



FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN ART

Dr. Ann Laenen - 24/11/2020

CONTENT

- Female Artists? Context
- What is Female Activism in Arts?
- How to tell the story? Choices made in the selection for this lecture.
- First Generation
- Second Generation
- Intersectionality
- Curatorial Activism

CONTEXT AND CHOICES MADE



On gender inequality in newspaper coverage on Art

First, despite increasing women's employment in arts and culture and a quantitative feminization of journalism, elite newspaper coverage of women in arts and culture has hardly changed, making up about 20-25 percent consistently over the last 50 years. Second, our results show surprisingly few cross-national differences in the amount of the newspaper coverage devoted to women in arts and culture. Third, although women are underrepresented in the coverage of all artistic genres, there is some evidence of horizontal sex segregation—particularly in architecture (stereotypical masculine) and modern dance and fashion (stereotypical feminine)—as well as vertical sex segregation—in that attention to women has increased in “highbrow” genres that have declined in status. Finally, as the status of an actor type increases from laymen to artistic directors, the proportion of women decreases in newspaper attention to arts and culture.

-Pauwke Berkers, Marc Verboord, Frank Wey - These critics (still) don't write enough about women artists, 2016.

CHOICES MADE

- The story about feminist art can be told in different ways. This lecture focusses on visual arts, telling the story through some key texts and a short selection of artists.
- The selection starts with artists from the seventies
- Looks at developments in feminist art
- Looks at intersectionality
- Finishes with curatorial activism and as such offers a wider view than the feminist perspective.



Linda Nohlin painted by Alice Neel



<https://www.facebook.com/mfaboston/videos/1378010475732502>

Feminist art theory started to develop in the early years of the 70ies, an essay that started the debate is Linda Nohlin's Essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* , which was published in 1971. She looked at the social and economic factors that prevented talented women from reaching the same status as their male colleagues. (http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Nochlin-Linda_Why-Have-There-Been-No-Great-Women-Artists.pdf)

WAYS OF SEEING

JOHN BERGER

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.

But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.



The Surrealist painter Magritte commented on this always-present gap between words and seeing in a painting called *The Key of Dreams*.

The way we see things is affected by what we

John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing* from 1972 also addresses this theme. The book, explores different ways of looking at art as well as the differences in representation of men and women. Berger concluded: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at". So, essentially, Western art was replicating the unequal relationships already embedded in society. (<http://waysofseeingwaysofseeing.com/ways-of-seeing-john-berger-5.7.pdf>)

