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FEATURES — JUNE 2015 — WOMEN IN THE ART WORLD



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

BY *Maura Reilly* POSTED 05/26/15 3:45 PM

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 achiever—like Marina Abramovic, Tracey Emin, and Cindy Sherman—does not mean that women artists have achieved equality. Far from it.

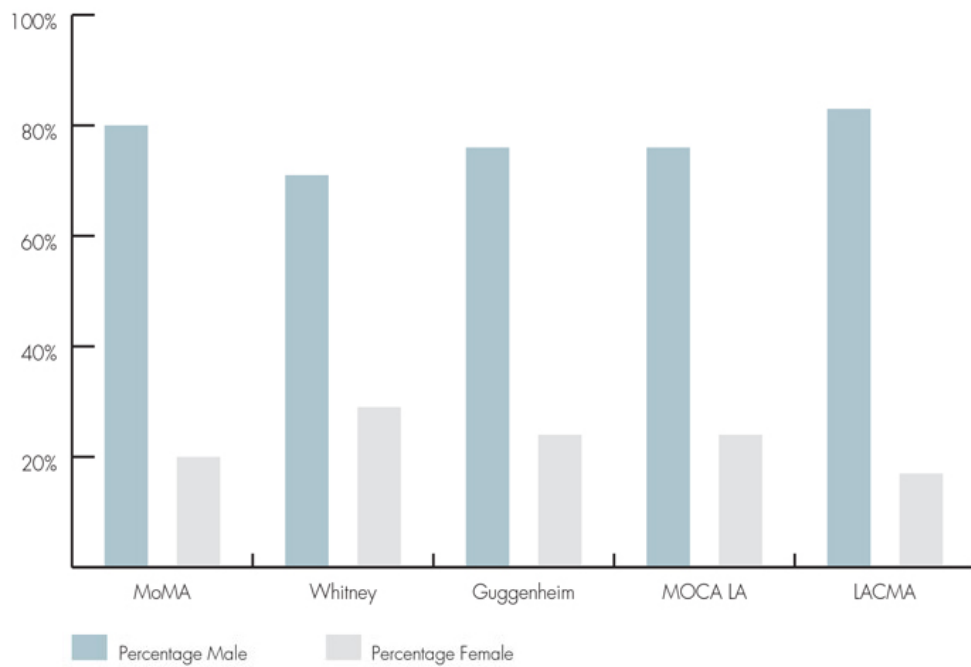
The more closely one examines art-world statistics, the more glaringly obvious it becomes that, despite decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the majority continues to be defined as white, Euro-American, heterosexual, privileged, and, above all, male. Sexism 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.

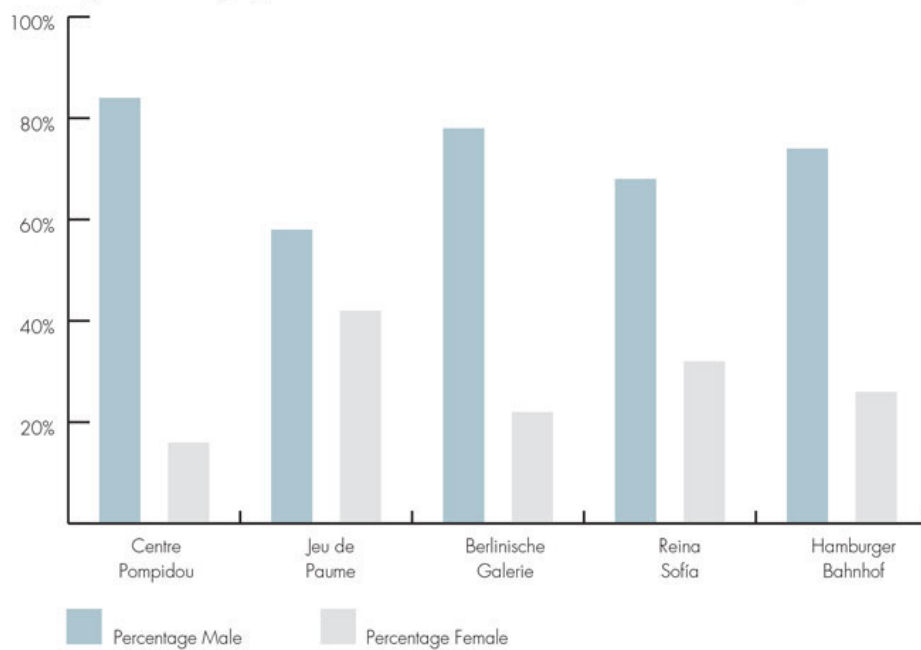
Discrimination against women at the top trickles down into every aspect of the art world—gallery representation, auction price differentials, press coverage, and inclusion in permanent-collection displays and solo-exhibition programs. A glance at the past few years of special-exhibition schedules at 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).

