

Exhibition Reviews:

***Global Feminisms*, Curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, March 2007 – July 2007**

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'We're Finally Infiltrating'

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This year's slate of major shows, books, and panels on feminist art reflects the rise of powerful female curators, art historians, and—notably—patrons, who are working to change art institutions from the inside
by Phoebe Hoban

Call this the year of institutional consciousness-raising: three major art centers, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Brooklyn Museum, have scheduled big events devoted to feminism's impact on art history—past, present, and future. And, not surprisingly, the main initiators of these events are women.

The year kicked off with "The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts," a two-day symposium at MoMA on January 26 and 27. Sponsored by the Modern Women's Fund, founded at the museum by philanthropist Sarah Peter, the symposium was dedicated to feminist activism in the 1960s and '70s, the backlash and revisionism of the '80s and '90s, and where feminism stands in practice and scholarship. The speakers' list included Lucy Lippard and Linda Nochlin and a panel of international art historians, artists, critics, and curators—as well as two founding members of the Guerrilla Girls (known by their aliases Frida Kahlo and Kathe Kollwitz). A book on female artists in MoMA's permanent collection will be published in 2009.

At L.A.'s Museum of Contemporary Art, "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution," an international retrospective of 1970s feminist art curated by Cornelia H. Butler, will run from March 4 to July 16, before traveling to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., in September and to New York's P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in February of next year. The show features work by more than 120 artists, including Chantal Akerman, Judy Chicago, Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, Lorraine O'Grady, Adrian Piper, Yvonne Rainer, Cindy Sherman, Nancy Spero, and Hannah Wilke. And on March 22, at the Brooklyn Museum, the ribbon will be cut on the world's first permanent museum space devoted to feminist art: the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, which will at last provide a home for Judy Chicago's iconic work *The Dinner Party* (1974–79). The center, whose curator is Maura Reilly, is the inaugural venue for the touring show "Global Feminisms," curated by Reilly and Nochlin and featuring work by artists from some 50 countries.

Along with this convergence of events is an initiative called "The Feminist Art Project" (feministartproject.rutgers.edu), which is being coordinated by Rutgers University and other centers and will commemorate anniversaries of the 1970s feminist art movement.

Nor should anyone overlook a significant blip on the art-world radar screen. Several major museum retrospectives of woman artists have recently been on view or are in the works in New York alone, including Elizabeth Murray at MoMA (last year); Kiki Smith (through February 11) and Lorna Simpson (March 1 through May 6) at the Whitney Museum of American Art; and Eva Hesse (last summer) and Louise Nevelson (May 5 through September 16) at the Jewish Museum.

Unfortunately, this remains an anomaly. As Reilly points out in her catalogue essay, in 2005 the Guerrilla Girls updated their famous 1989 poster asking "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?" with the startling statistic that less than 3 percent of the Met's modern-art holdings were by women—down from 5 percent 16 years earlier. And in a September 2006 piece in the *Village Voice*, "Where the Girls Aren't," Jerry Saltz looks at the fall schedules for 125 top New York galleries and reports, "Of 297 one-person shows between now and December 31, just 23 percent are solos by women" (up from the previous fall's 19 percent).

Further, according to Saltz, at MoMA, only 5 percent of nearly 400 objects in the galleries dedicated to the permanent collection of work from 1879 to 1969 are by women. (Saltz's article discusses only the works in the painting and sculpture collection—just one of seven curatorial departments at MoMA—and stops at the year 1970.)

There is also the problem that many of those emerging female artists who do get representation in galleries and museums take exception to the term "feminist." "The media love to talk about how nobody wants to be identified with being a feminist," says Guerrilla Girl Kollwitz. "We have been working all these years to rehabilitate the word, because women and men who believe in the tenets of feminism don't want to be associated with a term that has been demonized."



Lisa Reihana's photograph *Mahuika*, 2001, appears in "Global Feminisms," a touring exhibition curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin featuring work by woman artists born after 1960.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

Judy Chicago hopes that the upcoming shows will permanently alter that perception. "The congruence of all these exhibitions will demonstrate that what happened in America, England, and the Western countries was a historic change," she says.

"The '70s feminist movement is not over," Chicago emphasizes. "It has spread worldwide. The feminist work that has been produced globally—which through these shows will come face-to-face with the New York art world—is the most significant art movement of the latter 20th century."

For Chicago, the permanent installation of *The Dinner Party* is a saga come full circle. And in some ways it is also a paradigm for the reconsideration of the importance of feminist art itself. Back in 1979, toward the end of the feminist movement's heyday, when the work was first unveiled at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, it was an overnight sensation. "The initial response was huge," says Chicago. But not for long; criticism of the piece, with its plates and runners representing 1,038 female innovators (39 of whom have their own "vulval" plates), coincided with a backlash against feminism that continued through the 1980s and '90s. "There was a slow and negative kind of buildup in the art world of which I was completely oblivious," says Chicago (whose original plan had been to create a porcelain room to permanently house the epic work). SFMOMA's tour of the work fell by the wayside. "*The Dinner Party* went into storage, and I went into shock," she says.

Thanks to a number of grassroots groups, the international tour was rescheduled, and the piece eventually traveled to 14 venues in six countries. But it was in and out of storage until the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation acquired it and donated it in 2002 to the Brooklyn Museum, which put it on view. Now *The Dinner Party* will get the permanent home Chicago always envisioned for it, and, as she points out, "one of the big changes is that finally a woman has come forward to provide patronage for another woman's work—at a level from which women had formerly been restricted." She adds, "So much work by women has been erased, because we have not had comparable patronage. Feminism and feminist art is a long, historic struggle, and we are at another stage in the struggle."

The generation of women who were radicalized in the 1970s are now in their 40s and 50s, and many of them, like Reilly, have ascended to positions of power at major cultural institutions, and are now reexamining their holdings and the ways in which they are represented to the public.

"The confluence of these shows is not serendipity," says Reilly. "That it's all happening at the same time is the result of a lot of hard work among myself and my female and really powerful male feminists. I think we're finally infiltrating, to use a military term, the major institutions. The fact that something is happening at MoMA is a major coup. And the Sackler is the first exhibition space of its kind in the world dedicated to feminism. That in and of itself is worthy of major attention."

The Sackler Center's inaugural show, "Global Feminisms," is, in a sense, a 30-year update of Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris's historic exhibition "Women Artists: 1550–1950," which revealed how male-centric the canon of art history is, without questioning its Western centrism. The new show takes feminism to what Reilly calls its new frontier—international expansion. "Feminism has increasingly become a postcolonial movement that is very interested in notions of diversity and multiculturalism," she says. "'Global Feminisms' is meant to embody those changes within feminism itself, which have gone global."

The exhibition also represents a generational shift: all of the artists in it were born after 1960. "We are looking at a young generation of artists who are exploring feminism from a kind of third-wave perspective, and who are part of that generation that takes feminism for granted," says Reilly. "So this is precisely the type of audience that could really make a change."

In addition to its galleries for changing exhibitions, the center has a permanent biographical gallery devoted to the women represented in *The Dinner Party*. (That artwork itself was appraised at \$2 million, but neither Sackler nor the museum would provide further budget details.)

Says Sackler, "The center is a place that opens the door to dialogues about feminist art values and how we move as a society in the future toward equity. It provides a space for feminist art to take its place in the stream of art history. Feminist art is the mother of a lot of contemporary art. Without *The Dinner Party* and the feminist-art movement, many artists—both men and women—would not have branched out in the way that they did. The whole vocabulary expanded. Now we can put it in its historical place. I think we're on a wave—and I hope it's a roll."

"The issue of timing is really interesting," says Butler, who curated "WACK!" at MOCA. "I think part of this is a reaction to the conservative tide in this country's history during the time these shows were planned." Butler (who is now Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings at MoMA) says she had two major goals for the show: "I wanted to reveal the internationalism and the parallel practices of feminism, and I wanted to make a case that feminism was the most influential international impulse of postwar art. So much of the work we are now interested in is rooted in it, including the work of artists like Matthew Barney. There's always sort of a 20-year lag between the time something happens and the time it is historicized, and coming out of the '90s as we did, there was so much work that caused us all to look back. The radicality and freshness of the work is going to be absolutely evident, because the issues are still there. And to have the Sackler Center opening and *The Dinner Party* parked on the East Coast in everybody's face is really great."

Butler has organized "WACK!" around major themes, including "Family Stories," "Knowledge as Power," "Silence and Noise," "Social Intervention," "Making Art History," "Speaking in Public," "Body as Medium," and "Pattern and Assemblage," in an effort to contextualize feminist artists as diverse as Yoko Ono and Audrey Flack.

Meanwhile, at MoMA, what began as a book proposal turned into a symposium. After Peter created the Modern Women's Fund in 2004, the museum organized a meeting of all its female curators and asked them to recommend the fund's first project. The answer was a book documenting women in the

museum's permanent collection. (The only other major museum that has compiled a book of work by its woman artists is the Tate in London.) The first step was to create a bank of images, starting with the print collection.