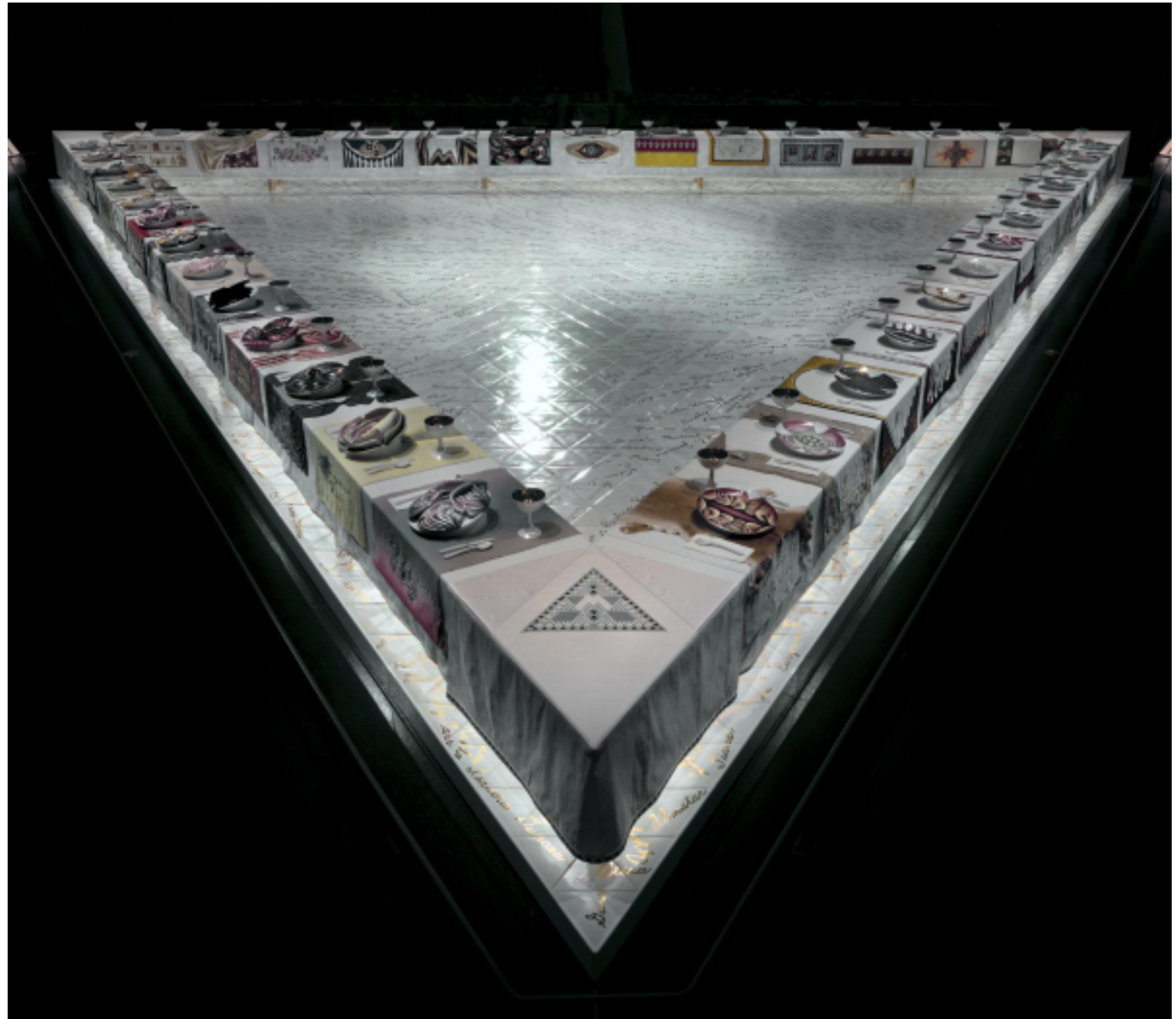
THE 70IES - FIRST GENERATION

In the 1970s, American women artists imbued with the spirit of radical feminism used their work to demonstrate the conceptual influence of feminism in its many and varied forms. Engaging with numerous issues relating to the status and rights of women, they established a clear link between their art and their lives as women. Frequently, they depicted the quotidian lives of women—small, seemingly unimportant moments. From their perspective, every subject—including those which, prior to that point, had been deemed trivial, minor, and (thus) “feminine”—were worthy of discussion and museum exhibition: issues related to housekeeping and child raising, the difficulties of making a living, over-friendly bosses with a habit of patting their behinds, or body-image issues manifested in the worried looks they gave to their expanding waistline in the mirror.

Tal Dekel (2013) *Gendered: Art and Feminist Theory*, p. 2



FIGURE 1-1: Lynda Benglis, *Untitled* (ad in the November 1974 *Artforum* Magazine), 1974. Colour photograph©Lynda Benglis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



Judy Chicago (American, born 1939). *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79. Ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 x 576 in. (1463 x 1463 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, 2002.10. © Judy Chicago. (Photo: Donald Woodman)

The Dinner Party, an important icon of 1970s feminist art and a milestone in twentieth-century art, is presented as the centerpiece around which the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art is organized. *The Dinner Party* comprises a massive ceremonial banquet, arranged on a triangular table with a total of thirty-nine place settings, each commemorating an important woman from history. The settings consist of embroidered runners, gold chalices and utensils, and china-painted porcelain plates with raised central motifs that are based on vulvar and butterfly forms and rendered in styles appropriate to the individual women being honored. The names of another 999 women are inscribed in gold on the white tile floor below the triangular table. This permanent installation is enhanced by rotating Herstory Gallery exhibitions relating to the 1,038 women honored at the table.