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



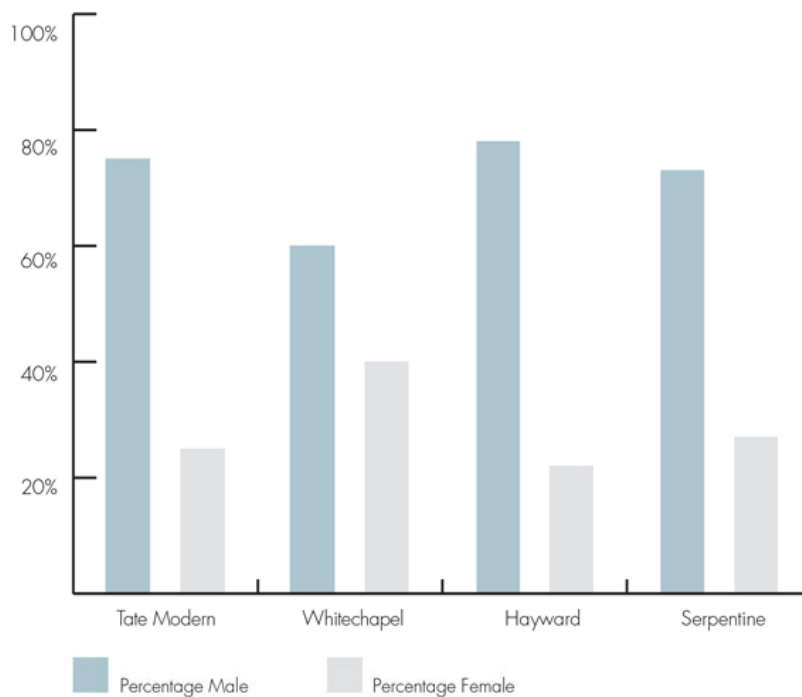
There are signs of improvement throughout France and Germany, but parity is nowhere in sight. Of all the solo exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou since 2007, only 16 percent went to women. In 1980 it was 1.1 percent, in 1990 it was 0.4 percent, and in 2000 it was 0.2 percent (Fig. 2).

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



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.

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



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.