"It's a tremendously exciting project to work on," says Deborah Wye, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Chief Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books at MoMA and one of the curators responsible for the book. In order to create the image bank, each curatorial department went through its holdings and digitized images of women's art starting in the 19th century. Now the curators are in the process of selecting the images for the volume.

"I'm hoping this will create a sort of bull's-eye for other people to think about and talk about, and for people to come forward and make donations," says Peter. "I know Elizabeth Sackler, and perhaps people in my generation now have the skills to move into leadership. I'm old enough to have seen this happen before—the steam builds up and then dissipates—but I hope this is another surge of moving forward. The whole focus is that throughout the world, women don't get the deal we want and the deal we deserve. Part of changing this is stepping up to the plate. I'm a wealthy woman, and if I don't stand up and set the agenda, who is going to? It's both my responsibility and my delight."

Guerrilla Girls Kahlo and Kollwitz think it's about time. "There's a lot of pressure from women inside the big art institutions to set them straight, and I think that's where a lot of this comes from," says Kahlo. "There are forces inside the museum, ranging from the staff to the benefactors, who are telling the museum that they really need to address these issues. It's a no-brainer. It's significant because it means that enlightened people inside those museums and enlightened people who give to them are trying to affect policy."

Adds Kollwitz, "There is a real acknowledgment among artists, academics, and students that feminism changed art. But it has taken a long time for curators at these institutions to get there. The question is, what is the feminist future? Where do we go from here?"

Phoebe Hoban is a New York-based journalist who covers culture for a variety of publications. She is author of Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art (Penguin, 1999).

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THE NEW YORKER

THE ART WORLD

WOMEN'S WORK

Feminist art at the Brooklyn Museum.

by Peter Schjeldahl

APRIL 9, 2007





Frames from Boryana Rossa's video "Celebrating the Next Twinkling" (1999).

“Global Feminisms” is a big, high-minded, intermittently enjoyable show of about a hundred mostly young and lesser-known female artists from about fifty countries. It inaugurates the Brooklyn Museum’s Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, in a suite of galleries anchored by the permanent installation of Judy Chicago’s much travelled “Dinner Party” (1974-79). The show includes some painting and sculpture, but photography and video dominate. Considering the varied national backgrounds of the participants, the ensemble looks and feels remarkably homogeneous. The reason is only partly thematic. What is feminism today? A lot of things, the show’s title gingerly asserts. What is feminist art? The cocurators—the Sackler Center’s curator Maura Reilly and the distinguished art historian Linda Nochlin (who helped organize a landmark exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, “Women Artists: 1550-1950,” in 1976)—are chary of definitions. They discount the “essentialist” view, of women as a unitary and eternal species, which inspired Judy Chicago’s vast, schmaltzy table with vagina-patterned place settings for mythical and historical heroines. Nor do they endorse the opposing opinion, advanced in a good deal of theory-driven art since the nineteen-seventies, that femininity is a socially tailored delusion. “Openness, multiculturalism, and variety are the names of the game,” they write in their preface to the show’s catalogue. They claim, for the art on display, only a shared “sense of *work as critique*, involving gender issues not necessarily overt but underlying.” Feminist art is in the eye of the feminist, apparently. How to look at it in that way—winking out “gender issues” with a rooting interest in their resolution—and simultaneously as art, an object of experience in and of itself, is not addressed. This kind of problem is not new.

What really unifies “Global Feminisms,” for a viewer, is the redolence of an almighty cultural agency that overleaps borders, blurs personalities, and purées ideas: the art school. Most of the artists embrace conceptualist strategies that have reigned as an academic lingua franca for three decades. Be they American, Egyptian, or Indonesian, the artists tend to hail from interchangeable sites of a pedagogical archipelago. They have studied some of the same forebears and have read (or been lectured to by people who have read) some of the same critical texts. Their works suggest mastery in the signal product of recent art education, which is, rather than art, the artist’s statement. The impression given, of standard forms embodying tendentious sentiments, is Victorian: an international (or “transnational,” the curators’ favored term) regime of busy stasis. There is no disgrace in this. The show is an exercise in networking on behalf of artists who may or, in some countries, dramatically do face career disadvantages, or worse, because they are women. Accordingly, the prevailing institutional network is projected as a state of nature. The price paid is a jejune savor in presumptively radical gestures

that recall past radical gestures and anticipate radical gestures to come, clickety-clack.

The titles of the show's four sections—"Life Cycles," "Identities," "Politics," and "Emotions"—broadcast what you're in for: respectively, bared bodies, jiggered clichés, protested abuses, and, well, emotions, variously angry and exuberant. The best artists help us forget where we are, even as they may snugly fit a category. My personal favorite is the Spanish performance artist Pilar Albarracín, who has two simple videos in "Identities." In one, she is a costumed flamenco singer, seated with a young male guitarist. They expertly render an impassioned plaint, at the end of which Albarracín stabs herself in the chest, releasing a gush of stage blood, and gets up and walks away. In the other, she is an elegant, taciturn woman in a canary-yellow coat and dark glasses, followed through the populous streets of Madrid by a brass band loudly playing a paso doble. She walks faster, then runs; the musicians stick with her. The implied commentary on conditions of womanhood in Spain is both cartoonishly obvious and, in its aesthetic power, exhilarating. Albarracín's specificity and economy expose, by contrast, the coyness and prolixity of much other work in the show. Also stirring is a video by the determinedly scurrilous young British art star Tracey Emin, who, in crosscuts, sitting on a couch, interviews herself, in the guises of a smart, stony skeptic excoriating an abject narcissist who—wielding cigarettes, a drink, and furious self-pity—is the Emin we know best. The work may be a minor sort of jape, but its funny, spooky intelligence stands out in an ambience of strained ambition.

The show's strongest suit is lumpen journalism documenting or, in an op-ed spirit, caricaturing worldly situations. (This points up one boon of the art-school franchise, as a cosmopolitan community building a common stock of information.) The German Julika Rudelius videos young Muslim men displaying new clothes and nattering about brands and prices, in the stereotypical way of mall girls. One man remarks that when married he will no longer care how he looks. The Iranian Parastou Forouhar's sprightly wallpaper drawings reveal figures, mostly female, being tortured or killed with whips, ropes, and stones. A Palestinian, Emily Jacir, uses a hidden camera to record her daily commute, on foot, past a sinister Israeli checkpoint. A video by the Israeli Sigalit Landau seems to accept guilt in this connection: naked on a beach, she twirls a hula hoop made of barbed wire, incurring bloody injury. (I wish she wouldn't.) The American Catherine Opie, who is a lesbian, mildly startles with a photograph of her beefy, tattooed self suckling her baby boy. A Serbian, Tanja Ostojic, exhaustively documents her successful Internet quest to acquire a husband with a European Union passport, so that she could live in Western Europe. (She and her prize, a German artist, have since divorced.) An installation by Michèle Magma, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, incorporates grainy black-and-white video footage of beautiful young people performing for the monumentally corrupt former ruler Mobutu Sese Seko, whose arrogant visage personifies a national catastrophe.

Arts of imagination, chiefly painting, come off badly, which might be deemed surprising at a time when many, if not most, of the freshest younger painters on the gallery scene happen to be women. The show includes only one big-name painter, the Briton Jenny Saville, who brings flashy painterly virtuosity to bear on grotesquely obese and tortured female nudes. (To my mind, Saville's technique and subject matter fight each other to an ultimately tedious draw.) The lack of painting, and of sculpture that isn't heavy-handedly themed, may reasonably reflect the curators' choice of feminist over merely female sensibility. But the major factor is a natural antagonism between school-rooted institutions and the commercial art world, in which an individual's success distances her from the ranks of collective purpose. The market selects art that people like to look at, whatever it may be about. This is bound to exasperate partisans of any particular aboutness, whose goal is not case-by-case approbation but blanketing justice. The conflict cannot be resolved, because the terms on the two sides—politics versus taste, virtue versus pleasure, aggrieved conviction versus disposable wealth—sail past each other. The agon's usual form is an assault, by the party of politics, on the complacency of art lovers. It draws force from the unexceptionable truth that justice is more important than artistic quality. Activists enjoin a suspension of fun-as-usual until urgently needed reforms are in place. In consequence, social movements are always aesthetically conservative (as the great Russian avant-garde of the revolutionary era learned, to its sorrow). They siphon off creative energies to pragmatic ends. Of course, no movement will admit the inferiority of its art. It will redefine the field to make pleasure appear to be at one with virtue. Many art lovers, for their part, like to imagine a socially salubrious tendency in their takings of joy. Both are wrong.

Genius and vileness can cohabit an artist's soul as comfortably as mediocrity and rectitude. The Sackler Center faces

incommensurable choices: to advance what women corporately want or to promote what a gifted élite of women does. It will opt both ways, probably, with attendant anguished debate. ♦

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Where the Great Women Artists Are Now

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Linda Nochlin on the many faces of contemporary feminist art

by Barbara A. MacAdam

There are few feminists who have been as influential, intellectually accessible, and prolific as Linda Nochlin, the Lila Acheson Wallace Professor of Modern Art at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. She is also a journalist, critic, curator, and author of numerous books and essays on subjects ranging from realism and Courbet to representing the nude to such contemporary artists as Jenny Saville and Robert Bechtle. Nochlin is perhaps best known for her seminal 1971 article in *ARTnews*, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in which she assessed the social structures—extending from academic training to patronage to business and institutional attitudes—that influenced not only the art produced by women but their professional and art-historical status as well.