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party



When I speak of the erotic, then I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language , our history, our dancing, our loving, our work , our lives.

-Audrey Laurde, Uses of the Erotic

Her performance is a parody on the television cooking demonstrations which were popularized by Julia Child in the 1960s



<https://youtu.be/ZuZympOIGC0>

Martha Rosler

Semiotics of the Kitchen
1975

SECOND GENERATION

“I like making images that from a distance seem kind of seductive, colorful, luscious and engaging, and then you realize what you're looking at is something totally opposite,” she reflected. “It seems boring to me to pursue the typical idea of beauty, because that is the easiest and the most obvious way to see the world. It's more challenging to look at the other side.”

Cindy Sherman

Cindy Sherman
Untitled Film Still #21
1978

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/cindy-sherman/>

<https://www.moma.org/artists/5392>





**Do women have to be naked to
get into the Met. Museum?**

**Less than 5% of the *artists* in the Modern
Art sections are women, but 85%
of the *nudes* are female**

Statistics from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 1989

GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

<https://www.guerrillagirls.com>



<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-tracey-emins-my-bed-ignored-societys-expectations-women>

DEVELOPMENTS IN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN ART

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON ART

CONTEMPORARY
OUTTAKES



EDITED BY JACQUELINE MILLNER
AND CATRIONA MOORE



Feminist Perspectives on Art: Contemporary Outtakes looks to interactions between art history, theory, curation, and studio-based practices to theorise the phenomenological import of this embodied gender difference in contemporary art. The essays in this collection are rooted in a wide variety of disciplines, including art-making, curating, and art history and criticism, with many of the authors combining roles of curator, artist and writer. This interdisciplinary approach enables the book to bridge the theory-practice divide and highlight new perspectives emerging from creative arts research. Fresh insights are offered on feminist aesthetics, women's embodied experience, curatorial and art historical method, art world equity, and intersectional concerns. It engages with epistemological assertions of 'how the body feels', how the land has creative agency in Indigenous art, and how the use of emotional or affective registers may form one's curatorial method. This anthology represents a significant contribution to a broader resurgence of feminist thought, methodology, and action in contemporary art, particularly in creative practice research. It will be of particular value to students and researchers in art history, visual culture, cultural studies, and gender studies, in addition to museum and gallery professionals specialising in contemporary art.

Intersectionality / term first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw as a way to understand feminism through the lens of race

<https://www.artsy.net/gene/intersectionality>

Oxford languages defines it as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Mickalene Thomas



<http://figuringhistory.site.seattleartmuseum.org/mickalene-thomas/le-dejeuner-sur-lherbe-les-trois-femmes-noires/>

Le déjeuner sur l'herbe: Les Trois Femmes Noires

Mickalene Thomas 2010 The Baltimore Museum of Art
Baltimore, Maryland, United States

<http://figuringhistory.site.seattleartmuseum.org/mickalene-thomas/>

In this tapestry, Kara Walker reproduces an etching from an 1863 issue of the newspaper Harper's Weekly that documents the burning of a "colored orphan asylum." Infuriated by newly imposed draft requirements during the Civil War, a mob of New Yorkers took to the streets, attacking both black and white innocents. To drive home the emotional reality of this atrocity, Walker superimposed the silhouette of a hanged black woman over this scene, a shocking image that grabs our attention. Walker's silhouette of the hanged woman is an example of her ongoing interest in the traditional medium of cut-paper silhouettes. Before the widespread popularity of photography in early nineteenth-century America, paper cutouts of profiles served as a popular medium for portraiture. For the artist, this collision of popular prints and cutouts with the more elite tradition of woven tapestries creates tension: "I liked the irony of transferring this lowly craft into a medium once used for kings and princes," Walker said.