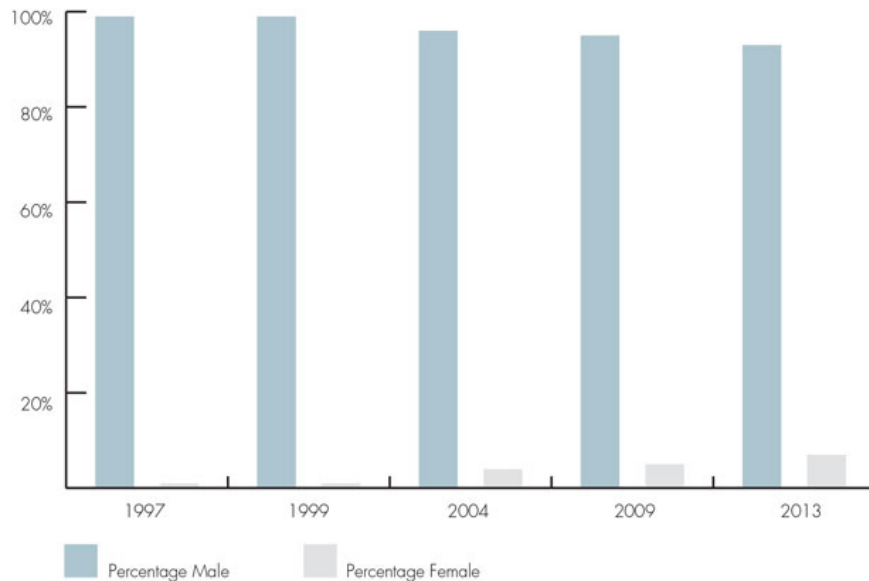
“Elles” was a particularly revolutionary gesture in the context of France. As Morineau explains, it “was a very un-French thing to do. In France, nobody counts the number of men and women in exhibitions. Very few people notice that sometimes there are no women.” It took her six years to convince the 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 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.

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



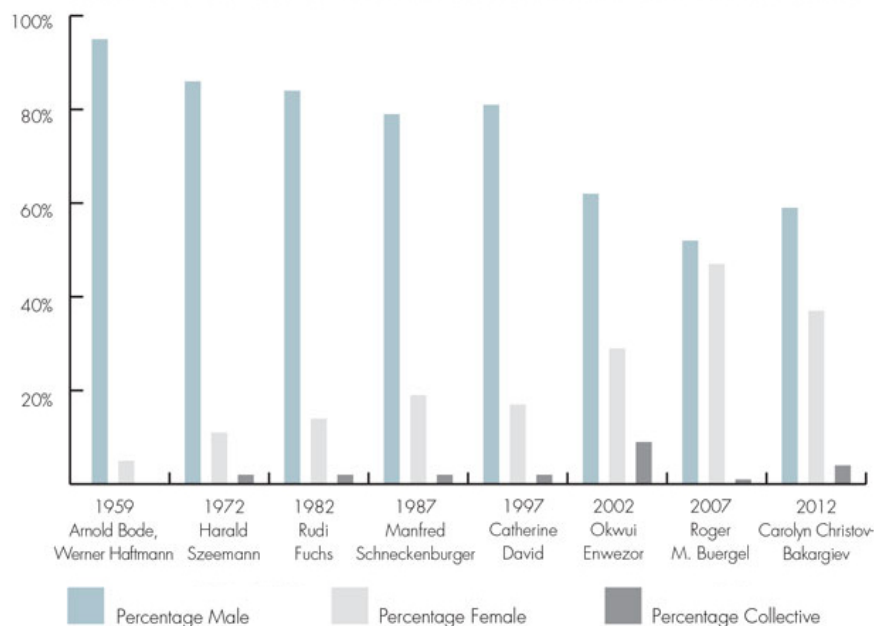
Many positive changes at MoMA have to do with the MoMA Women's Project (MWP), an initiative begun in 2005, not from within MoMA, but at the suggestion of donor Sarah Peter. Curators have done in-depth research on the women artists in the museum's collection, where the ratio of male-to-female artists 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

