



Julie Heffernan Hunter Gatherer

September 6 - October 6, 2018

Julie Heffernan was born in Peoria, Illinois, in 1956 and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received her BFA in Painting and Printmaking from the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1981 and her MFA from Yale School of Art in 1985. Heffernan has been exhibiting widely for the past two decades. Her work has been exhibited at the Tampa Museum of Art, FL; Knoxville Museum of Art, TN; Columbia Museum of Art, SC; Milwaukee Art Museum, WI; The New Museum, NY; The Norton Museum, FL; The American Academy of Arts and Letters, NY; Kohler Arts Center, WI; The Palmer Museum of Art, PA; National Academy of Art, NY; McNay Art Museum, TX; Virginia Museum of Fine Art, VA; Oklahoma City Museum of Art, OK; Crocker Art Museum, CA; The Palo Alto Cultural Center, CA; San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, TX, among others. Her work is in international public and private collections. Heffernan is a Professor of Fine Arts at Montclair State University, NJ.



Self-Portrait with Shipwreck 2018
(detail)
oil on canvas
72 x 60 inches



Self-Portrait with Spill 2018
oil on canvas
96 1/2 x 68 inches



Self-Portrait with Lock 2018
oil on canvas
68 x 58 inches



Self-Portrait with Rescuer 2018
oil on canvas
64 x 54 inches

#TimesUp

By Maura Reilly

Western artists, male understood, have historically represented women as objects of love and adulation at the same time that they have depicted them as abject victims, deployed in sexy poses for the visual delectation of heterosexual male viewers. From the time of Signorelli and Michelangelo to that of Picasso and Duchamp, male artists have illustrated tales of trickery and entrapment, abduction and rape, violence and murder in their formally beautiful representations of women's lightly draped or nude bodies. The history of western art, in general, inspired in classical antiquity by the stories of Ovid and others, and later by the numerous martyrdoms of Christian saints, and above all, by the Passion and crucifixion of Christ, has been filled with images of tortured, raped, and brutalized women. One thinks of Titian's *The Rape of Europa* (1562), Rubens' *The Rape of Proserpine* (c. 1637), Poussin's *Jupiter and Antiope* (17th century), Delacroix's *The Abduction of Rebecca* (1846), and the countless images of nymphs being raped by satyrs. One thinks, too, of Veronese's heart-rending image of Saint Agatha holding a bloody cloth to her chest after the cutting off of her breasts by the pagan executioner, but there are many, many others. Although meant to inspire awe and pity, they also consciously or not, must have produced a frisson of sexual pleasure in heterosexual male viewers who got turned on by the depiction of the abuse and suffering of pretty women, as movie-goers today enjoy snuff and slasher films or other violent pop culture genres in which the brutalization of women is the featured dish on the menu. The depth and breadth of misogyny is all-pervasive – now, as in the past.

Heffernan's most recent body of work, *Hunter Gatherer* (2017–18), is a feminist manifesto dedicated to the courageous women who have talked back to patriarchal authority throughout history. Within the context of all the rich imagery gleaned from her Catholic upbringing – of powerful saints who made intimate sacrifices for their beliefs, like Saint Catherine broken at the Wheel or Saint Lucy having her eyes plucked out – Heffernan's paintings are an homage to empowered women; however, they differ sharply from those earlier images of "suffering heroines," as traditionally produced by men. These paintings in *Hunter Gatherer* pay tribute to female revolutionaries in individualized portraits, which hang on

the walls behind the nude central female figure, a stand-in for Heffernan. While she began this body of work before the #MeToo movement caught fire, Heffernan was in a position to celebrate, among others, the #MeToo activists (e.g. Tarana Burke, Alyssa Milano, Esther Warkov) who so bravely spoke out against predators that had sexually assaulted them. Other heroines celebrated here include George Sand (pen name for Aurore Dupin) who rose up in a mostly all-male 19th-century French literary world to become one of the most famous authors of her era; Malala Yousafzai, who survived a shooting by the Taliban to become an outspoken proponent for female education throughout the Muslim world; Mechelle Vinson, whose law case against her former employer resulted in a Supreme Court decision, for the first time, that sexual harassment is an illegal form of discrimination; environmental activists Frances Beinecke, Rachel Carson, Lois Gibbs, Winona LaDuke; civil rights activists Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Yuri Kochiyama, Ida B. Wells; pioneering feminist authors, such as Virginia Woolf, Gloria Steinem, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Adrienne Rich; and Anita Hill, who accused U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment, here depicted with the Senate Judiciary Committee members who betrayed her, Joe Biden and Ted Kennedy. The list of powerful women portrayed in these paintings is a who's who of heroines. All of them dared to speak up; to rise up; to talk back – like acts of resistance, gestures that have challenged the politics of domination that have rendered women nameless and voiceless. It's no wonder that courageous women like these are considered threatening to the social order.