A Warm Summer Evening in 1863
Kara Walker 2008

CURATORIAL ACTIVISM

LOS ANGELES

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution

Micol Hebron

Connie Butler's pink-glass swan song, "Wack!", closes her tenure at MOCA (before moving to MoMA), and (re)opens the dialogue about feminism. The exhibition features 119 international artists and offers a sampling of art and the feminist revolution from 1965 – 1980. "Wack!" has many shortcomings: the lack of explanatory wall texts, the lack

of an index in the catalogue, the dearth of black artists. Then there is the 'sex sells' tactic of the catalogue cover image, the inclusion of certain artists, and the exclusion of others. But "Wack!" also brings good. Much like the seminal, feminist-generated consciousness raising groups of the '60s and '70s, this exhibition promoted discourse,

community and education with an unprecedented program of lectures, performances, screenings, artist-lead walk-throughs of the exhibition and dinner parties around Los Angeles during the first run of this show. It has been by way of the exhibition coupled with these events that the feminist dialogue and revolution has been reinstated.



The exhibition is as difficult for critics to navigate as the history of feminism itself is. There aren't any easy categories, easy definitions, easy timelines, or easy choices. Feminism, feminist art and consequently "Wack!" (8 years in the making), have wrestled for years with the complexity of representation — gendered, politicized, aestheticized, deconstructed or otherwise. The overwhelming amount of work in this show illuminates how feminist art was revolutionary in more ways than any other art movement in the 20th century. From performance to installation, video to practices of institutional critique, it was often the courage of feminist artists that kick-started or significantly redirected numerous genres of art.

Continued on page 93.

From left to right: Cosey Fanni Tutti with Instruments for 'Marcel Duchamp's Next Work,' c. 1970. Photo: Coum. Courtesy Cabinet, London; Martha Rosler, *Nature Girls (Jumping Janes)*, from the series "Body Beautiful or Body Knows No Pain," 1966-72. Photomontage, dimensions variable.

In 2008, feminist art was given its First major retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The show, WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution featured work by over 100 artists from various countries and groups all over the world. It demonstrated that the movement was as diverse and complex as any other movement in art history. While the feminist art movement, it's important to recognize the way they approached their art and the way they chose to create work that they can identify with. <https://www.moca.org/exhibition/wack-art-and-the-feminist-revolution>