Miwa Yanagi's chromogenic print *Yuka*, 2000.

©MIWA YANAGI

BAM: Your 1971 article is a comprehensive, very eloquent assessment of the state of women's art at the time. Where do you believe feminism stands today?

LN: I think we've made a lot of progress. I know it's not fashionable to admit it, but I'm just stating a fact. I think women artists occupy a better position today than they did 30 or 35 years ago. Some of the best artists in every medium are women. The problem is to make collectors, museums, and curators who aren't really up on things see that there are many great women artists. There are collectors and curators who—out of habit, laziness, or even misogyny—simply don't bother with women. But that's happening less and less frequently as women begin to occupy the most prominent places in the art world as creative artists. I mean, who wouldn't think of collecting Louise Bourgeois? You'd be crazy if you didn't. Or if you were interested in video artists, you'd be foolish not to consider the videos of Sam Taylor-Wood or Pipilotti Rist, not to speak of women working in various media from other parts of the world—Shahzia Sikander, for example, or Ghada Amer, or some of the Latin American women, or the Japanese. They are major figures. They're the ones who are doing the most interesting and challenging work. It isn't that people have to be charitable toward women in general or to people of other ethnicities, as they often were in the past.

BAM: Did it become easier for women when abstraction came along, and then Conceptualism? Did these new ways of making art mean that women weren't stuck with the academic tradition and didn't have to compete with the established male artists? How has the art scene changed for women since 1971?

LN: It has changed, but in different ways in different parts of the world. I think that in third-world countries women are returning to tradition, although often in very challenging, sometimes negative, critical ways. Shahzia Sikander, for example, uses Persian miniatures as a basis for her work but asks questions at the same time, and she uses contemporary media, including video, to recast her own national background. Ghada Amer uses traditional stitchery to make what would be considered pornographic images. So, yes, they are turning to their own backgrounds, but they're doing so in often quite challenging ways.

BAM: Aren't there new avenues for invention now that weren't available in the past?

LN: Absolutely. I think there are all kinds of avenues for critical thinking in visual language that simply weren't there before.

BAM: Do you think feminism means the same things now as when you wrote your article?

LN: I think it means much more, although there were always complex artists working in the feminist movement. It is oversimplifying to say that all the 1970s feminists were "essentialists"—that is, single-minded. A lot of them were not. I don't think Martha Rosler was an essentialist, or Joyce Kozloff, or Valie Export. But they were nevertheless feminists.

BAM: Do you still define yourself as a feminist?

LN: Very much so, but I believe that now there are *feminisms*. I am very open-minded. It's a big mistake to think that feminism is the same everywhere. It's important to recognize how notions of womanhood and femininity are constructed in different societies by different people. I think it's a mistake when people define themselves entirely as essentialists. But women are still very critical. Someone like Sam Taylor-Wood, especially when she works with male imagery—and she does a lot with men that is very feminist without being blatant—raises questions beyond that of maleness as a given, femaleness as a given. And I believe someone like Mary Kelly demonstrated in the '80s how sexual identity arises in the

individual almost inevitably, using diapers as her medium.

In fact, every time I go to a show of a woman artist who is interested in gender issues, or who doesn't even know she's interested in them, I see a new, more open, more critical, more inventive kind of feminism. It often works unconsciously, against the grain.

BAM: What about abstract painting?

LN: In the '70s, in the context of Minimalism, very often pattern, decoration, richness, and blood assumed a feminist mode. It doesn't mean that it naturally had to have it, but often feminist implications arise in certain historical circumstances and within certain art meanings that are givens. If the given is that male artists are involved with Minimalism—Donald Judd and Richard Serra—then maybe something by someone like Eva Hesse will assume a feminine meaning. This is partly because Hesse was trying to think in oppositions, in a kind of dialogue, and also partly because a woman artist herself wants to engage in a formal argument.

I don't think the work all came out of the vagina or anything like that. I think it all came out of the thinking of very ambitious artists who happened to be women. These women wondered, How am I going to place myself in relation to the art language of today? And this is one way that they thought about it—that the work could be made out of something ephemeral; that it was going to be anti-geometric in a sense, though not always; that it was going to have organic references even though it was abstract; that it might be vulnerable and subject to disappearance—all of which reads as somehow feminine. Meanwhile, others—male artists, mostly—were making things that might last forever.

BAM: I guess you can also have painting that is somewhat ironic, like the work of Beatrice Milhazes, who riffs on the overtly, baroquely decorative and lacy. As the issues of feminism—that is, the original issues—become less urgent or more diffuse, the problem will become how to engage the world, no?

LN: I don't think that the position of women is going to cease to be problematic. That's utopian. We live in a world where women are oppressed, where in certain countries they can't initiate court cases, where they have marriage thrust upon them. Even polygamy is coming back, and some forms of oppression are tied to religion. This happens around the world. These issues are not going to go away. Even in terms of art, as far as the market is concerned, women artists do not get the prices men do. There are rare exceptions, as in the case of Louise Bourgeois, perhaps.

BAM: But even she didn't command such high prices until late in her life.

LN: There are still battles to fight in that area, although women are curators—often well-paid curators who work very hard—and dealers. But do they often take women artists on? Not necessarily. And as for museum directors—think of that!—how many big museums do women direct? Women tend to run alternative spaces or small museum galleries, not major museums and the like.

BAM: But the situation for women has changed in terms of the art itself.

LN: Yes, in terms of expectations, in terms of what's out there in the galleries. I'm going to point out, too, that the trope of "woman as exception" has always been popular. You think of people like Élisabeth Vigée-LeBrun or Mary Cassatt or Berthe Morisot or Rosa Bonheur—probably one of the most popular artists of the 19th century—or of Georgia O'Keeffe, arguably the best-known woman artist in the United States. They're not very highly respected in vanguard circles. People don't know exactly what to do with "women as exception." They're like some odd bird out there that has done something unusual.

BAM: What about people like Marie Laurencin and Sonia Delaunay? Couldn't they, too, be considered somewhat exceptional?

LN: Not really. Sonia Delaunay was wonderful, but it was her husband who had the name. She made money for them by doing design and decorative art on the side, but Robert was considered the important artist.

However, in the pre-Soviet Union and early Soviet Union, you really had women right in there doing abstract art. It was the only time that a whole group of women were included in avant-garde circles on a par with male artists.

BAM: Which woman artists today are carrying the banner?

LN: I would say people like Janine Antoni and Pipilotti Rist and Sam Taylor-Wood and Jenny Saville. They're still young, and there's a generation still younger than they are. I think Rachel Whiteread is brilliant and original, and there's also a sense of covert domesticity, a counterargument to the assertive monumentality and permanence of someone like Richard Serra.

These are women who very deliberately make their art entangled with pleasure and violence. One of my absolute favorites is Angela de la Cruz, who I think is utterly splendid. She combines rage and elegance and is very much a world artist. There's also Sarah Lucas, a fierce feminist—fierce at least on gender issues.

BAM: Now that women have become more comfortable with their situation in the art world, do you think that there is more humor in their work?

LN: There's more everything. And there's also a lot of tragedy. Women are doing a lot of in-between work—combining paintings, objects, installation, performance. And a lot of photography.

BAM: But aren't men doing that, too?

LN: Yes, but I think there is a difference in terms of the gorgeousness and vulnerability in the women's work. I think Cecily Brown, with her violently animated surfaces, has been dealing with sexuality, beauty, and aggression. Her work makes constant reference to the connection between the act of fucking and the act of painting. Brown borrows from the painterly traditions of the 19th century.

BAM: You point out in your "Global Feminisms" catalogue essay ("Women Artists Then and Now: Painting, Sculpture, and the Image of the Self") how "anti-painting," in the form of photography, video, installation, and performance, gained popularity among women, like Australian artist Tracey Moffatt, because "they were associated with feminist refusal of the patriarchal reign of the painted masterpiece." These other media offered an independent territory for expression.

LN: I think one of the most important innovations of the "Global Feminisms" show is an engagement not only with the problematics of painting, but also with the various ways in which painting interacts with local traditions.

And I think gender—or the instability of gender—is very important throughout the world, as in the photographs of Catherine Opie, where she appears as a Madonna-like figure who is obviously homosexual, nursing her son.

Even more outrageously, Hiroko Okada, a woman, parodies the idea of motherhood being an exclusively feminine condition in her ink-jet print of two big-bellied men smiling at their situation.

Barbara A. MacAdam is deputy editor of ARTnews.