Feminist icon Carolee Schneemann plays a central role in Heffernan's new body of work, as well. Her portrait is included in *Self-Portrait with the Daughters*; but, more importantly, it is Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) performance, during which the nude artist extracted an origami with text from her vagina, which functions as a point of departure for Heffernan. Heffernan's personal view of art history, as a long conversation between practitioners conversing with one another, parsing – sometimes even contradicting – each other's words and ideas, is in evidence now as she responds to Schneemann with her own kind of scroll imagery. It focuses on a central female figure holding a two-sided scroll, which on one side features fragmented (often violent) images from Old Master paintings, and on the other, popular accounts of rape, torture, war, famine,

explosions, and other atrocities. As Heffernan explains, “These two-sided scrolls tell a double-sided story about History as not only ‘one damn thing after another’, but also as the sugar coating of tales of abuse (as in images of Manifest Destiny, or when Old Master paintings conflate rapes with abductions), and the flipside of that experience as evinced by imagery that glorifies abuse – like pornography, trophy photographs of hunters with their kill and the variety of titillating violent imagery that permeates mass media.” Society has become desensitized to violence; it is so deeply entrenched in our everyday imagery that it appears “natural,” and is largely unquestioned. In Heffernan’s paintings, however, the violence against women is thwarted, toyed with. As image producer, she is shifting the story, re-empowering the women in these traditionally Old Master rape scenes, or inverting sex roles in amusing ways. For instance, in Self-Portrait with the Daughters, she has changed the narrative of Rubens’ Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus (1618) by replacing the male on horseback (who, in the original, reaches down to abduct one of the daughters) with a nude woman. In Heffernan’s retelling of Rubens, the woman is now helping the daughters escape. In Self-Portrait with Rescuer, she has “edited” a painting by Fritz Zuber-Bühler, titled Heroic Rescue, (n.d.), by switching the male and female roles in the rape scene; she is abducting him; and in a scroll image from Self-Portrait with Lock, featuring Fragonard’s The Lock (1777), a scene of rape, Heffernan has cropped off the man’s arm, leaving him incapable of “locking” the door. In other images – as in Rubens, Landscape with Pan and Syrinx, 1626, which is featured in Self-Portrait with Lock, she visually cuts off the violent narrative; we may recognize the fragment as an Old Master rape scene, but the perpetrator Pan is now hidden behind the scroll. Heffernan is taking back these scenes from art history, making them her own, shifting narratives to suit her needs.

Like her contemporaries – Jenny Saville, Kiki Smith, Zoe Leonard, Catherine Opie, and others – Heffernan is facing up to and creating alternatives for the tradition of images of male domination, transvaluating the outright enjoyment of women’s pain and abjection that has characterized so much of the male dominated art of tradition. Indeed, since the 1970s, women artists have sought to challenge traditional representations of the female body, producing alternative, often shocking variations on the theme. Hannah Wilke placed gummy, vaginal

‘scars’ over her naked body in her performative photographic series, S.O.S. (1974-82); Judy Chicago pulled a bloody tampon out of her vagina in her lithograph Red Flag (1971); Valie Export spread her ripped pant legs wide to reveal her hairy genitals in her Aktionhose: Genitalpanik (1969). Unlike earlier representations of the nude female body by heterosexual male artists, such as Gustave Courbet – whose Origin of the World (1866) most certainly puts female genitalia on display for male consumption – these women artists have reversed the traditional power structure, via an explicit ownership and recuperation of the female body.

Heffernan is also challenging traditional notions of female beauty and self-portraiture in these new paintings. In earlier paintings, she portrayed versions of a metaphorical self, wearing extravagant chandelier headdresses or skirts of flora and fauna, or skirts of overripe fruit, dead game and fish, as tropes for the stages in her life. Now she is nude, clothed only by the “tools of the trade,” placed around her mid-riff or by large scrolls that festoon around her as she stares out at the viewer confidently, almost defiantly. These new so-called self-portraits are not academic, idealized depictions of a passive female body in repose with a come-hither glance à la Cabanel’s Birth of Venus (1863). Now Heffernan’s “gesture” – of shifting narratives and celebrating powerful women – is her way, some 50 years later, of fighting back with an arsenal of powerful imagery she has been studying, analyzing, and internalizing for 30 years. In this powerful body of work Heffernan is standing male domination on its head, using the very tools that Courbet himself wielded with such impunity, but now, with her own arsenal of co-opted and re-tooled stylistic choices, she is declaring, “enough is enough” and #TimesUp. She has self-consciously stripped herself of (or at least complicated) her “feminine” or alluring qualities, wreaking havoc on the tradition of the classic nude. Heffernan has presented these women as empowered figures who, like the caryatids of ancient Greece holding up a temple, stand guard before, and protect, the heroines behind them.

Maura Reilly is an arts writer and curatorial activist based in New York. She currently serves as Executive Director of the National Academy of Design. Her most recent publication, Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating, was published by Thames & Hudson in 2018. She received her MA and PhD in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.



Self-Portrait with the Daughters 2018
oil on canvas
79 x 56 inches



Feast of Fools 2018
oil on canvas
68 x 66 inches



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