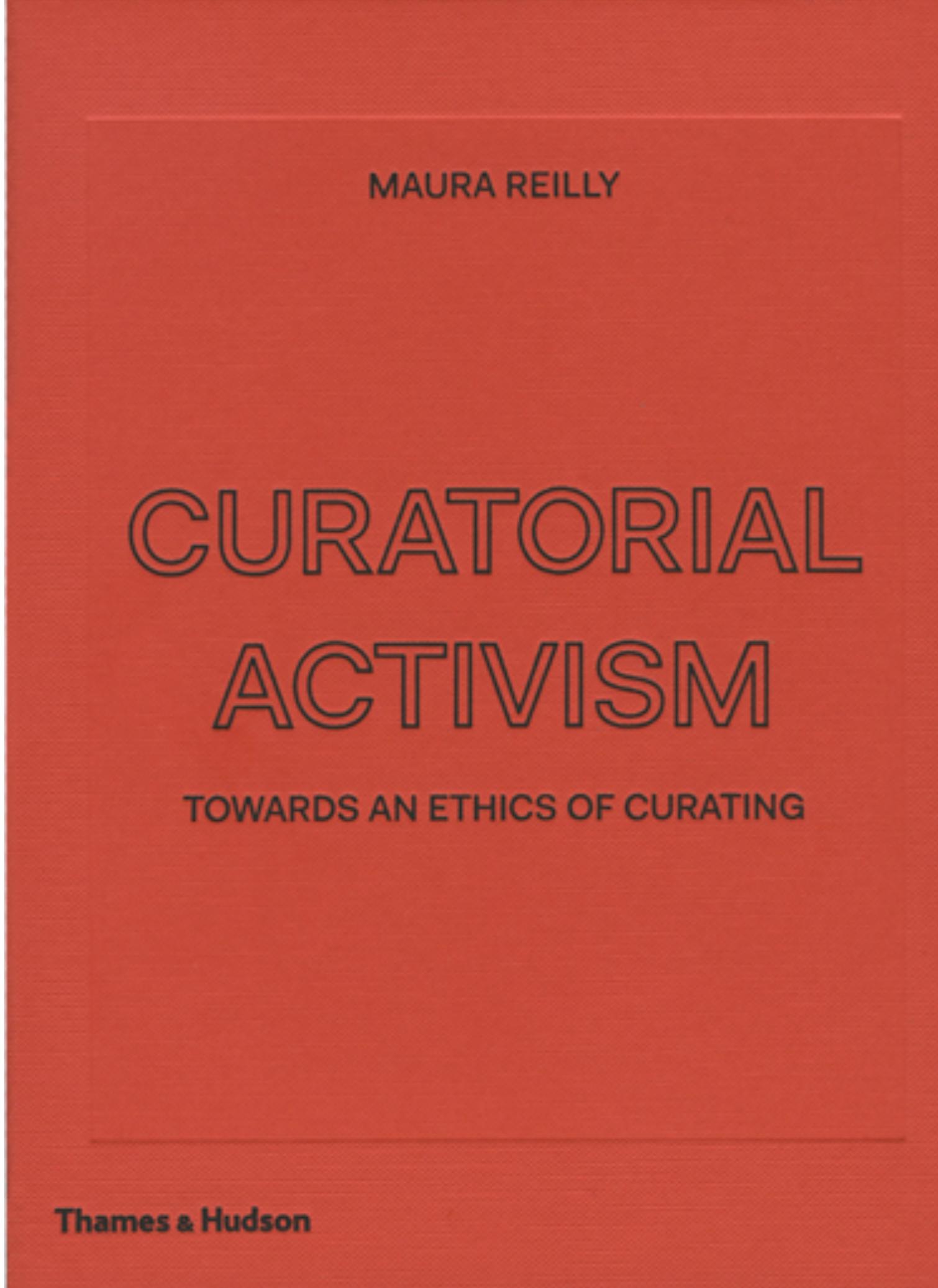
Focusing on the work of black women artists, *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85* examines the political, social, cultural, and aesthetic priorities of women of color during the emergence of second-wave feminism. It is the first exhibition to highlight the voices and experiences of women of color—distinct from the primarily white, middle-class mainstream feminist movement—in order to reorient conversations around race, feminism, political action, art production, and art history in this significant historical period.

Presenting a diverse group of artists and activists who lived and worked at the intersections of avant-garde art worlds, radical political movements, and profound social change, the exhibition features a wide array of work, including conceptual, performance, film, and video art, as well as photography, painting, sculpture, and printmaking.

https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/we_wanted_a_revolution



Jan van Raay (American, born 1942). *Faith Ringgold (right) and Michele Wallace (middle) at Art Workers Coalition Protest, Whitney Museum, 1971*. Digital C-print. Courtesy of Jan van Raay, Portland, OR, 305–37. © Jan van Raay



MAURA REILLY

CURATORIAL ACTIVISM

TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF CURATING

Thames & Hudson

<https://thamesandhudson.com/curatorial-activism-9780500239704>

“Curatorial Activism” is a term I use to designate the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principle aim of ensuring that certain constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art. It is a practice that commits itself to counter-hegemonic initiatives that give voice to those who have been historically silenced or omitted altogether—and, as such, focuses almost exclusively on work produced by women, artists of color, non-Euro-Americans, and/or queer artists.- Maura Reilly



