REDISCOVERY, RECOVERY, REVISION

AN EXPLORATION OF FEMINIST METHODOLOGIES IN CURATORIAL TRENDS AT THE CENTRE IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA SINCE 2007

Kyla McDonald

PhD Thesis
Glasgow School of Art
2024

DECLARATION

This thesis represents my submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research at The Glasgow School of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

— Kyla McDonald
May 2024

ABSTRACT

Over the last fifteen years or so the art world has witnessed the steady rise of interest in older and dead artist-women whose work has previously been neglected or ignored for sustained periods. Writer Zoë Lescaze named it 'the age of reparative exhibitions,' whereby several high-profile mainstream art museums and institutions appear to be seeking to correct their prior exclusions and bring discussion of canon revision to the fore. This trend has outwardly signalled the use of strategies such as revision and recovery that have been discussed in feminist scholarship since the 1970s. The aim of this research, therefore, is to explore to what extent this evolving trend in the mainstream art world has followed an engagement with feminist discourse and feminist art history. It seeks to investigate what feminist curatorial strategies, if any, have been used in the production of the exhibitions that have recovered these artists, as well as examining how the exhibitions' framing conditions have impacted the artistic legacy of the artists being foregrounded. Ultimately, it endeavours to determine whether or not this trend signifies that we are finally witnessing feminist strategies entering the museum in meaningful ways.

The thesis is structured over four chapters. The first traces one genealogy of feminist curatorial practice from the 1970s to the mid-1990s, outlining a selective number of key feminist curatorial strategies. The subsequent chapters provide distinct case studies that critically examine the renewed interest in three artists – Hilma af Klint (1862–1944), Lee Lozano (1930–1999) and Betye Saar (1926–). Each chapter analyses the exhibitions and curatorial work that has brought these artists mainstream recognition. It uses textual analysis of exhibition and artist-related materials, archival research, and interviews with key curators, artists, and writers associated with these artists recovery.

This research considers feminist curatorial practice as a form for feminist historiography, primarily focusing on an examination of curatorial practices in the mainstream art world from 2007 to the present. In doing so, it aims to provide a critical and timely reflection on a key moment in the history of the art world's engagement with artist-women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has been made possible with the encouragement and support of many individuals. Firstly and above all, I would like to thank my incredible supervisory team – Prof. Susannah Thompson, Prof. Patricia Allmer, and Dr. Adele Patrick – for their abundance of wisdom and guidance throughout this whole process. Our conversations, be it about my work, their work, on feminism, on art and exhibitions more generally, or any number of other things have kept me afloat through some challenging times and have meant a lot to me. I am so grateful to each of them for their individual intelligence and kindness.

I am indebted to all the people who have participated in my research giving me their valuable time, important insights and reflections on their work: Frances Morris, Gabrielle Schor, Jessica Morgan, Sarah Munro, Camille Morineau, Tracey Bashkoff, Rebecca Quaytman, Emma Enderby, Iris Müller-Westermann, Julia Voss, Hedwig Martin, Josiah McElheny, Barry Rosen, Helen Molesworth, Fiona Bradley, Bob Nickas, Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, Adam Syzmcyzk, Sabine Folie, Katrin Mayer, Isabelle Malz, Pernille Fonnesbech, Julie Roberts, Mark Godfrey, Zoe Whitley, Catherine Morris, Carol Eliel, Esther Adler and Stephanie Seidel. I consider these conversations a great privilege and know I will return to them many times in future work. I am grateful to the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York for arranging remote access to their files during a time when visiting was impossible. Thanks to Emily Fayet at Hauser & Wirth who helped with several Lee Lozano enquiries and provided access to the artist's archive and private notebooks. I would also like to thank all the staff at GSA Library, Glasgow University Library, Edinburgh University Library and the Kunstbibliothek, Berlin who each do a lot of invisible work that enables research such as this.

