From WIA To WAR To Zines
An Overview of Feminist Art Exhibition Practices in New York City
by Anne Swartz
The current exhibition *Women Choose Women Again* reprises the approach of the first New York City museum exhibition of feminist art, organized forty years ago by the Women in the Arts Foundation (WIA). The previous show now serves as a springboard for new discoveries about feminist art. Engaging the ideas of generation and collaboration, co-curators Mary Birmingham and Katherine Murdock invited 13 of the original 109 artists to choose an artist for inclusion in this iteration of the show; so, again, women choose women.

Feminist art is art made about the content of women's lives and experiences. Feminist exhibitions showcase that work. And in creating these exhibitions, organizers frequently adopt different strategies, often relying on group efforts and networks intended to bypass or undermine, rather than perpetuate, the existing structures of the male-dominated art world. This essay surveys the unique flashpoints in New York City that reveal the arc of feminist exhibition strategies and practices from alternative to mainstream. The charting of this history evidences the profound changes feminist artists have achieved for themselves and for future artists.

WIA was founded in 1971 by an uptown group of women artists, writers, and other art-world professionals with downtown connections; its mission was to “overcome discrimination against women artists.” The group incorporated in 1973 and created the original *Women Choose Women* exhibition, which several WIA members helped install, at the New York Cultural Center from January 12 through February 18, 1973. A modest catalogue accompanied the show and featured essays by the New York Cultural Center's director, Mario Amaya, and by

Notes appear at the end of the catalogue.
feminist critic Lucy R. Lippard. Laura Adler, Mario Amaya, Elizabeth C. Baker, Linda Nochlin, Pat Passlof, Ce Roser, and Sylvia Sleigh juried the show.

This retrospective glance to the historical exhibition shows the value of feminist collective activity in combating the exclusion, isolation, and absence women experienced forty years ago, while raising those issues in light of today’s art world. Whereas feminist artists of the 1970s combated patriarchy and focused on equality, feminist artists now focus on intersectionality, which makes feminism more inclusive.2

The prevailing presumption that there were no great women artists led feminism to radicalize women in the art world. The notion—unfortunately still very much in circulation today—is that if an artist is “good enough,” she or he will receive appropriate recognition. However—as art historian Linda Nochlin argued in her landmark 1971 article “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”—women did not have the same access to institutions, materials, and training and suffered greatly from cultural suppositions that discouraged women from pursuing a profession in art.3 “Genius” status was thus reserved for male artists who had opportunities unavailable to women. In particular, women lacked access to exhibition opportunities. Because showing one’s work leads to visibility and documentation, which is how art is circulated, known, collected, and acquired,4 this lack of access denied women artists the prospect of getting their work recognized.

However, as the culture as a whole shifted, the situation for women artists changed as they sought to strike out against the conventionally defined patriarchy and entrenched expectations for the next generation. Women slowly gained recognition as artists and curators, but the progress was minuscule, partially because feminist art differs in content from men’s art and therefore operates differently. This art challenged the existing framework, which sometimes expanded to include it but usually did not. The women who succeeded in the 1940s and 1950s in getting exhibitions often remained distraught and burdened by the slow or minimal exposure and the absence of patrons and press. Artists Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois, for example, became known as “the Two Louises”—a moniker stemming from the seemingly unrelenting determination with which each of these artists pursued venues to show their art, even as they were isolated or alienated from the very system they wanted to engage. It was the rare woman artist who was shown in or represented by midtown and uptown commercial galleries in New York City. The feminist artist groups of the 1970s, such as WIA, dedicated themselves to changing this, as they realized the importance of exhibiting and the need to create opportunities for themselves.5

WIA, alongside similar groups, emerged with the changing consciousness of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Women’s Movement emerged and feminism saturated the lives and experiences of many women artists. All-women exhibitions and galleries were something of a double-edged sword, however: As art historian Jenni Sorkin has described, they
repeated existing art-world structures that marginalized women, yet they also motivated and radicalized the artists. Further, exhibitions circulate work in a way that almost no other art-world mechanism does. WIA thus focused on what equity they could attain, while resisting the circumstances of the existing art world whenever possible.

