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## Curator's Close-Up: Maura Reilly



By Lilia Ziamou

Maura Reilly is a curator and writer who has dedicated her career to contemporary art in/of/from the margins. She has recently joined the National Academy Museum as the Chief Curator. Prior to this appointment, she held various senior curator positions and was the Founding Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

In this conversation, Maura Reilly talks to us about a recent *ARTnews* Special Issue on Women in the Art World that she has recently co-edited, her recent book project and her goals as the Chief Curator at the National Academy Museum, which she joined last month.

**Lilia Ziamou: In June, you were the guest contributing editor of the *ARTnews* Special Issue: Women in the Art World. How did this come about? What did you hope to achieve with this issue?**

**Maura Reilly:** For the past few years I've been giving a keynote address that focuses on sexism in the art world. I've presented this talk at Tate Modern, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, and a few other places. This talk was the basis for the article.

In the spring, I approached Sarah Douglas, the Executive Editor of *ARTnews* with the idea to publish the lecture and she took the idea to a whole new level. She solicited additional essays and invited artists to respond to my piece. My aim with the article, and with the issue in general, was to raise awareness, and to remind people that there is continued gender disparity that needs to be re-examined — in galleries, art museums, art market, and so on.

**Lilia Ziamou: In this same issue, the centerpiece is your essay entitled *Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes*. In it, you present data from several sources to illustrate gender differences. Can you share with us how the data informs the challenges women are facing in the art world?**



**Maura Reilly:** The statistics that I've collected over the years, and that I shared in my article, speaks volumes about how little has changed for women in the art world, despite decades of feminist activism. Sure, women are in a far better place than they were in the 1960s, say, but we are far from equal in the art world. Just look at auction price differentials, press coverage, permanent collection hanging ratios, etc. revealed by the data. My aim with the article, then, was to examine the data closely, and to offer up possible solutions for addressing the disparity, in the hopes of precipitating change.

What is interesting is that there are about 60% women in MFA programs. Then when we look at gallery representation, it becomes 30% women. This means that when curators are looking at the work exhibited at the galleries, they are seeing 70% men, just as they are seeing 70% men at the museums. So it is a cycle. And it has to change. It is much easier for a curator to go to a few galleries and choose from the artists exhibited there. But isn't it more interesting to exhibit artists who haven't shown before? I think so. It just requires a bit more work.

**Lilia Ziamou: You have a new book coming out in 2016. Talk to us about this new project.**

**Maura Reilly:** The title is *Curatorial Activism* and it will be published by Thames & Hudson. It is based on my personal research over the last few years, and it focuses on what I am viewing as activist curating. What I mean by that is that the majority of curators organize exhibitions around white male artists. I am interested in curators who work differently, who are interested in expanding the definition of contemporary art to include 'other' voices. Curators who are interested in including more women, more artists of color, more LGBT artists, for instance. In 1989, *Magiciens de la Terre*, an exhibition curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Georges Pompidou, was the first exhibition to offer a post-colonial approach to contemporary art. In a similar vein, there are curators today who are trying to offer a more just representation of contemporary art — one inclusive of multiple voices — not just a select few. This book is celebrating the work of these curatorial activists.

**Lilia Ziamou: You have edited *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* recently published by Thames & Hudson. Talk to us about the motivation for editing this book?**

**Maura Reilly:** Linda Nochlin is a prolific art historian and the Lila Acheson Wallace Emerita Professor of Modern Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She was my MA and PhD Advisor, and is now a long-term, close friend. I conceptualized this project as a way of giving back, of thanking her for her years of support. It was a labor of love! The majority of her anthologies feature essays in which she is using a feminist methodological approach to interpret male artists' works. The anthologies reproduce few essays about women. However, since the late 1960's she has published innumerable articles and catalogues essays about women artists. It was important to find and bring many of these essays together, and present them in a chronological order so that you can see the development of her thinking.

**Lilia Ziamou: You have recently joined the National Academy Museum as the Chief Curator. What**



## of the exhibitions that will serve these goals?

**Maura Reilly:** Since its founding in 1825, the National Academy Museum is dedicated exclusively to American art and architecture and its mission is to promote the fine arts in America through instruction and exhibition. My goal as Chief Curator is to ensure that this mission is clear, focused, relevant, innovative, and exciting to the public at large. We are starting to develop a program that will focus on National Academicians, who are professional artists and architects elected by their peers annually. There are approximately 415 living Academicians. Using them as a starting point for future exhibitions is logical since most of them are very well known.

Over the next few years we will be rolling out a series of exhibitions that will re-emphasize and clarify the institution's dedication to American art and architecture, past and present. For instance, opening in a few weeks is a show examining the architecture of Academician Moshe Safdie, and then, in January, a series of exhibitions devoted solely to Academicians — a salon hang of the permanent collection, an exhibition of 1930s/40s prints from the collection, an exhibition of Anthony Panzera's Leonardo series, and a survey show of Miriam Schapiro's work.



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