At Glasgow School of Art thanks go to Laura Haynes, Marianne Greated, Nicky Bird, Fiona Jardine, and especially Laura Guy, who each read and provided feedback on my work at critical points. To my friend and colleague Vanessa Boni – thank you for being an attentive reader and for all the many conversations we have had in regards to this work and other feminist projects together.

To my dear friends who have engaged in my work, sympathized in moments of despair, and given me vital encouragement at numerous points – I am so grateful for each of you.

I would like to thank my family – my parents, and my sister Tara for supporting me in the background, for their love and reassurance, for a place to stay, and for help with childcare. To Judy for babysitting at key moments. To Simon for everything, but mostly for supporting my decision to start this mammoth journey in the first place, for being there through every up and down along the way, and for always being my biggest champion. To Lotte and Raife, who were born in the middle of this process and who have changed my life in unimaginable ways, thank you for reminding me that there are so many other wonderful things, both large and small, to be enthusiastic about in life.

This research was generously funded by the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities and I thank them for this vital support, without which this work would not have happened.

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE CENTRE

In 2007 two large survey exhibitions dedicated to the presentation of artist-women and feminist practice were presented in the United States: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (4 March–16 July 2007) and *Global Feminisms* (23 March–1 July 2007), which launched the inauguration of the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, a space dedicated to the research and dissemination of feminist art. In addition, the Museum of Modern Art, New York (abbreviated to MoMA throughout) held a two-day symposium *The Feminist Future* (26–27 January 2007), which was part of their larger research project *Modern Women* that examined how they were addressing the issue of gendered exclusions in their collections. In that same year, the quinquennial contemporary art exhibition *Documenta 12* (16 June–23 September 2007) presented its large-scale survey where 46% of the total artists included were women. As a result, art historian Sue Malvern named 2007 an 'annus mirabilis' for feminist art in Europe and America.[1] Similarly, reflecting on this moment in 2021 feminist critic Wendy Vogel stated that 'feminist art history may come to be defined as the era before and after WACK!'[2]

What Vogel suggests is that due to *WACK!* (and I would argue this should include the other feminist-related exhibitions and projects of 2007), there appeared to be a more sustained engagement with the work of artist-women and feminist discourse across the mainstream art world which has lasted well-beyond 2007. This is supported by art historian Catherine Grant who proposed that *WACK!* 'amplified the growing interest in feminist art, politics and ideas across generations of artists, writers, and curators.'[3] This interest became visible in mainstream arts organisations through the increase in number of all or majority-women survey exhibitions, as well as solo exhibitions of artist-women who had been previously overlooked, unfolding across Europe and the United States post 2007. Key examples of survey exhibitions are:

[1] Sue Malvern, 'Rethinking "Inside the Visible"', in *Politics in a Glass: Case Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. L. Perry and A. Dimitrakaki (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 104.
[2] Wendy Vogel, 'WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution', *e-flux*, 8 February 2021, https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/375476/wack-art-and-the-feminist-revolution.
[3] Catherine Grant, *A Time of One's Own: Histories of Feminism in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 6.

elles@centrepompidou: Women Artists in the Collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, in Paris (2009-2011); *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* at the Museum of Modern Art, Vienna (2009-10); and *WOMAN: The Feminist Avant-garde of the 1970s*: *Works from the Sammlung Verbund Collection, Vienna*, which toured across several European venues between 2010 and 2022[4]. In more recent years, exhibitions such as *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965–1985* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art (2017); and *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* at the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2017) have taken place. In 2018–2019 *Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance* was exhibited over two acts at Nottingham Contemporary and the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea. In 2022 Cecilia Alemani curated *The Milk of Dreams,* the 59th International Art Exhibition for the Central Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, which included over 90% of artists who were women-identifying – a groundbreaking demographic for the Biennale. In addition, two survey exhibitions focused on artist-women's contributions to the history of abstraction occurred: *Elles font l'abstraction* (*Women in Abstraction*) at Centre Pompidou, Paris in 2022; and *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists and Global Abstraction 1940-1972* at Whitechapel Gallery, London in 2023. In November 2023 Tate Britain will present *Women in Revolt!* – an exhibition examining art, activism, and the women's movement in the UK between 1970 and 1990.