WIA wanted to transform the art world and attitudes about women as professional artists. They picketed exhibitions in major museums including the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971 and 1977 and the Museum of Modern Art in 1972 and 1984. They also took an activist stance by creating a public face, countering the discrimination women experienced. Participation in protest activities, such as interviews and letter-writing campaigns, gave members opportunities to address the inequities women artists experienced. They specifically combated the unfairness they saw in the National Endowment for the Arts in its jury organization and lack of support and funding for women artists.

Options had to be created. The idea of an alternative exhibition space emanates from such events as the Salon des Refusés of 1863, created by Emperor Napoleon III, which included the three thousand works rejected that year by the Paris Salon, an antiquated establishment regarded as having become too narrow in its acceptance criteria. The Salon des Refusés is usually identified as the inception of Modernism and the avant-garde. However, it came into existence by official decree. Certainly, there were occasional focused exhibitions of women artists, such as in 1943 when Peggy Guggenheim held 31 Women at her Art of This Century Gallery—probably the first major exhibition of women artists in an avant-garde commercial gallery. But women artists seeking to exhibit their work, desiring inclusion, and hoping for recognition rarely had official mandates or attention from commercial galleries. Resisting a system without a clear place for their art, they turned to their experiences with organizing and protest. Some of them had had Communist parents and exposure to the Union and Labor Movements, while others had been involved in the Peace or Civil Rights Movements. Many were radicalized by the Women’s Liberation Movement, also known as Women’s Lib, the second wave of feminist activity after the suffragists.

The most consistent and persistent qualities of the history of feminist art from its inception in the early 1970s until the present are collaboration and networking, especially in creating alternative exhibition strategies and practices. Feminist artists created unconventional scenarios and utilized consciousness-raising (CR)—essentially group conversations where each person is given the opportunity to speak on a particular personal topic or issue—as a unique way to create a place and space for themselves in the art world, which previously did not have a place for such dialogue (or for them). As an invention of the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, CR was a way of connecting with others to explore or examine personal experiences. Women’s Lib had proffered the idea that “the personal is political,” and these personal networks and collaborative peer groups became an essential component of gaining
visibility and achieving parity. Effectively, these artists were going to take on the establishment through resistance and insurrection born from personal experiences.11

Change began in 1969 when a group of women found the Art Workers’ Coalition (AWC) uninterested in their concerns. In response, they formed Women Artists in Revolution (WAR). Juliette Gordon, one of the founding members of WAR, remarked on the grassroots nature of their formation and their consciousness-raising approach: “What was to become WAR began with small meetings in various lofts, where we found a strange new kinship awakening.”12 In February 1970, a small group of WAR-associated artists curated the first feminist exhibition, generically referred to as X-12 but also called X-12 Twelve Artists Women, X-12 Feminist Artists, and X to the Twelfth Power. The show was held at the alternative downtown space MUSEUM: A Project of Living Artists.13 The exhibition statement referred to the hope of eradicating divisions between art made by women and art made by men:

We do not deny our true femininity whatever it may be. We accept it, we will rejoice in it.
We affirm all the vital values HEALTH, BEAUTY, CREATIVITY, COURAGE, SENSITIVITY, STRENGTH, FEELING, ENERGY. Between the fully liberated man and woman there will be no difference but biology.14

In writing on the exhibition three years later, artist and participant Vernita Nemec reflected that she felt the show was more important than the art. She also remarked on how woman-only exhibitions seemed less pressing after a few years because of improved opportunities for women.15 The show was extensively reviewed with critics focusing on the level of high quality art which they had not anticipated in work created by women.16

Also in 1970, the Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee, which included some of the same artists and critics from WAR, formed and protested against the Whitney Annual, held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, which had only 8 women out of a total of 151 artists. Feeling that they needed to disrespect the institution that had disrespected them, they rallied strongly against the museum for three months, demanding change, pelting staff with egg bombs and sanitary napkins, and writing slogans on bathroom mirrors in lipstick. Their efforts did have a small impact: The 1970 Whitney Sculpture Annual included a higher number of women artists—20 out of the total 100 artists. Additionally, African-American artist Faith Ringgold, a member of the Committee, successfully demanded the inclusion of artists of color in that exhibition, and works by African-American artists Betye Saar and Barbara Chase-Riboud were shown.17 The Committee also sought free admission to museums for artists, which they did achieve at some institutions, such as the Whitney.