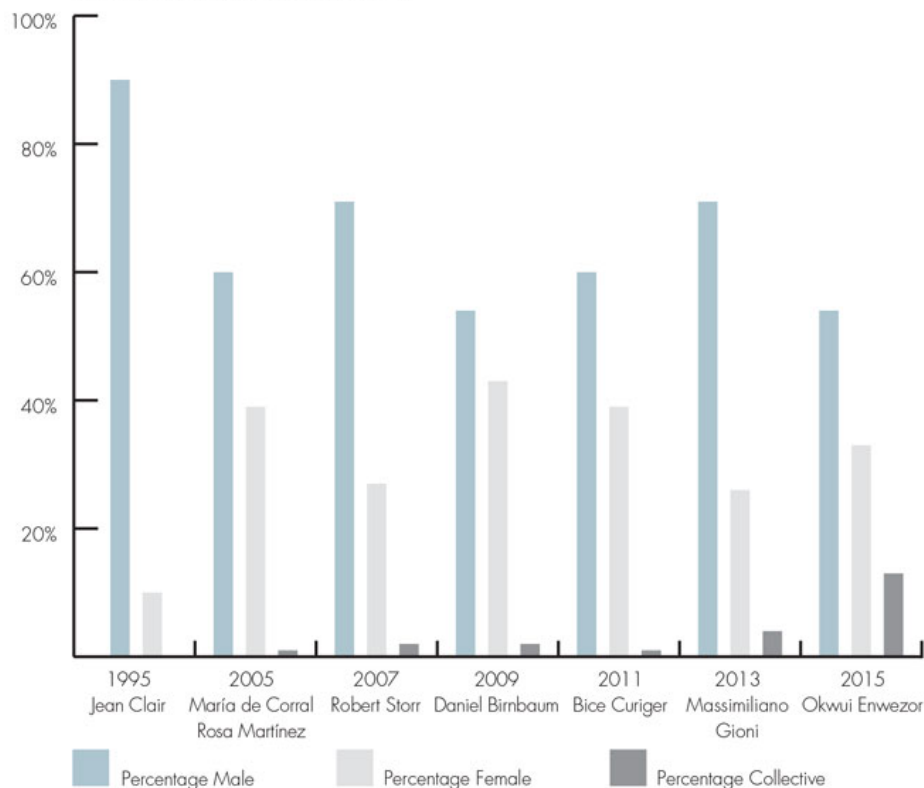
Women are often excluded from exhibitions within which one would think they would play major roles. While the [12th edition of Documenta](#), directed by Roger M. Buergel in 2007, included 53 women out of 112—a promising 47 percent—Okwui Enwezor's edition, in 2002, praised for its postcolonial curatorial 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.

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



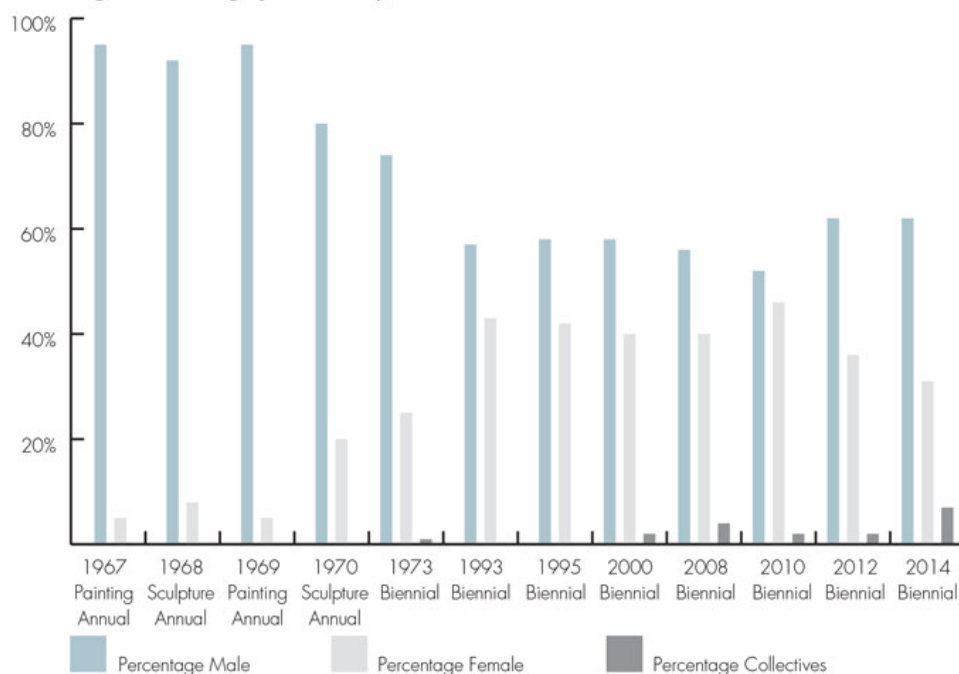
The statistics for the last few editions of the Venice Biennale are similar to those from Documenta, demonstrating recent improvements, but continuing problems. While the 2009 edition featured a promising 43 percent women, in 2013 that figure dropped to 26 percent under curator Massimiliano Gioni. This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

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



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.