In terms of solo artist presentations, several artist-women who were either older and in the late stages of their careers, or who were now dead, began to be given more major exhibitions than ever before, and markedly in spaces where they had been conspicuously absent in the preceding decades. Notable examples include: Polish artist Alina Szapocznikow (1926–1973), who received wider, yet posthumous, visibility outside of her native Poland after her inclusion in *Documenta 12* in 2007; Romanian artist Geta Brătescu (1926–2018) represented Romania in the Venice Biennale in 2017 at age 91, after receiving her first major solo exhibitions outside of Romania from around 2010 onwards; Phyllida Barlow (1944–2023), the British artist who became successful later in life, represented Britain at Venice in 2017; British artist Lubaina Himid (1954–), was awarded the Turner Prize in 2017 at age 63 following a change in the rules to

[4] The full list of hosting venues is: Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna, Rome (February 19-May 16, 2010); Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid (June 3-September 1, 2013); BOZAR Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, Brussels (June 18-August 31, 2014); Mjellby Konstmuseum, Halmstad, Sweden (September 20, 2014-January 11, 2015); Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (March 13-May 31, 2015); The Photographers' Gallery, London, (October 6, 2016-January 8, 2017); Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (May 4-September 10, 2017); ZKM (Centre for Media and Culture), Karlsruhe (November 18, 2017-April 1, 2018); Stavanger Art Museum, Stavanger (June-September 2018); The Brno House of Art, Brno (December 2018–February 2019); CCCB, Barcelona (July 2019–January 2020; "Im Vektor" Hall, Tirol (May–July 2021); Lentos, Linz (September 2021–January 2022); and Museum of Contemporary Art, Art Vojvodina, Novi Sad (May–June 2022).

drop the prize's 50-year-old age limit, and has subsequently had a major solo exhibition at Tate Modern in 2022; Swedish painter Hilma af Klint (1862-1944), whose abstract work was rarely exhibited in her lifetime has become posthumously celebrated following a major retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, New York in October 2018, an exhibition that attracted over 600,000 visitors – the highest recorded attendance figure for a single exhibition in the museum's history[5]; German artist Anni Albers (1899–1994) had a major retrospective at Tate Modern, London in 2018, which was the museum's first ever exhibition centred on textile-art, a medium that has been relegated as craft and design and negatively associated with women's practice; Sophie Tauber-Arp (1889–1943), the Swiss artist who worked across disciplines – including textiles, furniture, sculpture, theatre and costume design and geometric abstraction – had her first exhibition in the United States in over 40 years at MoMA in 2021; American artist Howardena Pindell (1943–) was given her first ever retrospective exhibition showcasing five decades of work at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in 2019; American artist Faith Ringgold (1930–) had her first ever solo European exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries, London in 2019, which was followed by a major American retrospective at The New Museum, New York in 2022; a growing interest in artist-women associated with the Surrealist movement has been witnessed in major solo retrospectives of artists including Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012) and Dora Maar (1907–1997) both at Tate Modern in 2019.

Accompanying the exhibitions themselves were articles, in both specialist arts press and mainstream newspapers, extolling this phenomenon with headlines such as: "Redressing the Balance: Women in the Art World" (*White Review* online, July 2013)[6]; "An Era for Women Artists?" (*The Atlantic*, 2016)[7]; "Female Artists Are (Finally) Getting Their Turn" (*New York Times*, 2016)[8]; "The Overlooked, Radical History of Black Women in Art" (*Artsy*, 2017)[9]; "Want to Get Rich Buying Art? Invest in Women"

