the work is still by an artist who appears to be white and male (or, really, “masculine” and “phallic”). Call this the “Margaret Thatcher syndrome.”

Instead of belaboring the depressingly commodified state of the global art world, I’d prefer to focus on the alternatives in terms of venues and artistic/aesthetic strategies. These are continually being articulated, produced, and presented through public institutions that we might consider “minor” in scale and visibility but that are “major” in their capacity to affect an otherwise narrow-minded art world as well as broader audiences from the non-specialist public. Their impact lies in the different kinds of creativity they proffer, produced by artists who are usually far from being identified with the white male artist. While not disregarding the potential importance of large museum exhibitions and programming in foregrounding feminist goals, artists, and movements, I find

these more modest venues more creatively vital at this moment for achieving feminist goals.

I have just returned to Los Angeles after living abroad for eleven years, and have been awed by the amazing ventures running on shoestring budgets while developing radical alternative content, such as: Human Resources L.A., a performance/art space showing queer, feminist, and anti-racist work, and featuring artists who stand on a continuum beyond the crude categories of “male” and “female”; the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at University of Southern California, where I teach (which, guided by director Joseph Hawkins and programming curator David Frantz, features performances and exhibitions relating to their extensive archive of queer historical materials); and the Blk Grrrl Book Fair initiative, organized by black feminist activist and journalist Teka-Lark Fleming and artist and curator Skira Martinez.

Finally, I’d like to say that the Blk Grrrl Book Fair, which mounted their annual event in March 2015 at Martinez’s Cielo Galleries & Studio in South Central Los Angeles, was one of the liveliest events I’ve witnessed in a long time. Fleming and Martinez brought together publishers, artists, poets, performers, along with books, zines, and artworks by radical feminist artists and writers, all identifying with the black (or “Blk”) community’s goals of promoting culture that is anti-racist and class-conscious in its feminism. The fair included the feminist films of Julie Dash, the anti-racist paintings of Lili Bernard, L.A. Queer Resistance’s “Transfeminist Revolt” lecture, readings of Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*, and the trash-talking poetry of Snatch Power (read off an iPhone). The Blk Grrrl Book Fair drew on strategies and attitudes from riot grrrl feminism to the Black Power movement, creating its own vibrant and politically exciting version of feminism. In fact, creating its own “art world.” *This* is the art world I want.

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# LINDA NOCHLIN ON FEMINISM THEN AND NOW

BY MAURA REILLY

MAURA REILLY: AT WHAT POINT IN YOUR LIFE DID YOU REALIZE THAT THERE WAS SUCH A THING AS INEQUALITY BETWEEN THE SEXES?

Linda Nochlin: I remember vividly my first act of proto-feminist critique in the realm of the visual. I must have been about six years old when I performed this act of desecration. Slowly and deliberately I poked out the eyes of Tinker Bell in an expensively illustrated edition of *Peter Pan*. I still remember my feeling of excitement as the sharp point pierced through those blue, long-lashed orbs. I hoped it hurt, and I was both frightened and triumphant looking at the black holes in the expensive paper. I hated Tinker Bell—her weakness, her sickening sweetness, her helplessness, her wispy, evanescent body (so different from my sturdy plump one), her pale hair, her plea to her audience to approve of her. I was glad I had destroyed her baby blues. I continued my campaign of iconoclasm with my first-grade reader—*Linda and Larry*, it was called, and Larry was about a head taller than Linda and always the leader in whatever banal activity the two were called on to perform. “See Larry run. See Linda run. Run, Larry, run. Run, Linda, run,” etc. I successfully amputated Larry’s head with blunt scissors on one page of the reader and cut off his legs on another: now they were equal and I was satisfied.

MR: IN JANUARY 1971, YOU PUBLISHED “WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO GREAT WOMEN ARTISTS?” IN A PIONEERING AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE OF *ARTNEWS*. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE THIS NOW CANONICAL ESSAY?

LN: When I embarked on “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” in 1970, there was no such thing as a feminist art history: like all other forms of historical discourse, it had to be constructed. New materials had to be sought out, a theoretical basis put in place, a methodology gradually developed.

MR: YOUR ESSAY “STARTING FROM SCRATCH” (PUBLISHED IN YOUR NEW BOOK, *WOMEN ARTISTS: THE LINDA NOCHLIN READER*, THAMES & HUDSON, 2015) CAPTURES BEAUTIFULLY WHAT APPEARED TO BE

A SENSE OF URGENCY ON THE PART OF LIBERATED WOMEN LIKE YOURSELF, AS YOU SOUGHT TO INTERVENE IN AND ALTER HISTORY ITSELF. BUT WAS THERE A SPECIFIC INCIDENT AROUND THAT TIME THAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE THAT ESSAY?