One mainstay of this period was the development of the feminist art cooperative gallery, an idea in active existence in New York City since mid-century.18 Having learned firsthand about the limited opportunities for women in the existing gallery system through often heartbreaking and demeaning experiences, women established these feminist art cooperatives with the
express purpose of showing women’s art. Several spaces developed in short order in major urban centers, including Womanspace in Los Angeles (1971), A.I.R. (Artists in Residence, Inc.) Gallery in New York City (1972), Artemesia Gallery in Chicago (1973), Soho 20 in New York City (1973), ARC Gallery and Educational Foundation in Chicago (1973), FOCUS in Philadelphia (1973), Muse Gallery and Foundation for the Visual Arts in Philadelphia (1977), and WARM (Women’s Art Registry of Minneapolis) (1976). To highlight one example, A.I.R. Gallery, founded by a group of women artists, had in its mission statement: “A.I.R.’s goal is to provide a professional and permanent exhibition space for women artists.” The group had an actual gallery space in SoHo, New York’s gallery district, and their focus was not on a communal, or shared, or even similar aesthetic; nor was it on creating a community for themselves. Instead, A.I.R. members were interested in creating opportunities to exhibit their
art, and they viewed their project as a feminist intervention in the marketplace. Curator Julie Lohnes underscored this point with a bell hooks quotation in a 2012 statement for a show she had organized at A.I.R.: “a space for feminist intervention without surrendering our primary concern, which is a devotion to making art.”

Co-op galleries were only one aspect of the communal activities of the period. The Women’s Caucus for Art, founded in 1972, became a massive organization focusing on creating national opportunities for women visual-arts professionals, especially artists. Newsletters, magazines, and lecture series also became ways for women artists to spread their messages; these included the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series (1971) founded by Joan Snyder at Rutgers University, Women Artists Newsletter (1975) started by Judy Seigel and Cynthia Navaretta, Chrysalis (1977) founded by Shelia Levrant de Bretteville and Arlene Raven, Heresies (1975) founded by the Heresies Collective, followed by WARM Journal (1980) by the Women’s Art Registry of Minnesota, and Woman’s Art Journal (1980) created by Elsa Honig Fine—among many, many other similar projects and outlets.

There were two other successful organizations that became significant in circulating feminist art, but neither was intended to focus exclusively on work by women artists. They are Franklin Martha Wilson with Karen Finley, who was performing “A Woman’s Life Isn’t Worth Much” May-June 1990, at Franklin Furnace, New York, NY.
Furnace and the New Museum, which were started by feminists Martha Wilson and Marcia Tucker, respectively. Philadelphia artist Martha Wilson opened Franklin Furnace in 1976 as part of a larger collection of art-related spaces on Franklin Street in New York City. Initially the organization was conceived as a kind of bookstore, an outlet for what are now known as artist’s books. The mission was to “present, preserve, interpret, proselytize, and advocate on behalf of avant-garde art, especially forms that may be vulnerable due to institutional neglect, their ephemeral nature, or politically unpopular content.” Wilson focused on time-based art, especially live art, which began organically at her space when artist Martine Aballea prepared an installation two months after the space opened and she situated herself reading at the center. Thus, Franklin Furnace became a key institutional support for performance art. Wilson collaborated with artists in running Franklin Furnace, especially Jacki Apple as curator and Barbara Quinn, who managed development. She regards the central role artists have played in its administration as a significant component in Franklin Furnace’s willingness to embrace pioneering and bold art in its programming.