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Unusual Suspects: *Global Feminisms* and *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*

Helena Reckitt

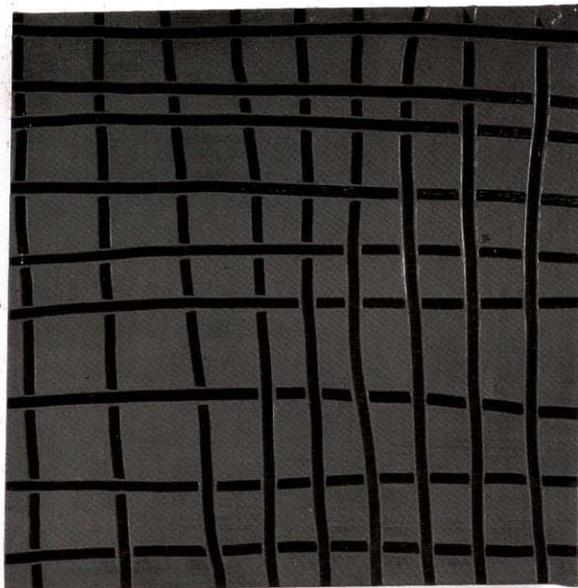
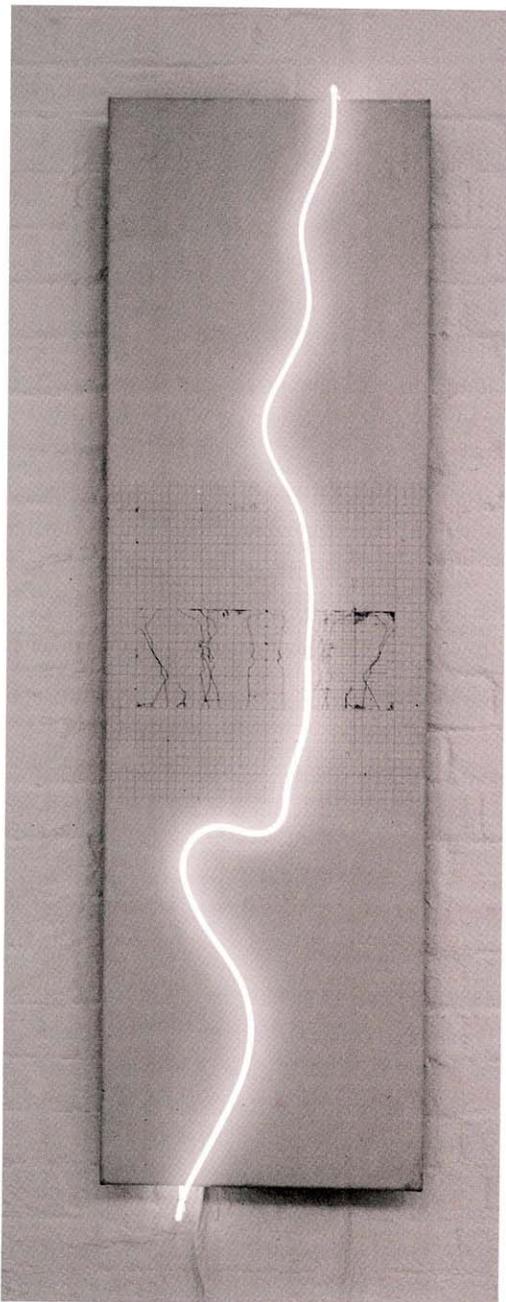
Imagine a blockbuster feminist art exhibition. Probably you can readily visualize galleries of works by artists crucial to feminist – if not mainstream – art history. And this, argue the curators of two forthcoming feminist surveys, is the problem. Few major exhibitions have focused on the women’s art movement, so audiences lack the familiarity with feminist art that regular viewing enables. Consequently, knowledge of the field has ossified around a limited list of projects and ideas. Maura Reilly, curator at the Brooklyn Museum, feels that, **‘for a long time Western feminism has been at a standstill because it hasn’t looked beyond its own familiar conceptual theoretical, and geographical borders.’** In *Global Feminisms*, the exhibition that she is organizing with Linda Nochlin for the Brooklyn Museum next year, she wants to push feminist curating in a new direction, by radically expanding its borders and definitions.

Excavating Feminism

Global Feminisms coincides with an ambitious feminist exhibition curated by Connie Butler for LA MOCA, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*. Butler’s show also rethinks feminist aesthetics and the feminist canon. Featuring over 120 artists who emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, plus a few senior figures like Louise Bourgeois and Alice Neel who

made important feminist work during the period, *WACK!* also draws more than 50% of its artists from outside the US. When Butler proposed the idea to LA MOCA, **‘as one of the only post-war art movements yet to be surveyed’**, she planned to focus on American feminist art. **‘But I soon realized’**, she says, **‘that the project would only interest me if I broadened it beyond the usual suspects and made it international’**.

One of the first people Butler called was the curator Catherine de Zegher, whose poetic treatment of women’s art in *Inside the Visible* (1996) Butler especially respected. Although she declined de Zegher’s advice to include men – **‘I considered it, but felt that the story from women’s points of view needed to be told first’** – Butler admired *Inside the Visible*’s thoughtful approach to time, space, and national identity (what it termed **‘an elliptical traverse of twentieth century art’**) and she is grouping and organizing works within themes, rather than by lineage or geography. Her fifteen sections range from practice-based categories like ‘Abstraction’, ‘Photography’, and ‘Collectivity’ to subjects like ‘Family’, ‘Mythology’, ‘Art History’, ‘Self-Representation’, and the ‘Goddess’ – a term that Butler admits finding especially problematic, at one point renaming it ‘Spirituality’ before retaining ‘Goddess’ as more accurately reflecting second wave feminist culture.



Left: Rita Donagh *Contour* (1967-68) silkscreen on canvas with argon tube 45.8 x 152.4 cm. Private Collection. Courtesy of MOCA, LA. Right above: Mary Heilmann *Little 9x9* (1972) acrylic on canvas. Hauser & Wirth Collection, Switzerland. Courtesy of MOCA, LA. Above: Suzy Lake *Miss Chatelaine* from the *Co-Ed* series. Photographs. Courtesy of Artist. All three works are selected for *WACK!* (2007)

WACK! juxtaposes iconic projects from feminist art history – many rarely exhibited – with works not usually considered within this tradition. Key projects by Mary Kelly and Adrian Piper, for instance, appear alongside those by artists who worked at some distance from the feminist movement’s centre [in America], like Sanja Ivekovic in Zagreb, Monica Mayer in Mexico, or Ursula Reuter

Christensen in rural Denmark. At the same time the show highlights regional hubs – like Chicago, Rio de Janeiro, Chile and New Zealand - where women worked closely, and sometimes collectively, in a rhizomatic model of creative exchange. In contrast to art history’s tendency to single out individual artists, *WACK!* advances a sense of artists operating as part of a feminist continuum. For example, it

shows the impact of the photo-conceptualist Suzy Lake on Cindy Sherman, featuring work from Lake's *Co-Ed* series that Sherman invited her to exhibit at Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center in 1975 and that influenced Sherman's *Self Portraits A - E* (1975) and *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-80).

Though she acknowledges the validity of a feminist canon, Butler is no servant to art history – feminist or otherwise – seeing inclusiveness as antithetical to strong curating. **'Why does a feminist art show have to be inherently democratic?'** she asks. **'I am far more concerned with making the strongest exhibition with the best possible work'**. Consequently, the show excludes numerous artists who we might expect to see from the period, including prominent figures like Betsy Damon, Monica Sjo, and May Stevens, and projects like *Feministo*.

Yet the show promises to be a visual treat, encompassing a range of formal approaches. The film/video selection ranges from little-known innovators like Sonia Andrade and Lili du Jourie to celebrated ones like Chantal Akerman and Joan Jonas. Painting, which many 1970s feminists avoided, is well represented. Abstract painters such as Louise Fishman, Mary Heilmann, and Sylvia Plimack Mangold balance realists like Audrey Flack and Sylvia Sleigh. With its lack of figuration or easily legible narratives, this strong abstract work stretches feminist aesthetics in potentially suggestive ways. Rather than showing what feminist art looks like, it asks how feminists look at art. Where feminist critics like Lucy Lippard read Mangold's abstract depictions of her studio floor in a feminist context, and Fishman's participation in exhibitions like *A Lesbian Show* (1978) alerted viewers to her gender politics, Heilmann has rarely – if ever – been discussed within feminist terms. **'I always suspected that part of what I loved about Heilmann's work was its gendered approach to colour and architectural form'**, says Butler. **'So it was with a certain thrill and relief to discover that my instincts about the work's implicit feminism echoed Heilmann's aims'**. Other figures not usually read as feminist include Mary Hilde Ruth Bauermeister, a central figure in Germany's post-war avant-garde, and Rita Donagh, whose delicate adaptations of newspaper images suggest to Butler a gendered (if not overtly feminist) response to public events.

Of course, feminism far exceeds aesthetic concerns. For many feminists, community-building was central to their artistic practice. Butler highlights activist projects like the African-American collective and exhibition *Where We At*,

and the archival and performance-oriented *Lesbian Art Project*. She emphasizes the pedagogic work of Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville in California, and the far-flung critical and curatorial activities of Lucy Lippard, tracking Lippard's transformation from formalist critic to her advocacy of feminists and artists of colour. Casements of ephemera will feature examples of the curatorial, publishing, and community projects that women spearheaded as alternatives to, and critiques of, mainstream cultural spaces.