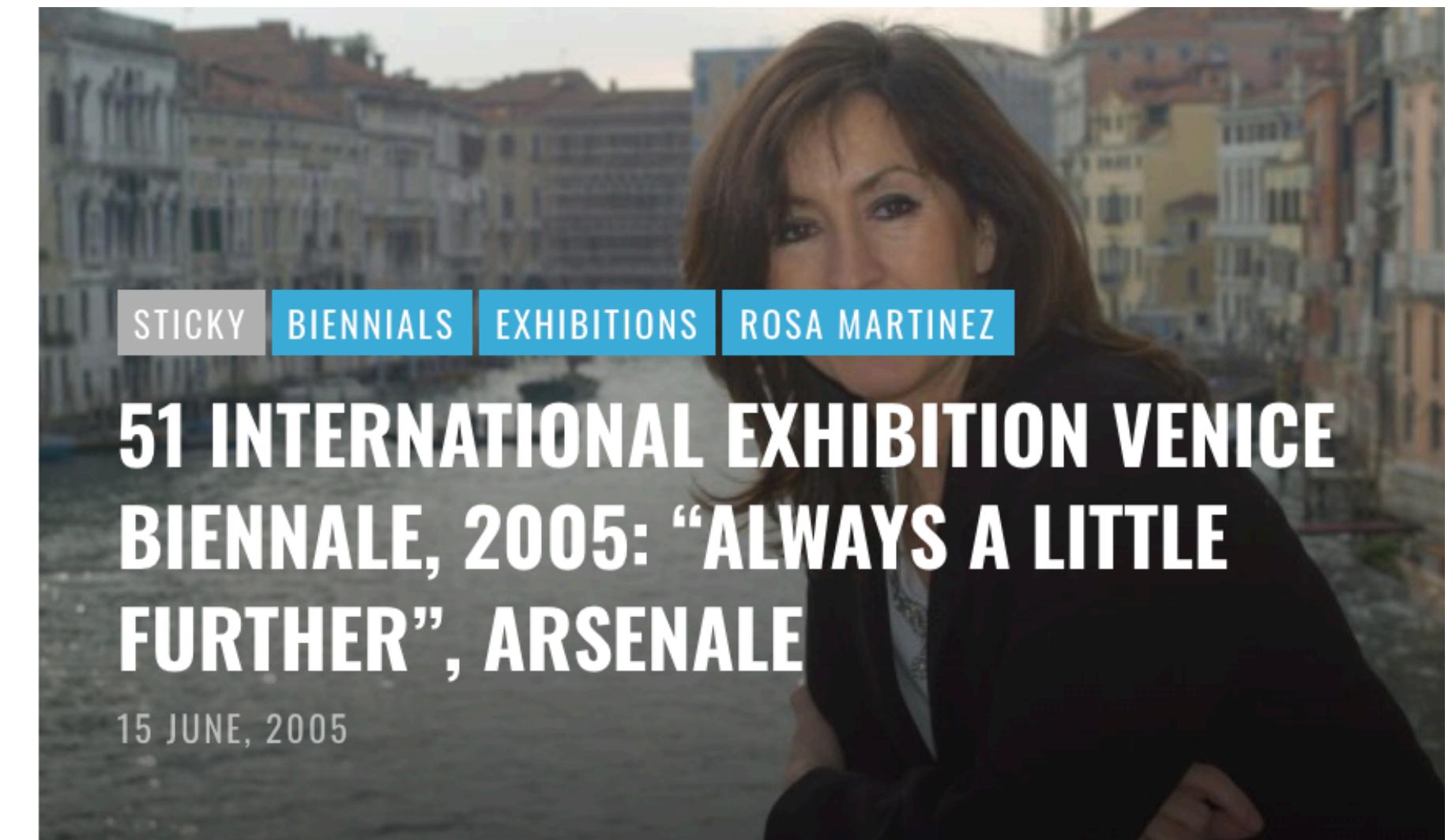
STICKY | GROUP SHOWS | EXHIBITIONS | ROSA MARTINEZ