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



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 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).

GUERRILLA GIRLS' 1986 REPORT CARD				PUSSY GALORE'S 2015 REPORT CARD			
GALLERY	NO. OF WOMEN 1983-4	NO. OF WOMEN 1984-7	REMARKS	GALLERY	% OF WOMEN	GALLERY	% OF WOMEN
Blum Helman	1	1	No improvement	303 Gallery	41%	Matthew Marks	16%
Mary Boone	0	0	Boy crazy	Alexander & Bonin	29%	Marlborough	16%
Grace Borgenicht	0	0	Talks initiative	Mary Boone	13%	Metro Pictures	33%
Diane Brown	0	2	Could do even better	Leo Castelli	15%	Pace	16%
Leo Castelli	4	3	Not paying attention	Cheim & Read	36%	Petzel	35%
Charles Cowles	2	2	Needs work	Paula Cooper	29%	Postmasters	39%
Marisa del Rey	0	0	No progress	Derek Eller	15%	PPOW	53%
Allan Frumkin	1	1	Doesn't follow direction	Zach Feuer	50%	Andrea Rosen	29%
Marian Goodman	0	1	Keep trying	James Fuentes	33%	Salon 94	50%
Pat Hearn	0	0	Delinquent	Gagosian	15%	Tony Shafrazi	5%
Marlborough	2	1	Failing	Marian Goodman	22%	Jack Shainman	26%
Oil & Steel	0	1	Underachiever	Casey Kaplan	23%	Sikkema Jenkins	50%
Pace	2	2	Working below capacity	Paul Kasmin	11%	Sonnabend	31%
Tony Shafrazi	0	1	Still unsatisfactory	Anton Kern	21%	Sperone Westwater	8%
Sperone Westwater	0	0	Unforgivable	Lehmann Maupin	41%	Edward Thorp	50%
Edward Thorp	1	4	Making excellent progress	Galerie Lelong	61%	Tracey Williams	58%
Washburn	1	1	Unacceptable	Luhning Augustine	21%	David Zwirner	27%

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSEQUENCE OF THE ART WORLD
SEE SAVANNAH PLACE, 100TH ST., NY 10013
FOR MORE QUALITY INFORMATION

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM PUSSY GALORE KICKING IDIOCY IN THE ARSE
© Pussy Galore 2015

The Guerrilla Girls' 1986 "Report Card" along Pussy Galore's 2015 version.

©1986 GUERRILLA GIRLS; ©2015 PUSSY GALORE

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.

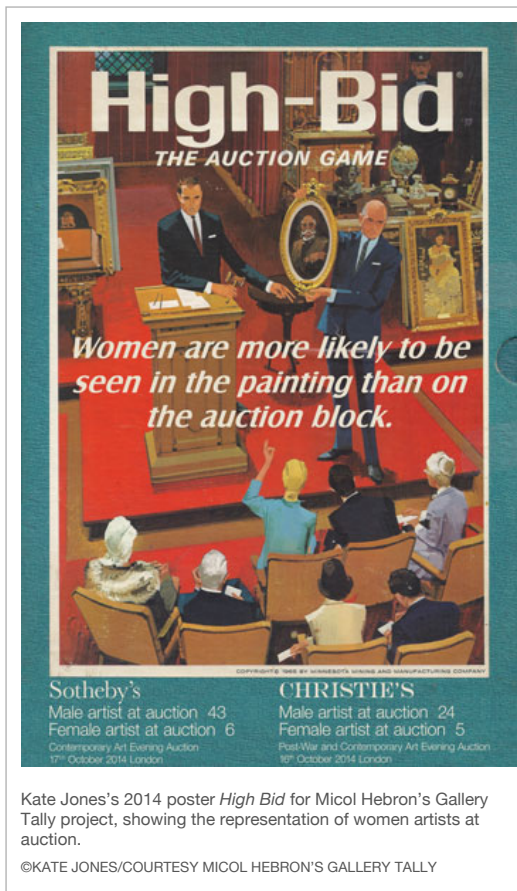
If, as feminist theorist Hélène Cixous argues, women are spoken of and for, but are very rarely allowed to speak themselves, then it is imperative that women become speaking subjects, rather than silent objects. If a “well-adjusted” woman is silent, static, invisible, then an unruly, speaking woman is 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 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.