Challenging 1970s feminism's image as stridently prescriptive, the show foregrounds artists who query the very act of speaking and making art within patriarchy. These include Ketty La Rocca, whose intimate photo-text collages, born from her lack of visibility in the art world, question self, other, and their mutual reliance; Helena Almeida who, in her *Inhabited Paintings*, seems to paint from inside the canvas, pigment sometimes blotting out her face; and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, whose books, films, and performances imagine nation and body as linguistically structured, and therefore divided at the root.

Going Global

Where *WACK!* attempts to outline – and redefine – a movement in its heyday, the task for Reilly and Linda Nochlin in *Global Feminisms* is, in some ways, harder. They strive to renew feminism's urgency in a "*postfeminist*" period in which mainstream culture has absorbed, and diluted, many feminist principles. Even more than Butler does, the curators seek inspiration outside familiar terrain. **'I tend to be critical of exhibitions that call themselves "international" because they always assume that the West is the centre and all else is the periphery'**, explains Reilly:

To me, international exhibitions generally present not a multiplicity of voices, but rather a larger sampling of Western European and American artists with a limited number of non-Western ones – as is often the case with most Biennales, *Documenta*, and *Manifesta*. Linda and I attempted a different approach as curators of *Global Feminisms*. We started by identifying artists from non-Western countries, and settled on the US and Western European artists last. We accompanied this postcolonial curatorial strategy – influenced by precedents like *Magiciens de la terre* and *Documenta 11* – by re-examining feminism through the writing of postcolonial feminists like Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ella Shohat, and countless others, who for decades have urged



Above: Mary Coble *Binding Ritual, Daily Routine* (2004) 3 videostills from a single-channel video projection 11 min. 16 sec., color, sound, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Conner Contemporary Art, Washington, DC. © Mary Coble

Left to right: Oreet Ashery *Boy Marcus* (2000-2006) digital print on archival paper 3 x 4 ¼" (7.5 x 11 cm) edition of 7 from an original Polaroid taken in 1974. Centre: Portrait of Marcus Fisher I from the Portrait of Marcus Fisher I-IV series (2000) lambda print, 43 x 39 (109.2 x 99.1 cm) edition of 7. Courtesy the artist and Foxy Production. Photo: Manuel Vason. *Boy Marcus* (2000-2006) digital print on archival paper 3 x 4 ¼" (7.5 x 11 cm) edition of 7 from an original Polaroid taken in 1974. Triptych courtesy the artist © Oreet Ashery. Courtesy of Brooklyn Museum. *Global Feminisms* (2007)



a more inclusive, broader examination of feminism between cultures and beyond Euroamerican borders. I call this feminism's "*global imperative*".

Yet when she sat down with Nochlin to brainstorm the show, Reilly was struck by how little they knew about feminists working outside Euroamerican contexts:

Here we were, experts hired for our knowledge of feminist practice, but we could not say what feminist art looks like in Sao Paulo or Jakarta, what it means to perform gender in Nigeria, or to be a lesbian in Pakistan. We realized that we had to push ourselves to not be afraid of the unfamiliar, but to keep rethinking what it means to be a feminist in radically different socio-cultural, political, racial, and class situations. Our exhibition, therefore, offers an expanded definition of feminist artistic production, one that acknowledges incalculable differences among women globally, and that recognizes feminism itself as an always already situated practice without a universal or fixed definition.

For Reilly, the 51st Venice Biennale, curated by Rosa

Martinez and Maria de Corral, '**with its presentation of transnational feminisms in the plural**', provided an inspiring and refreshing precedent. The non-Western bias and international Platforms of Okui Enwezor's *Documenta II* was another valuable model, which even though it included an unprecedented 37% of female artists, less than 10% lived outside Europe or America, regardless of their country of origin. By consulting local critics and curators in regions beyond the art world's traditional orbit, and making extensive studio visits, Reilly avoids the tendency for curators to select artists who have already been rubber stamped by the international arts community. Of *Global Feminisms*' more than one hundred artists, at least 50% are from non-Western countries. Although slightly more artists live in the US than elsewhere (followed by the UK), strong selections from Asia, the Middle East, South America, East and Western Europe, and Australasia create an intriguing mix. Even more potentially exciting, most aren't represented by US or UK galleries, many have not exhibited in North America, and—although some have appeared in the Venice Biennale and



Hiroko Okada (Japan, b. 1970) *Future Plan #2* (2003) inkjet print 54 13/16 x 35 1/8" (140.4 x 90 cm). Courtesy the artist and Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo. Courtesy of Brooklyn Museum. *Global Feminisms* (2007)

other important exhibitions – few are international art stars. The catalogue reflects this international outlook. Excluding Reilly and Nochlin, many of the writers – who include N’Goné Fall, Geeta Kapur, Elisabeth Lebovici, Charlotta Kotik, Joan Kee, Kasahara Michiko, and Virginia Pérez-Ratton – come from outside America.

Global Feminisms focuses on work from 1990 to the present by artists mainly under the age of forty. Like *WACK!*, it eschews genealogy or geography for themes: ‘Life Cycles’, ‘Emotions’, ‘Identities’, and ‘Politics’. But if *WACK!* shifts the emphasis away from female bodies, *Global Feminisms* places embodiment at centre of its curatorial frame. The hyperbolic repetition of identity what Nochlin, in her catalogue essay, calls “*self othering*” is a defining trope. In her karaoke performances, Hsia-Fei Chang’s enacts a kind of sexual and ethnic drag, playing herself playing herself as a hot Asian chick. Pilar Albarracín parodies *clichés* of Spanish womanhood, from the popular singer to the flamenco dancer, the contented peasant to the prostitute. Tania Bruguera channels the persona of the African icon, Nkisi-Nkonde, in works that grapple with collective responsibility and guilt.

Playing close combat with the stereotypes that threaten to define them, these women deftly sidestep exoticism’s traps.

Also drawing on performance traditions, several artists act as witnesses or conduits to traumatic events. Regina José Galindo, who received the Golden Lion at the 2005 Venice Biennale as the most promising younger artist, for her performance works like *Skin*, where she shaved her body, and *Who Can Erase the Prints*, where she walked naked through the streets, leaving a trail of bloody footprints behind her, in protest at the murder of Guatemalan women. Peggy Phelan has suggested that the theatrical impulse in such work ‘**might be understood as an attempt to make this pain something to be shared. Theatre exists for a witness. In returning to the agony of trauma, art might provide a means to approach its often radical unknowability**’.¹ Other artists tackle painful histories with less overtly visceral means. Parastou Forouhar, whose parents were assassinated in her family home in Teheran, calligraphed the rooms of an abandoned house with free floating Farsi script. The piece evoked a longing for motherland and mother tongue unfettered by fundamentalist interpretations of language.

Juxtaposing the work of artists from diverse backgrounds, *Global Feminisms* sets up “*common differences*” between them. It explores the theme of motherhood, for instance, in works including the lesbian artist Catherine Opie’s portraits of her son nursing at her breast, Dayanita Singh’s pictures of the eunuch Mona Ahmed and her adopted child, Hiroko Okada’s photographic series, *Delivery By Male*, of men who appear to be heavily pregnant, Oreet Ashery’s images of herself dressed as a Hassidic Jew while handling her naked breast, and Patricia Piccinini’s whimsical imaginings of genetically-engineered offspring.

Like so many native informers, artists offer insights into the cultures they know best, critiquing vernacular tropes even as they appropriate them. Shahzia Sikander improvises on the Persian miniature. Sarah Lucas harnesses the casual sexism of British jokes. Kate Beynon’s *Calligrafitti* combines iconography from Chinese script, graffiti, comic books, and tattoos. Carey Young inserts herself into the corporate world to decode training and public speaking methods.

Global Feminisms will inaugurate the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, named for the philanthropist and collector whose gift of Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) provides the wing’s centerpiece. Reilly thinks that viewers who know the work only in reproduction (it has been in storage for the best part



Above: Regina José Galindo (Guatemala, b. 1968) *Who Can Erase the Prints? (¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?)* (2003). Single-channel projection, 2 min. video documentation of performance on July 23, 2003 in Guatemala City. Courtesy the artist.

Left: Tania Bruguera (Cuba, b. 1968) *The Burden of Guilt (El peso de la culpa)* (1998) video documentation of performance. 12 min. Produced by Kunsthalle Wien. Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Courtesy the artist and Centre Georges Pompidou. Both images, courtesy of Brooklyn Museum. *Global Feminisms* (2007)

of three decades) will be impressed by its scale and intricacy, the banners that herald the work and echo the table's design, and the heritage tiles honouring women whose lives correlate with those in the plates. A series of exhibitions in the Biographical Gallery will examine women commemorated in the project, starting with Hapshepsut, the first female Pharaoh.