CONSTELLATION MALTA

8 OCTOBER, 2018

Rosa Martinez

<http://www.rosamartinez.com/new/>



STICKY | BIENNIALS | EXHIBITIONS | ROSA MARTINEZ

51 INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION VENICE BIENNALE, 2005: "ALWAYS A LITTLE FURTHER", ARSENALE

15 JUNE, 2005



STICKY | INTERVIEWS | ROSA MARTINEZ

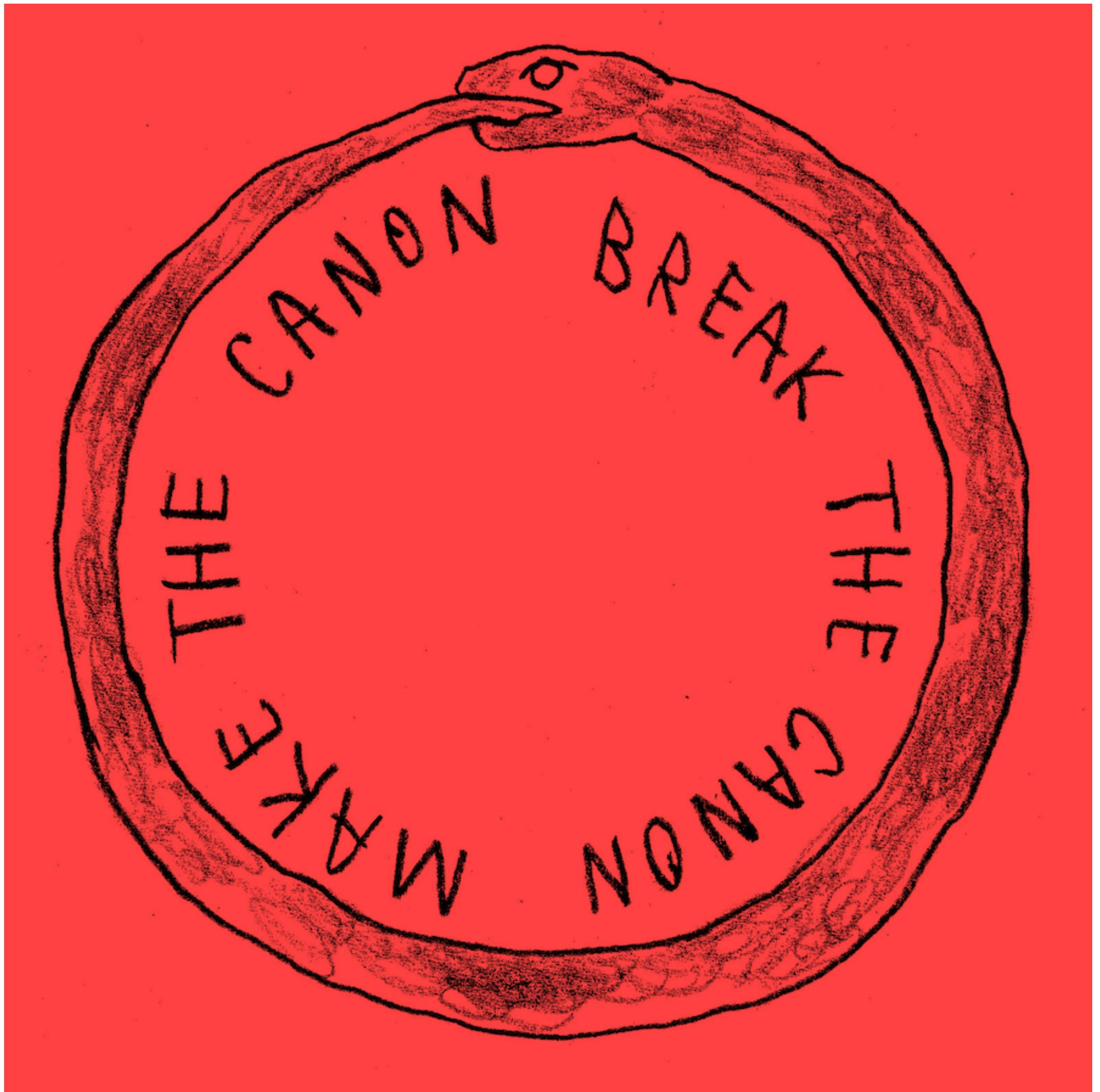
ARTFORUM NEW YORK, EEUU 1999

30 AUGUST, 1999

What can each of us do, as curators, artists, educators, gallerists and museum directors, to difference the art historical canon, and to offer a more just and fair representation of global artistic production?

Should we all be working towards a global art history, an art without borders? Should we be aiming to abolish the canons altogether, arguing that all cultural artefacts have significance – in other words, should our goal be a totalising critique of canonicity itself? Or should we accept the omnipotence of the art historical canon, within and against which we all work, and vow to always supplement and query it, ad infinitum? I don't know the answer.

What I do know is that, as we venture forward into this new century, it is imperative that art institutions examine not only their putative subjects, but their ideological biases as well. This will involve rethinking methodologies and iconographies for what they say, and do not say, about the constructions of race, gender, class and nation. In such cases, critical theory is not enough; we must re-examine cultural objects and social practices to understand the patterns of everyday life that shape the past and inevitably imprint the future. - Maura Reilly



<https://breakthecanonmakethecanon.tumblr.com/?fbclid=IwAR18G3tQT3i7oJbS-SDZlBFFMdURFWWBLFMIpqrz3QHkhi-EGspAz44Yw6c>

Possible actions ...

Break The Canon Make The Canon

@ Sint Lucas Antwerpen

Did you ever wonder why our books and references are so white, male and cis-heteronormative? *We Cannot Work Like This* is currently working hard on a library that will break and make the canon of art & design education in our school. We order new books that view the library through a **self-reflexive, intersectional feminist, non-cisheteronormative and anti-racist lens**.