Wilson’s commitment to artists making live art essentially remains unsurpassed; she focused her attention on art marginalized by uptown institutions she regarded as largely ignoring ephemeral art. She embraced artists seeking such freedoms—even radically engaged artists such as Annie Sprinkle, a former prostitute and stripper transitioning to performance artist, and Sprinkle’s collective Deep Inside Porn Stars—in the 1984 exhibition Carnival Knowledge, which resulted in the cancellation of federal grants and the loss of corporate sponsorship to Franklin Furnace. They subsequently created the Franklin Furnace Fund for Performance Art in 1985 to support alternative and experimental work. Further, Karen Finley’s 1990 installation A Woman’s Life Isn’t Worth Much, which included drawings and text about censorship, resulted in Finley’s being named one of the “NEA 4”—a group of artists (also including Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes) whose grants were withdrawn by the National Endowment for the Arts for explicit controversial content related to anger, subjectivity, feminism, the body, and sexuality. Wilson points out that the religious right’s attack on the progressive left centered on the use of the image of the woman’s body, followed by work with homosexuality as its subject. Although not a female separatist space, Franklin Furnace, under Wilson’s aegis, supported and cultivated work that benefited from her feminist stance and commitment to free expression.

As a curator at the Whitney, Marcia Tucker had come under fire by WAR during their protest activities there. How could a feminist curator not support their efforts? Tucker was distraught by the reaction from WAR, as she regarded herself as sympathetic to the feminist art cause and because she’d organized solo shows of Ree Morton, Gladys Nilsson, Nancy Graves, Jane Kaufman, Lee Krasner, and Joan Mitchell, among others, and had shown Betye Saar’s work.
After extremely negative critical reviews of the survey exhibition of artist Richard Tuttle’s work in 1976, Whitney Director Tom Armstrong seized the opportunity to oust Tucker as Curator of Contemporary Art. He told her the museum’s focus was turning to the permanent collection rather than contemporary art, thus making her position theoretically obsolete. This experience shifted Tucker into high gear and truly radical approaches followed. In 1977 she founded the New Museum, which was dedicated to supporting contemporary art (made within the last ten years). Tucker wanted the New Museum to function more as a think tank for conversation and participation than as a traditional arts institution, explaining it as a place that would:

...redistribute authority and privilege in the museum context; to share power and decision making; to create alternative management structures that stressed collaboration, openness, mutual respect, exchange, and dialogue. In the process, I had to learn to accept contradictions, inconsistencies, and mistakes.

Though the New Museum didn’t become a hub of feminist exhibition activity during Tucker’s tenure (she left the museum in 1999), there was an emphasis on artists investigating urgent social issues, including sexuality and gender. And the redistribution and reconfiguration of power and privilege that Tucker promoted had its roots in feminist organizing and activism, or what critic Juli Carson terms “a feminist space.” During Tucker’s time at the museum, solo shows of women’s work included Joan Jonas (1984), Linda Montano (1984), Ana Mendieta (1988), Nancy Spero (1989), and Mary Kelly (1990). Group shows, including Art and Ideology (1984), Difference: On Representation and Sexuality (1984), and Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object (1986), explored gender and sexuality-related issues. Tucker’s complicated exhibition Bad Girls (1994) was her way of inserting humor into the dialogue, a technique used much more effectively by the Guerrilla Girls.

The Guerrilla Girls successfully ignited feminist art in inventive ways, employing anonymity, absurdity, and humor at a moment when feminism was being disavowed by artists and women in the broader culture. The group was born out of a desire to jumpstart feminism in the art world. In the mid 1980s and incensed by the dearth of women artists in a large survey exhibition of contemporary art at the Museum of Modern Art, two of the women who would help form the Guerrilla Girls—they took the pseudonyms Frida Kahlo and Kathe Kollwitz—participated in a protest at the museum. However, they were discontented with the minimal impact their participation had at that moment. Frustrated with the discrimination and supposed liberal stance and meritocracy of the art world, these two women and other women visual-arts professionals decided to “do something to change the system” and named themselves “the conscience of the art world.” They decided to wear masks and use pseudonyms (influential women artists from history) to focus attention on the issues, not the individuals involved. Members of the Guerrilla Girls who had been active in the feminist art movement in the 1970s had seen personality cults develop around some participants, which
were contrary to the group’s collectivist ideology. Frida Kahlo described the group’s goals: We didn’t want the Guerrilla Girls to become a discussion group. We wanted to do something that would change the system. To do that we had to transform the way others thought about the art world. We wanted people to realize that there was conscious and unconscious discrimination against women and artists of color. We knew we had to do it in a new and different way. We took a structural look at the art world, and said something is really wrong here. But instead of pointing our fingers and saying “This is bad,” we designed a way to let the viewer come to that conclusion after seeing our work.