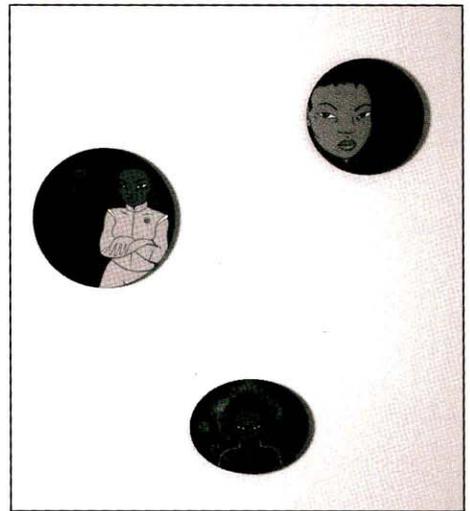
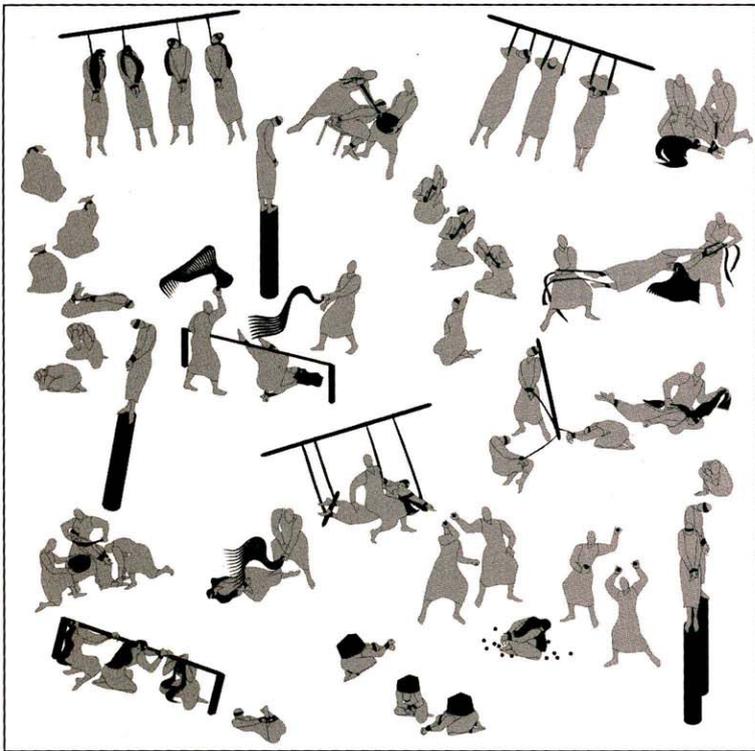
But, as Reilly surely knows, *The Dinner Party's* centrality in the first feminist museum wing is bound to stir up controversy. Despite – or perhaps because of – its popular appeal, the work has been criticized for everything from its grandiose tone to its kitsch aesthetics, its Western outlook to its equation of women with vaginas. To Nochlin, *The Dinner Party* is **'more a religious work than it is a great art work. Certainly it's an icon of the first wave of consciously feminist art and as such it is a kind of shrine'**.

By inviting Nochlin to co-curate, Reilly acknowledges her catalytic impact on feminist art. Nochlin's essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1971) refocused attention from individual figures to the institutional and ideological frames around them, signaling the start of self-consciously feminist art history. Moreover, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, which Nochlin co-curated with Anne Sutherland Harris in 1976, was the first feminist museum

survey in North America. This exhibition opened at the LA County Museum and culminated at the Brooklyn Museum. *Global Feminism* thus acts as a kind of a bookend to her career. As Nochlin (now in her mid-seventies and still on the faculty at New York University) puts it: her first show was at the Brooklyn Museum; her last will be too.

Framing Feminism

Both exhibitions promise much. Together they present a vast amount of work from – and in – a feminist perspective that (while skipping the 1980s) conveys a powerful sense of the movement's sophistication, audacity, and continuing influence. Both pack theoretical and intellectual punch. They refuse to tart up, or dumb down, their feminism with goofy or sexy titles (a tendency that the blogger *Anonymous Female Artist*, A.K.A. Militant Art Bitch, laments, concluding, **'Do not agree to be in a show called Little Women. Ever. Even if you live to be 95 and you never get a goddamn show'**).² Their supple definitions of feminism keep it open to expansion and question. The exhibitions promise to be timely too. *WACK!* unearths radical aesthetic gestures that – if the recent Whitney Biennial is anything to go by – excite younger artists. *Global Feminisms* presents gender-conscious



Left: Parastou Forouhar (Iran, b. 1962) *Thousand and a Day*, (2003) wallpaper drawings (digital), dimensions variable. Collection of the artist. Courtesy the artist. Right: Kate Beynon (Hong Kong, b. 1970) *Good Luck Collective* detail (2005). Private collection, Australia. Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne. Photo: Andrew Curtis, Melbourne. Both images, courtesy of Brooklyn Museum. *Global Feminisms* (2007)

perspectives on international issues that are rarely seen in media reports, let alone art exhibitions. Moreover, given the conservative political climate in the US, such militancy should strike a chord.

At the same time, it will be interesting to see, in the case of *WACK!*, if Butler's sensitivity to the latent feminism in some women's work can stretch the category without diluting its usefulness. After all, if we didn't know that Isa Genzken or Jay de Feo were women, what in their work would indicate a consciousness of gender, let alone feminism? I also wonder if the show's strident title, evoking the acronyms of radical groups, strikes the right tone, especially since so much work in the show is implicitly, rather than explicitly, feminist.

If *WACK!* risks diluting feminist politics, *Global Feminisms* might elevate feminist content above other aspects of its artists' work. The curators' conviction that non-Western perspectives can rekindle feminism puts artists from outside the West under intense focus. So it will be interesting to see if these artists – who might seem to perform and comment on their national and cultural heritages more explicitly than those from Euroamerican countries – are valued as highly for their artistic talent as for their political insights when the exhibition opens. Yet the curators' selection of practitioners who draw attention to the third world in the first (like Mary

Coble who has memorialized queer casualties of US hate crimes) and the first in the third (like Dayanita Singh who photographs upper class Indian homes) indicates that they also want to question, or minimize, this polarity.

Allergic to Feminism?

So why have museums been so reluctant to acknowledge the feminist art movement? For Reilly:

Sexism is still so insidiously woven into the institutional fabric, language, and logic of the mainstream art world that it often goes undetected. It's quite alarming – and disheartening – how prevalent it remains. People say 'women artists are doing great, we've come so far.' My answer to that is: Bullshit. Look at price differentials between male and female artists, ratios in museums, galleries, and within thematic and national exhibitions. For instance, look at the fourth and fifth floors of MOMA: only 4% of the works on view are by women – and that's after its 2004 reinstatement! For my *Global Feminisms* catalogue essay I researched the ratios of male/female artists shown and collected by contemporary art museums. The statistics are even worse than I had imagined. And those for artists of colour are worse still. It never ceases to amaze me that despite the decades of

postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the art world ‘majority’ continues to be defined as white, Euroamerican, privileged and, above all, male. We still have quite a road ahead of us!

Butler concurs:

It’s almost as if museum people are allergic to feminism. When I was in Paris recently I discussed my plans for WACK! with a male museum director whose main question was why I wasn’t including men. It was as if he literally couldn’t visualize a good exhibition with only female artists. I could sense his physical discomfort, embarrassment almost, about the subject.

This anecdote reminds us of the art world’s resistance to explicit sexual content – especially in work by women. As long-time MOMA Curator William Rubin commented on a work by Louise Bourgeois, ‘**when themes of sexuality are pressed too literally, a set of emotions interposes itself between the viewer and the work in a manner uncondusive to aesthetic contemplation.**’³ Butler thinks that this conflation of women’s art and women’s bodies has everything to do with the art world’s aversion to feminism. ‘**I can’t tell you how many times people asked me: ‘What are you going to do with all that ugly art?’ – by which I am sure they meant sexually explicit material.**’

Despite curators’ visible role in framing art these days, they often have less freedom than we imagine. In 2002 Simon Taylor was fired from Guild Hall in East Hampton after a fracas over Carolee Scheemann’s *Interior Scroll*. Following a board member’s objections, the museum’s director removed artwork relating to the piece from *Personal and Political: The Women’s Art Movement, 1969-1975* which Taylor co-curated. The irony of the situation was not lost on Schneemann – she had debuted *Interior Scroll* during the *Women Here & Now* festival at the same venue in 1975. Catherine de Zegher resigned amidst controversy this year as Director of the Drawing Center after explaining that the institution would never allow its programmes to be censored if it moved to a space at Ground Zero. Given the art world’s fickleness regarding women’s art (remember *Riot Grrr!*? The early 1990s *Bad Girls*?) the Sackler’s support of feminist practice is crucial and will, I hope, prompt other institutions to make explicit commitments to the field. It will also be interesting to see what a difference Butler makes to that bastion of male modernism MOMA which she recently joined as Curator of Drawings.

But where many fear that women have hit a glass ceiling in the arts, to Linda Nochlin, as she reviews more than 35 years of feminist scholarship, teaching, and curating, we have – to coin a phrase – come a long way.