LN: I wrote [the essay] as the direct result of an incident that took place at Vassar graduation in 1970. Gloria Steinem was the graduation speaker...she had been invited by my friend Brenda Feigen, who was then a graduating senior. Her brother Richard Feigen was there. He was already a famous gallery person then, the head of the Richard Feigen gallery. After the ceremony, Richard turned to me and said, “Linda, I would love to show women artists, but I can’t find any good ones. Why are there no great women artists?” He actually asked me that question. I went home and thought about this issue for days. It haunted me. It made me think, because, first of all, it implied that there were no great women artists. Second, because it assumed this was a natural condition. It just lit up my mind. I am sure it was the catalyst that enabled me to put together a lot of things I had been thinking about, and stimulated me to do a great deal of further research in a variety of fields in order to “answer” the question and its implications, but his initial question started me off.

MR: THROUGHOUT YOUR SCHOLARSHIP OF THE 1970S, YOU MAINTAINED THAT, IN ADDITION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REVISIONIST ART HISTORY, THERE WERE SEVERAL FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES THAT NEEDED TO BE ADDRESSED BEFORE FEMINISM IN THE ARTS COULD TRULY IMPLEMENT CULTURAL CHANGE. THE FIRST, OF COURSE, WAS THE NOTION OF “GREATNESS,” WHICH ITSELF MUST BE REDEFINED AS SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHITE, WESTERN, AND UNMISTAKABLY MALE. HAVE WE ACHIEVED THIS?

LN: I think the whole idea of “greatness” is out of date, as far as contemporary art is concerned, and rightly so. And so are single standards....I happen to think that women are now doing the most interesting and innovative work... and it is all quite different! No sign of a “female style”; no centralized imagery or necessary pattern and decoration, as some essentialist feminist art critics believed at the

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beginning of the women's movement. A wide range of mediums, genres, and styles marks women's work today. To me, this is what is important. Women can do what they want, the way they want.

MR: YOU'VE ALSO ARGUED THAT THE "FAULT" LIES NOT IN OUR HORMONES, BUT IN OUR INSTITUTIONS AND EDUCATION. HOW MUCH HAVE THESE CHANGED SINCE THE 1970S?

LN: It is undeniable that both institutions and education have changed a great deal. M.F.A. programs are now comprised of 60 percent women students. There are courses on women artists, feminism and art, contemporary women artists, etc., at major institutions of learning. This would have been unheard of in my day. And yet it is perhaps arguable that even today women have to struggle harder to get to the top, whatever the top is. Certainly, there are more shows by women artists in museums, especially university museums, than there used to be. But men still command the top prices at auctions and in general. But do I think top prices are the equivalent of important, interesting art? Jeff Koons costs more than Courbet; what does that tell us about relative value? But I have a feeling the art market is going to be biased for a long time, despite the heartening progress that 20th- and 21st-century women artists have made in university galleries, in publications, and in museums. The art market is in many ways still a boys' club, with men competing with other rich men to see who can pay the highest prices. Can we really judge the value of art, by men or women, by the crazy logic of the market? Is some of the stuff that goes for millions really "worth" that amount? This is a complicated question.

MR: THEN THERE CAN BE CHANGE, AFTER ALL?

LN: Yes, I think that there can be change. I've seen it. Education, exhibitions, and, in general, making women's presence felt as part of normal practice in fields like art and, we hope, science and medicine. I mean, who would have thought when I was a kid, many, many, many years ago, that almost half of our doctors and medical students would now be women?

MR: YOUR ADVICE FOR WOMEN ARTISTS TODAY?

LN: Don't be afraid. This is very important. Or, if you are afraid, keep it down. Keep your goals and what you have to do to achieve them in mind. One of the things I did in the '70s was to study men. It was very interesting. In general or in public, anyway, they can take criticism. They do not burst into tears; they do not get all upset. Men say some really cutting, critical things about one another and that is acceptable. A level of confidence and an ability to take criticism is essential to success. Women all too often are not brought up to take intellectual and professional criticism, harsh criticism.

MR: NOR ARE WOMEN BROUGHT UP TO HAVE A VOICE, TO SPEAK OUT AND UP.

LN: Precisely. Men are trained to talk up.

MR: AND AS A CLOSING STATEMENT...?

LN: At a time when certain patriarchal values are making a comeback—as they always do during times of war and stress—it is well to think of women as refusing their time-honored role as victims or supporters. It is time to rethink the bases of our position and strengthen them for the fight ahead. As a feminist, I fear this moment's overt reversion to the most blatant forms of patriarchy—a great moment for so-called "real men," like football players and politicians, to assert their sinister dominance over "others," primarily women and people of color—the return of the barely repressed. Masculine dominance in the art world fits into this structure, and we need to be aware of it. But I think this is a critical moment for feminism and women's place in the art world. . . . We need to be conscious not only of our achievements, but also of the dangers and difficulties lying in the future.

Kathleen Gilje, *Linda Nochlin in Manet's Bar at the Folies-Begère*, 2005.

*A widely published writer on art and feminism, Linda Nochlin is the former Lila Acheson Wallace Professor of Modern Art at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. This is an edited excerpt of an interview that appears in Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader (Thames & Hudson, June 2015).*