They succeeded in promoting conversation about these issues. Among the main strategies of the Guerrilla Girls was late-night plastering of the streets of SoHo with posters that called attention to the almost universal exclusion of women and artists of color in art institutions and galleries. (The first of these posters, known as These Artists and These Galleries, were made in 1985.) At gallery openings over the following days, the group would listen in on conversations about their work.

Many of the group’s posters combined provocative, irrefutable facts with a humorous tone, and even if the information was upsetting, it was accurate and began a conversation about

The Guerilla Girls with images of their pseudonyms.
the shocking level of corruption. As Kahlo noted: “It was hard [for people] to give up the idealistic, optimistic, and altruistic art world.” The Guerrilla Girls focused on all marginalized groups, striving to join them and understand their common situation. They refuted the claim that women and artists of color were not engaged in the dialogue of art in a qualitative way and that the ways artists were judged were not masculinist. They were particularly discouraged by the way art was treated as “a commodity rather than as a social voice.” Their efforts were successful in drawing attention to discrimination in the art world and effecting some change.

In the early 1990s, a new framework for feminism emerged as the Third Wave, where younger feminist artists focused on broader issues relating to gender, sexuality, and economics. Initially separate from the art world, this burgeoning activist feminism defined itself much more broadly and became increasingly more inclusive. In the world of music, the punk Riot grrrl Movement came into existence, and the ideas and interests of the younger women involved in this movement spread via the DIY zine, a low-budget variation on a glossy magazine that instead of circulating general, broad ideas focused on the personal and individual message. These ephemeral publications were often shared by friends, who faxed or hand-distributed photocopies in the early days of the movement and later moved to the Internet for electronic circulation and distribution. Zines have an aesthetic all their own, challenging any notion of the visual organization (and sometimes even form) of the printed book, an extension of their radical content. An interesting extension of girls’ bedroom culture, these zines were frequently the work of younger women producing them at home alone or in small collectives. Rapidly, these small groups of like-minded artists began to seek opportunities to show their work beyond the self-produced brochure or flyer.

In particular, in the 1990s and 2000s, lesbians became more prominent in protesting their absence from the art world and began organizing, along with other groups bound by identity, such as South Asian Women’s Creative Collective (SAWCC). The subculture of lesbian art within the art world at large and feminist art in particular became more prominent and accepted because of the insistence of these groups in their activities. The widespread embrace of identity politics in art of the 1990s and 2000s, partially accounts for this situation. These groups successfully organized, networked, and circulated their work and ideas more broadly than previous ones. Like feminist art groups in the past, they received attention from the popular art press and curated their own exhibitions and events. And they had the advantage of the experiences of those earlier groups. As well, many of these artists were young, had incredible energy, and produced a great deal of work. Unlike the previous groups, however, they were able to circulate their ideas and art much more widely in zines and on the Internet through artists’ respective websites (and, in some cases, their gallery websites). Further, these artists benefited from the rise of queer theory as an academic discipline and the attentions of both queer and feminist (as well as queer-feminist) art historians. And some of them have achieved art world centrality: gallery representation, visiting and tenured academic positions.
Lesbians to the Rescue; then Listen Translate Translate Record—before moving on to phrases unrelated to the letters. The group focused on sustainable change, queer pleasure, and critical feminist productivity. One of the reasons for LTTR’s success results from what art historian Virginia Solomon refers to as an engagement of the social alongside the artistic. She says: “While other participatory practices have tried to demonstrate that the art object is always embedded in a world defined by social relations, LTTR makes already existing social practices the stuff of art.”41 Whereas earlier homosexual artistic groups focused on the power of collective organizing (such as the Heresies group) or the engagement of participatory performance (Solomon discusses General Idea in this context), LTTR focused its attentions outward.
Ridykeulous, founded in 2005 by artists A.L. Steiner and Nicole Eisenman, similarly used its social network and events as part of its artistic activities, as well as produced a zine and exhibitions. They resisted the attribution of their art to the status of “alternative” through demanding a place in mainstream dialogues. As art historian Rachel Wetzler comments: “In adopting the role of curators and organizing exhibitions, Steiner and Eisenman forcefully insert themselves and their collaborators into the spaces, both literally and figuratively, of the art establishment.” They create exhibitions of art by large amorphous groups (not all of whom identify as female or queer) as a means of disturbing the existing conditions of the art world. Also, both Steiner and Eisenman belong to other groups and pursue solo careers, giving them several outlets for circulating their work.