It’s really hard to take ourselves back to pre-feminist days when the presence of a successful woman artist – or any other professional – was considered exceptional. But, blasphemous though it is, I think I am entitled to use the forbidden word Progress. Never before have women assumed such prominent positions in the visual arts as curators. Think of Rosa Martinez’ and Maria de Corral’s Venice Biennale. True, women artists’ prices have not reached the level of men’s. But we are not surprised when a figure like Eva Hesse has a major retrospective. And many other women artists are considered leaders.

Moreover, Nochlin notes,

Gender studies has penetrated all ways of looking at art. No matter how distorted or misunderstood, feminist protocol has made its way into the heart of the beast. Consciously or unconsciously people make work about sex and sexuality in ways that were impossible before feminism. Has there been support from this changing practice? Not much. Has society changed accordingly? In many ways, not at all – we still don’t have adequate nursery facilities or pre-school, and poor women remain at the bottom of American society. But, nonetheless, I still see this as a moment of some achievement and celebration.

Far Away and So Close

While it might seem perverse for feminists to seek validation from a system they’ve so thoroughly critiqued, museums’ financial and psychological support shouldn’t be overestimated. As Carolee Schneemann points out, ‘**Although my work has an enormous presence through the efforts of art historians and cultural thinkers, it’s only in two American collections. It’s a form of economic censorship – cultural capital but not much actual capital. Sometimes I feel like I live in a fur-lined teacup.**’⁴

Of course, a feminist show does not guarantee feminist support, as Amelia Jones discovered when she centered her survey of North American feminist work on *The Dinner Party*. Or as Kate Bush and Emma Dexter, the curators of *Bad Girls* at London’s ICA, experienced when Laura Cottingham lambasted them for their show’s premise and title in her exhibition catalogue essay.⁵

The hubbub around these shows correlates directly to the hopes that audiences have for them. Minority groups rarely see themselves, or their concerns, reflected by mainstream institutions. Because feminist exhibitions are so rare, Butler, Nochlin, and Reilly carry an unusually heavy burden to represent the movement. Their exhibitions offer audiences the unusual opportunity to see art by and as feminists. Unlike the experience of being positioned as a female consumer, being hailed as a feminist viewer is unusual (and might explain why women's studies conferences can be so surprisingly libidinal). Therefore, for a feminist viewer, the 'correct distance'⁶ from which Hal Foster suggests art should be viewed might not exist. In her work on gender and the aesthetics of proximity, Mary Ann Doane argues that women cannot create the gap between themselves and the image needed to be good voyeurs. Quoting from Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she writes: 'Nearness, however, is not foreign to woman, a nearness so close that any identification of one or the other, and therefore any form of property, is impossible. Woman enjoys a closeness with the other that is so near she cannot possess it any more than she can possess herself'.⁷ Far from finding Foster's 'correct distance', the feminist is therefore improperly close to, invested in, and identified with, the objects and artefacts of the women's movement.⁸

When recounting their efforts to broaden feminist aesthetics, Butler, Nochlin, and Reilly all spoke of trusting their instincts when assessing work that had not already been presented in this frame. The need for such suppleness leads Griselda Pollock to imagine feminism as a '**movement across the fields of discourse and its institutional bases, across the texts of culture and its psychic foundations ... the play on the word 'movement' allows us to keep in mind the political collectivity in which feminist work must be founded and, at the same time, it enables us to refuse containment in a category called feminism.**'⁹ In the spirit of Pollock's proposal, these exhibitions see feminist movement as a verb not a noun – a shifting, searching, reflexive activity that takes all society as its subject and resists easy definition. Imagine a blockbuster feminist art exhibition. Now think again.

Helena Reckitt is a critic and curator, based in Toronto. She edited *Art and Feminism* (London, Phaidon Press, 2001) and co-edited *Acting on AIDS: Sex, drugs and politics* (London, Serpent's Tail, 1998). She was Senior Director of Education and Exhibitions at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center in Atlanta, Georgia (2002-2005), organized talks at London's ICA (1990-1997) and was a commissioning editor at Routledge in the late 1980s. *Paul Shambroom: Picturing Power*, curated by Reckitt with Diane Mullin and Chris Scoates, will tour throughout the US in 2008.

Thanks to Charles Reeve and Leyla Rouhi for their editorial counsel, Renee Baert for her invitation to write about these important exhibitions, and the curators for discussing their ideas with me so generously. Comments by Connie Butler, Linda Nochlin, Maura Reilly, and Carolee Schneemann come from phone interviews that I conducted in May 2006.

Notes

1. Peggy Phelan 'Survey' in Helena Reckitt (ed) *Art and Feminism* (London, Phaidon Press, 2001) p.45
2. <http://anonymousfemaleartist.blogspot.com>
3. William Rubin quoted by Helen Molesworth in 'Bathrooms and Kitchens: Cleaning House with Duchamp' in Nadir Lahiji (ed.) *Plumbing: Sounding Modern Architecture* (Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 1997) p. 45
4. Telephone interview with author, May 2006
5. Laura Cottingham 'What's So Bad About 'Em?' in Kate Bush and Emma Dexter (eds./curators) *Bad Girls* (London, ICA, 1993)
6. Hal Foster 'Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?' in *The Return of the Real*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, MIT Press, 1996)
7. Mary Ann Doane 'Film and the Masquerade' (1991) reprinted in Amelia Jones (ed) *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London, Routledge, 2003) p.63-64
8. As a precedent see, Griselda Pollock *Vision and Difference: femininity, feminism, and histories of art* (Routledge, London and New York, 1988)
9. Griselda Pollock 'Differencing: feminism's encounter with the canon' in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art Histories* (London and New York, Routledge, 1999) p.26



Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia

Global Feminisms Rebecca Belmore's video installation "The Named and the Unnamed" is among the works in the first exhibition at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

They Are Artists Who Are Women; Hear Them Roar

The combination of the "Global Feminisms" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum and its Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, whose inauguration this

ROBERTA SMITH

ART REVIEW

show celebrates, is like a false idea wrapped in confusion. The false idea is that there really is such a thing as feminist art, as opposed to art that intentionally or by osmosis reflects or is influenced by feminist thought, of which there is plenty. Feminist art is a short-hand phrase that everyone uses, but institutionalizing such an amorphous, subjective qualifier should make us all reconsider.

The center seems to have been created mostly for its publicity value. It isn't necessary in order to showcase the only jewel in its crown, Judy Chicago's unruly, inspiring installation "The Dinner Party," a landmark in feminist history that occupies around 5,000 of the center's 8,300 square feet. Made by Ms. Chicago and scores of volunteers from 1974 to 1979, this immense piece is in many ways the perfect storm of

second-wave feminism and modernism: it is lashed together by pride, fury, radiating labial forms and numerous female-identified crafts, most prominently painted ceramic plates and needlework. Whatever you think about it as a work of art, it amounts to one-stop consciousness-raising and historical immersion: an activist, body-centered tribute to 39 important women. Study "The Dinner Party" close enough and your bra, if you're wearing one, may spontaneously combust.

What is confused is the exhibition, a sprawling, sometimes energetic assembly of recent work by nearly 90 women from nearly 50 countries that has been organized by Maura Reilly, the founding director of the Sackler Center, and the veteran art historian Linda Nochlin. It seems worth noting that the show's organizers don't use the phrase "feminist art" in its title. The same goes for what might be called its sister exhibition, "Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution," which has just opened at the Museum of

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They Are Artists Who Are Women

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Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and will travel to the P.S. 1 Contemporary Arts Center in Long Island City, Queens, next February.

While "Wack" examines art made by about 120 women in the late 1960s and 1970s, "Global Feminisms" concentrates on the present and, by implication, the future. It is restricted to artists born since 1960 and works made since 1990, although most date from 2000 or later. It is energetic, illuminating and irksome, and in all ways worthy of careful study. But it should have been much better.

In her catalog essay Ms. Reilly emphasizes the second "s" in the word feminisms. To whit, there is more than one way to be a feminist these days; feminist goals and issues are different in different places, as is the rate with which they are realized. Still, the show itself feels narrow.

Nearly devoid of significant painting and sculpture and thoroughly dominated by photography and video, with a documentary slant to many of its better works, it is more about information, politics and the struggle for equality than it is about art in any very concentrated or satisfying sense.

The curators have treated New York like just another spot on the globe, which is healthy. Nonetheless, "Global Feminisms" jumps cannily back and forth not so much between

Opening Events

"Global Feminisms" continues through July 1 at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, at Prospect Park, (718) 638-5000; brooklynmuseum.org. Special events, including talks by artists and curators, concerts and film screenings, are planned through June in conjunction with the opening of the center. Unless noted, events are free with museum admission, \$8, \$4 for students and 62+, free for members and children under 12. Events this weekend include a lecture with the artist Judy Chicago and the philanthropist Elizabeth A. Sackler (tomorrow at 3 p.m.); and a performance by the Brooklyn Philharmonic (Sunday at 3 p.m.; tickets, \$15 or \$10 for students and members, include museum admission; 718-488-5913).

mainstream and margins as between the two not completely separate success platforms of the marketplace and the institutional stage. To one side are those who sell like hotcakes, among them Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood, Sarah Lucas, Pipilotti Rist and Kara Walker. To the other are those known mostly from the international biennial circuit, like Tracy Rose, Arahmaiani and Katarzyna Kozyra.