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.

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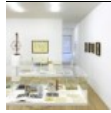
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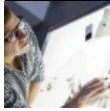
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DANIEL BUCHHOLZ OPENS IN NEW YORK, CELEBRATING THE ELUSIVE RAYMOND ROUSSEL



'WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU SEE': DONALD JUDD AND FRANK STELLA ON THE END OF PAINTING, IN 1966



EDITOR'S LETTER: ARTNEWS SUMMER 2015, ORIGINAL COVER BY WILL COTTON

13 Comments

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Barbara Morales · a month ago

I think too much revolves around the money in art instead of the quality of the art itself. I have met quite a few artists male and female and to me it seems that producing mass amounts of crappy cheesy sloppy A** art is abundant. Art is about creation. If one produces work that is pleasing to the senses it doesn't matter if one is female or male. Women are so adamant about being cheated and snubbed by the art world that anger and rage blinds the creativity that could produce the fine works that would otherwise be created. I do agree that males have the edge when it comes to dollars and promotion. BUT if people consider that our modern art society scowls and scoffs at the best and otherwise unknown gifted people due to the fact that trying to break into the art world is a load of S***. Governed by jealousy, greed and too many demands of the so called experts and modern ideals of what art should be. Is a deterrent to many artists who have much to offer but are lost in the far too complex world of art. This includes many women whose works could be the equalizing factor for our gender. And for more modern minded males whom would not perceive females in the art world as competition but as equals!

2 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



Oltremarino · a month ago

Very interesting article. I've been aware of the inequities for my entire career but hadn't ever seen the statistics revealed so starkly. It is worse than I thought.

I wonder why there is no mention of the National Museum of Women in the Arts in this article, which lists other women-centric exhibition spaces.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



gerald brennan · 2 months ago

I'm from the music world.

The first great composer for whom we have a name (other than "anonymous"), is a woman. About 1000 years ago. Her name was Hildegard and she was amazing.

Since then? Nobody.

I'm talking about the very few first-raters here, not "good composers."

Nobody I know cares the slightest bit if great music comes from a man, a woman, or a Martian of indeterminate sex.

I suggest that men and women are different and have different proclivities. Of course in a forum like this I expect such a statement to be, at best, ignored.

Hildegard proved it can be done. That a woman can be a great composer. It's not that many of us don't believe it, it's that we're still waiting for another one.

I don't know if such an observation is germane to the art world. In that realm I am only a breathless observer.

1 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



Origami_Isopod → gerald brennan · 21 days ago

This context-less, blithe, privileged nonsense again.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



PretenderNX01 → gerald brennan · 2 months ago

I don't think it's so simple as to claim women just don't like to do it that much. Women have historically been blocked from education.

Then further blocked by being devalued by a western male-centered worldview that galleries, museums and art critics/press have had for so long. Women who create are still seen as a novelty.

By the way, I also suggest you Google female composers and you will find quite a few good ones who have been ignored by history.

2 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



gerald brennan → PretenderNX01 · 2 months ago

"By the way, I also suggest you Google female composers and you will find quite a few good ones who have been ignored by history."

Musicology is part of what I do. I am aware of all these women. There are many. But I am not talking about "good ones." I