In the 2000s, major retrospective examinations of 1970s feminism revealed that the formation of a feminist canon had occurred. The 2002 show Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art in the 1970s was curated by Catherine Morris and Ingrid Schaffner at White Columns, an alternative space founded in the 1970s by artists. Later the same year, Catherine Morris co-curated with Lauren Ross Regarding Gloria, a group exhibition of feminist artists that showed the impact of 1970s feminism. Also in 2002, the useful exhibitions Personal & Political: The Women's Art Movement, curated by Simon Taylor and Natalie Ng at Guild Hall in East Hampton, New York, and Goddess at Galerie Lelong in New York City, were both on view. Even the graffiti feminist groups of the 1970s have received attention. (Graffiti artists usually work alone but travel in groups, which for women was and is especially important due to the prevalence of crime.) From 2005 to 2011, a transition occurred where many major museums held important exhibitions of feminist art.

However, although the generation that came of age in the 1970s were now getting attention, some artists took issue with these shows. These artists often wanted different treatment of their work or to be exhibited alongside artists whose work was not included. Further, they didn’t necessarily agree with the curatorial theses of the exhibitions heralding their art. This dissension was the case with the 2007 WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, as one example. This show was a much-heralded and lauded exhibition in the feminist art community. However, Cornelia Butler used the current zeitgeist by examining international feminist art in that exhibition. She remarked in the catalogue: “My ambition for WACK! is to make the case that feminism’s impact on art of the 1970s constitutes the most influential international ‘movement’ of any during the postwar period…” Even as artists celebrated that show, they also expressed concern about the exclusion of many, many feminist artists active in the United States during the 1970s. Because the exhibition wasn’t focused entirely on American feminist art, only a select number were included.

I was involved in organizing AGENTS OF CHANGE: Women, Art, and Intellect, an exhibition at Ceres Gallery, an alternative space in New York City, in 2007. I mention it as an example of
how much feminist art exhibitions have evolved since WIA’s show in 1973 when an esteemed jury selected the work, but left much to the organizing artists. It had its limitations—not held at a museum, had a small publication available only at the exhibition, and was a single show rather than a series.\(^47\) However, for AGENTS OF CHANGE, we had distinguished art professionals involved in all phases; in particular, gallery member and coordinator Phyllis Rosser\(^48\) and curator Leslie King-Hammond, with installation support from Lowery Stokes-Sims. The major source of funding came from the Toby Fund, a foundation created and run by the prominent philanthropist Toby Devan Lewis. The nineteen artists included were multi-ethnic and multi-generational, and all but one (the emerging Korean artist Sungmi Lee) held or held academic positions at top institutions or enjoy or have enjoyed successful independent careers as visual-arts professionals. The gallery itself is a product of the New York Feminist Art Institute (NYFAI), one of the collective groups that developed in the 1970s under the aegis of artist Nancy Azara, and has a professional staff and a location in the Chelsea gallery district (a center of the art world in the 2000s). The exhibition originated from the activities of The Feminist Art Project, a collaborative initiative housed at Rutgers University and founded in 2005 by Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin. It received a flattering review in The New York Times, where art critic Holland Cotter noted that “art conceived from a feminist perspective has always tried to trip up the machinery of the academic art industry and raise a collective voice, in myriad ways only beginning to be defined.”\(^49\) Artist Judy Chicago commented about the sophistication of the individuals forming the Feminist Art Project, remarking, “This group is hardly grassroots.”\(^50\) Times have changed in some ways. But more needs to be done.