The show begins in the Sackler Center in the space around Ms. Chicago's opus and then advances through an adjacent wing of galleries. But in many ways it never gets too far beyond the world according to "The Dinner Party."

Most of the work here is essentialist, body-oriented and familiar to the point of old-fashioned. Again and again and again women fall back on making art from the thing nearest at hand that separates them from men: their bodies — and often echo their predecessors rather literally. One example will suffice: Ana Mendieta's charged earthwork/performance art is absent from the exhibition because the artist was born before 1960. Instead we have younger artists doing work similar to hers. Some, like Bernie Searle, take possession; others, like Iskra Dimitrova, offer tame indoor versions of Mendieta's.

To some extent, this is the nature of pioneering. Just because land has been cleared and houses built in one part of the world does not mean the same techniques can be avoided when trailblazing elsewhere. Nor does this rule out originality, as exhibitions devoted to the international repercussions of Cubism and Constructivism have proved.

But feminism is not a style, or a formal approach. It is a philosophy, an attitude and a political instrument. It is more important than Pop, Minimalism or Conceptual art because it is by its very nature bigger than they are, more far-reaching and life-affecting. In addition feminism is not of itself an aesthetic value. It is an idea that can assume an organic force in some artists' work, but others just pay it lip service without much exertion or passion.

Divided into four convention-bound thematic sections, the show swings from the familiar to the sensational to the familiarly sensational and back again. In "Life Cycles" you may wonder just how many more naked breasts and other body parts female artists will expose, replicate or exaggerate in order to get even for those depicted over the centuries by male artists. Lots, it would seem. But Anna Gaskell's photographs spook just because the feet of the model's pantyhose are tied together. Milena Dopitova evokes the strange isolation of older women with an arresting photograph of what may be a set of matronly twins or just one woman, alone with herself.

In "Identities," the issue of gender identity, volatile enough in Western cultures, is tackled by women working in photography and video in other parts of the world who dress like



Yossi Milo Gallery

"Study of a Boy 2" (2002), a photograph by Loretta Lux.

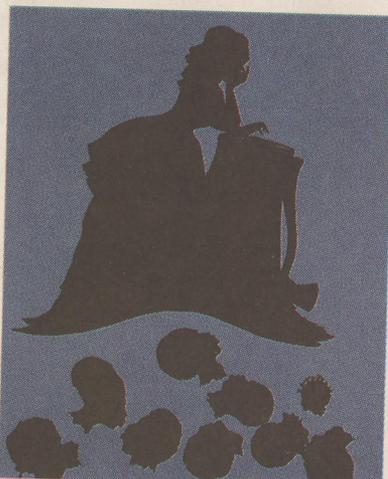


"The Dinner Party" (1974-79), by Judy Chicago, is the centerpiece of the exhibition "Global Feminisms."

Polshak Partnership Architects/Brooklyn Museum

men, shave like men and sit like men. But the most compelling move across genders and cultures is "Tagged," a straightforward three-channel video by the German artist Julika Rudelius, in which a succession of young Muslim men show and tell their spiffy wardrobes, trying on clothes while talking about prices, favorite brands, working out and, finally, how they won't have to worry about their looks once they marry.

In "Politics" the work alternates between harrowing and oblique, and labels often trump art. On video Tania Bruguera hangs a dead lamb from her neck and eats dirt; Sigalit Landau makes a hula hoop out of barbed wire and twirls it till her torso starts to shred. Arahmaiani's "Display Case" may look innocent enough, but when exhibited in Indonesia in 1994, its juxtaposition of religion and sex (evoked by a Buddha icon, the Koran and a box of condoms), set off such a furor that she fled the country for several years. Parastou Forouhar's "Thousand and One Day" wallpaper is inherently hard-hitting, sprinkled as it is with schematic scenes, in a style that seems part Persian miniature and part Robert Gober, of women in burqas being tortured and killed. The



Sikkema Jenkins & Company

From "The Emancipation Approximation" (1999-2000), a series of prints by Kara Walker.

wall label hits harder still: In 1998 her dissident parents were assassinated by Iranian secret agents in the family home in Tehran.

Rebecca Belmore's 2002 video installation "The Named and the Unnamed" may get your attention first for the intensity of the ritualistic performance piece it documents, which protested and mourned the abduction and murder of more than 50 women, many of them sex workers, in Vancouver. But ultimately it is that the video is projected on a wall gridded with small light bulbs, and the way the image shifts but the lights don't, that hold the eye. A more straightforward yet quirky docu-

mentary is Emily Jacir's "Crossing Surda (A Record of Going to and From Work)"; it gives a low-tech, knee-level, careering account, using a hidden camera, of her repeated crossings of an Israeli checkpoint, and conveys a mordant, depressing view of an already desolate limbo.

"Emotions," the final section, begins with the claim that "in the history of art women have always dominated the representation of emotions," an idea that seems almost as idiotic as the notion that men are better at science. It includes Julia Loktev's strange meditation on relationships, a dual-screen video piece made with Vito Acconci that has excellent camera work; Tracy Moffatt's exhilarating "Love," a fast-moving compendium of love (and hate) scenes from Hollywood movies that would never be seen on Oscar night; and last, and very much least, Patricia Monge's cell-like "Room for Isolation and Restraint," which is lined on all six surfaces with sanitary napkins.

After the press releases proclaiming a "museum within a museum," the smallness of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art is surprising. But perhaps it will become unnecessary: it will certainly never be able to accommodate all the art, by women as well as men, that has feminist consciousness somewhere in its DNA. The word feminism will be around as long as it is necessary for women to put a name on the sense of assertiveness, confidence and equality that, unnamed, has always been granted men.

ONLINE: WOMEN AND ART

More images from "Global Feminisms" at the Brooklyn Museum:

[nytimes.com/design](http://www.nytimes.com/design)

Art

Time Out New York / Issue 599 : Mar 22–28, 2007

Sister act

The Brooklyn Museum opens a center devoted to feminist art.

Hang around the art world long enough and you start to notice how critical attention ebbs and flows around certain topics. Case in point: After five quiet years or so, feminism is back on the radar. This winter saw several related high-profile events: a two-day symposium at MoMA in January, a series of panels at the College Art Association's New York conference in February, and the opening earlier this month of "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution" at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. And this week, the Brooklyn Museum unveils its new Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, showcasing work by women artists from 1960 onward.



Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979
Photograph copyright, Aislinn Weideler for Polshek Partnership

Reached by phone in her Brooklyn office, the center's curator, Maura Reilly, described the opening as "an historical moment of feminism infiltrating the museum." The guerrilla-like implication of Reilly's statement—that the center will somehow function outside the traditional museum that houses it—harks back to the '70s, when feminist artists protested the disproportionately small number of women represented in museum collections. And, as artist Faith Ringgold observes in an interview, the problem still persists: "It is unfortunate that it is still so necessary for women to have a dedicated center." But, she adds, "Right now, the Sackler Center can make a great deal of difference because women have yet to penetrate the mainstream through artwork alone."

The metaphorical and physical core of the new institution is a permanent installation of Judy Chicago's monumental sculpture *The Dinner Party*, donated by philanthropist—and center namesake—Elizabeth A. Sackler. Made in 1979, the piece is arguably feminism's most famous work of art. An enormous triangular table set with 39 elaborately modeled place settings that honor the historical contributions of women ranging from Eleanor of Aquitaine and Sojourner Truth to Georgia O'Keeffe, *The Dinner Party* elicits a split response, characterized by some as an iconic representation of women's power, and by others as visually cumbersome and overhyped. In addition to the figures cited by the place settings, the installation names 999 other women who have influenced history. That roster will inspire a series of related exhibitions, starting with "Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses: Feminism's Impact on Egyptology," which inaugurates the center's unfortunately named Herstory Gallery.

The third show opening at the Sackler Center is an ambitious international survey titled "Global Feminisms," jointly organized by Reilly and eminent art historian Linda Nochlin (author of the ground-breaking 1970 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"). Featuring works by 88 artists from 50 countries born since 1960, it addresses the complex relationship between theoretical critique and the politics of inclusion that feminism has long sought to balance. According to Reilly, this focus on a new wave of the movement—nothing in the show predates 1990—is in line with the center's goal of "looking toward the future of feminism and examining its subjective complexities."

As for the present, artist Carolee Schneeman, whose radical performances of the '60s politicized the female body, finds relevance in the Sackler Center opening as the Bush administration drives the country deeper into war. "Feminism has always battled against hypermasculinity" she says. "This position couldn't be more vital than it is in our current political moment." On a lighter note, when *TONY* e-mailed Yoko Ono to ask her opinion about a museum devoted exclusively to feminist art, she wrote back, "I love it. Women power!"

The Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art opens at the Brooklyn Museum Fri 23.

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