Do you #breakthecanon? Do you #makethecanon? Do you think about the canon of arts education?

Break The Canon Make The Canon is a project of We Cannot Work Like This Sint Lucas Antwerpen. The cross-disciplinary transnational alliance *We Cannot Work Like This* is a project of Natasa Petresin-Bachelez for Contour9 Biennial Mechelen. It brings together several departments of academies and universities from Belgium, France, England and Hong Kong, and facilitates students working together in each of their schools on sustainable, decolonial and inclusive practices. The students are invited to look at sustainability through the self-reflexive, intersectional feminist, anti-capitalist and anti-racist lens.

Pauwke Berkers, Marc Verbood, Frank Wey, These Critics (still) don't write enough about women artists, *Gender & Society*, Vol 30, No 3, June 2016.

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin, 1972.

Tal Dekkel, *Gendered: Art and Feminist Theory*, Newcastle upon Tyne : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Micol Hebron, Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution at MoCA, *Flash Art International*, volume 40, issue 254, in May-June 2007

Sheila Jeffereys, 'Body Art' and Social Status: Cutting, Tattooing and Piercing from a Feminist Perspective, *Feminism & Psychology* 10(4).

Kim McMillon, Black Feminism, The Ancestors Speak, and the Women of the Black Arts Movement, *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.11, no.6, April 2018.

Jacqueline Millner, Catriona Moore and Georgina Cole, Art and Feminism: Twenty-First Century Perspectives, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 2015 Vol. 15, No. 2, 143149, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2015.1089816>

Jacqueline Milner and Catriona Moore (eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Art: Contemporary Outtakes*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018

Linda Nochlin, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?". In Gornick, Vivian; Moran, Barbara (eds.). *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*. New York: Basic Books, 1971.

Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2018



THANK YOU