Since WIA began and organized Women Choose Women, feminist art has received increasing attention in an art world still often antagonistic to women artists and artists of color. More younger women artists are showing in spaces, sometimes independent and alternative, occasionally mainstream and supported. The need to work outside the system remains for many women artists, but the situation is slowly changing as I have charted here. Women artists have significantly more access than they once did—thanks, in large part, to the efforts and vision of their predecessors in the 1970s.

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Choices and Connections


3 One important result of the feminist art movement has been a gradual increase in the number of female faculty members in colleges and art schools. Lippard noted in 1973 that although the majority of undergraduate art students were female, only 2% of their teachers were female. [Ibid., 6.] In contrast, nearly all of the artists in Women Choose Women Again have taught or currently teach. Joan Snyder was an art student at Rutgers University in the 1960s, when there were no women artists on the faculty. Recognizing the need for women artists as role models, Snyder initiated The Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series (DWAS) at the Mabel Smith Douglass Library at Rutgers University in 1971—the oldest continuously running exhibition space in the United States “dedicated to making visible the work of emerging and established contemporary women artists.”

4 This painting was inspired by “Proserpina,” the last song written by acclaimed folk singer Kate McGarrigle, who died in 2010. McGarrigle’s daughter, Martha Wainwright, recorded a beautiful and haunting version of the song in 2012. The painting incorporates words appropriated from the song lyrics. [Joan Snyder in conversation with the author, November 6, 2013.]

5 The decision to install Perez’s Rope between works by Kozloff and Ringgold in this exhibition was based on the shared aesthetics of the pieces, but hopefully this juxtaposition will highlight an important historical connection. One outcome of the women’s art movement has been the gradual acceptance and even mainstreaming of materials and mediums previously overlooked as “craft” or dismissed as “feminine” or “decorative,” including quilts, ceramics, and needlework. Artists such as Ringgold and Kozloff helped break down some of the hierarchies previously ingrained in Western art, broadening the subsequent choices for male and female artists.

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I am grateful for Mary Birmingham’s kind support of this project, as well as for her encouragement to go further in examining recent activities. In addition, Joyce Kozloff gave me a useful overview of the history of women artists’ protests and actions and offered suggestions for clarification, including the origin of consciousness-raising in mid-century China. I am also indebted to Frida Kahlo and other members of the Guerrilla Girls, who spoke with me on behalf of that group; Martha Wilson, who discussed her history and the evolution of Franklin Furnace; Jennie Klein for her suggestions, and Diane Banks for her assistance.

1 Mainstream is within a context here; it refers to the progressive left of the avant-garde art world.

2 The concept of intersectionality differs from the patriarchy. Its focus is on exposing discrimination and privilege as products of the current society and culture. It views these systems as interdependent, interconnected, and oppressive. Examples of these complications include sexism, racism, ableism, classism, and homophobia. This term was first advanced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. [cf. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” University of Chicago Legal Forum (1989); 139–167.]


4 Documentation here also refers to research as a form of authorization.

5 Interview with Joyce Kozloff, November 26, 2013.


7 Carol Duncan, “When Greatness is a Box of Wheaties,” Artforum vol. 14 (October 1975), 64.

8 This exhibition showed: Djuana Barnes, Xenia Cage, Leonardo Carrington, Leonor Fini, Susie Frelinghuysen, Elsa von Freudtag-Loringhoven, Meraud Guevara, Anne Harvey, Valentine Hugo, Buffie Johnson, Frida Kahlo, Jacqueline Lamba, Eyre de Lanux, Gypsy Rose Lee, Aline Myer Lieberman, Hazel McKinley, Milena, Louise Navelson, Merset

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9 Judy Chicago had activist Marxist parents, as one example. [cf. Gail Levin, Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist
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10 The term consciousness-raising was the brainchild of feminist activist Kathie Sarachild in 1967. A member of New

11 Interestingly enough, anarchist theory provides much of the framework for creation and formation of a new society; at this time it is unknown whether any of the artists operating then had much knowledge of this subject. The later writings of anarchist theorists such as Howard Ehrlich and Jeffrey Shantz read like a history of the feminist art movement. [cf. Howard Ehrlich, “Reinventing Anarchy, Again,” AK Press, rev. sub edition (July 1, 2001): 242–3, and Jeffrey Shantz, “Rebuilding Infrastructures of Resistance,” Journal of the Research Group on Socialism and Democracy, vol. 23, no. 2 (July 2009): 83.]

12 Artists exhibited there include: Lois di Cosola, Iris Crump, Mary Ann Gillies, Helene Gross, Dorlois Holmes, Inverna, Arline Lederman, Carolyn Mazzello, Vernita Nencic, Doris O’Kane, Silvianna, and Alida Walsh.

13 Artist-organized spaces were a key component of early Modernist activity, seen in such groups as the Suprematists and Futurists, among many others. In New York City, the 1950s began an active period of creating such spaces and places. [cf. Joellen Bard, Ruth Fortel, and Helen Thomas, Tenth Street Days: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 175–178.


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20 Telephone interview with Dena Muller, past director of A.I.R. Gallery, December 16, 2013.
22 Telephone interview with Martha Wilson, December 26, 2013.
23 Telephone interview with Wilson.
26 Interview with Wilson.
28 A Short Life of Trouble, 93.
29 A Short Life of Trouble, 100.
30 A Short Life of Trouble, 125.
32 Telephone interview with Frida Kahlo, December 6, 2013.
33 Interview with Guerrilla Girl, December 2013.
34 Interview with Frida Kahlo.
35 Frida Kahlo commented: “There were other groups like Sister Serpent in Chicago and Grand Fury in New York City that used provocation. We were the feminist group that got the most attention for being outrageous.” (E-mail from Frida Kahlo, December 28, 2013.) They also adopted inherently different strategies; one Guerrilla Girl told me she was active in the group because they offered child-care whereas other feminist art groups did not. (Interview with Guerrilla Girl, December 2013.)
36 Women’s Action Coalition (WAC) was another art world–related organization involved in protests and actions against the discrimination of women artists. They formed in 1992 and rapidly grew into a massive international network.
37 Kathleen Hanna describing her work on zines in The Punk Singer: A Film About Kathleen Hanna, directed by Sini Anderson (80 minute documentary), 2013.
39 They are calling their forthcoming journal issue READYKEULOUS.
There were other group exhibitions of feminist art in New York City, Los Angeles, and elsewhere during the 1990s and 2000s. I am not presuming to be comprehensive here and am focusing on exhibitions that showcased the resulting canon, as presented by those earlier shows upon which the more recent ones are dependent. As art historian Nizan Shaked noted about WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution that Cornelia Butler, the curator, relied on many of those earlier shows in defining her approach: “Previous exhibitions by M. Catherine de Zegher, Nina Feldshin, Susan Stoops, Marcia Tucker, Lynn Zelevansky, and Amelia Jones, as well as the book The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, are cited by Butler as her major influences.” [cf. Nizan Shaked, “F is for Finally,” WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, vol. 9, no. 4 (Summer 2007), (http://x-traonline.org/article/f-is-for-finally/), accessed January 2, 2014.]


This point became a topic of discussion at the “Modern Art in Los Angeles: Feminist Art in Southern California” panel discussion at the Getty Center on March 27, 2007. Maren Hassinger and Rachel Rosenthal focused on that conversation during the panel. Hassinger subsequently chaired “Salon des Refusés” or who was/is ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the recent feminist exhibitions,” a session at my invitation on this subject for TFAP@CAA 2009 (The Feminist Art Project Day of Panels at College Art Association’s Annual Conference February 28, 2009). Also, Joyce Kosloff and Joan Snyder have separately noted, in several lectures and talks, the numerous New York City feminist artists they’ve seen overlooked in many of these exhibitions. [cf. Shaked, “F is for Finally.”] Carol Duncan had made this point in 1975 about the older generation of artists who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s and their similar reticence about how their work was framed in relation to some feminist critiques. (Duncan specifically discusses critic Cindy Nemser in this piece.) (cf. Duncan, 62.)


Stefany Benson, the gallery director, was also an essential participant who joined the gallery as we planned the show.