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[5] 'Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future Most-Visited Exhibition in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's History', Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Press Release, 18 April 2019, https://www.guggenheim.org/press-release/hilma-af-klint-paintings-for-the-future-most-visited-exhibition-in-solomon-r-guggenheim-museums-history (accessed April 2019)
[6] Louisa Elderton, 'Redressing the Balance: Women in the Art World', *White Review,* Online Exclusive, July 2013, http://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/redressing-the-balance-women-in-the-art-world/ (accessed January 2019).
[7] Sarah Boxer, 'An Era for Women Artists?', *The Atlantic*, December 2016 Issue, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/12/move-over-michelangelo/505826/ (accessed December 2018)
[8] Hilarie M. Sheets, 'Female Artists Are (Finally) Getting Their Turn', *The New York Times*, 29 March 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/03/arts/design/the-resurgence-of-women-only-art-shows.html?_r=0 (accessed December 2016)
[9] Yelena Keller, 'The Overlooked, Radical History of Black Women in Art', Artsy, 28 April 2017, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-overlooked-black-women-altered-course-feminist-art.

(*New York Times*, 2018)[10]; and "Modern women rediscovered: Frieze Masters focuses on female artists" (*The Art Newspaper*, 2022)[11]. Issue seven of *Frieze Masters Magazine*, produced to coincide with the 2018 edition of Frieze Masters Art Fair, London, was themed around celebrating and promoting the achievements of artist-women throughout history. In Frieze Art Fair's 2017 and 2018 editions they had special sections dedicated to artist-women, which would appear to indicate growing market interest in their work.

In her aforementioned article, Vogel also touched upon the market interest in feminist art while reflecting the impact of *WACK!* in 2021, remarking that 'the biggest difference between now and then [2007] is the booming market for feminist art, and its resultant glamorization in mainstream media…' She concluded that 'feminism has been fully branded as part of contemporary capitalism; so too have many artworks of its most fertile period, though artist themselves have unevenly reaped the benefits.'[12] Vogel's observations are founded in the fact that there has been an acceleration in commercial galleries – of all scales – taking on increasing numbers of either older artist-women or their estates. Take for example, Carmen Herrera (1915–2022), whose estate is represented by Lisson Gallery. They began working with the artist in 2010 when she was in her early 90s, at that point the price of her most expensive painting was 250,000 dollars – they are now priced at 4.5 million dollars.[13] Herrera is just one example among many. Such incidents are not a coincidence, they reflect and provide evidence that a trend has been developing in the art world. Words such as 'overlooked', 'resurgence', and 'rediscovered' have become commonplace in the rhetoric associated with this trend: older and/or dead women artists and rediscovering them, it seems, is fashionable.

Importantly, many of the artists now being shown were previously overlooked by the very institutions who are now both celebrating and showing their work. There has been a visible push by major international museums such as Tate and MoMA to address previous omissions in gender equality. For example, Tate Modern opened its new wing, The Blavatnik Building, in 2016 championing the increased percentage of artist-women in the collection—from 17% to 36%—since the opening of Tate Modern in

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[10] Mary Gabriel, 'Want to Get Rich Buying Art? Invest in Women', *The New York Times,* 24 September 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/24/opinion/want-to-get-rich-buying-art-invest-in-women.html (accessed December 2018)
[11] Aimee Dawson, 'Modern Women Rediscovered: Frieze Masters Focuses on Female Artists', The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, 13 October 2022, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/10/13/modern-women-rediscovered-frieze-masters-focusses-on-female-artists.
[12] Wendy Vogel, '"WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution"'.
[13] Cited in 'Who's Afraid of Women of a Certain Age? The Market Still Dramatically Undervalues Female Artists—But There's More to the Story – Burns Studio', accessed 14 June 2023, https://studioburns.media/katya-headline/.

2000.[14] Between 2016 and the present they have had a series of major large-scale solo retrospectives with artist-women such as Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), Anni Albers (1899–1994), Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012), Dóra Maurer (1936–), Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930–2017), Maria Bartuszová (1936–1996), and Natalia Goncharova (1881–1962), among others. In addition to this, in 2023 Tate Britain opened a major rehang of their collection galleries with art from the 1500s to the present day, which 'reflects the growing diversity of the collection.'[15] Director Alex Farquharson explained 'you still get celebrated works and celebrated artists—but also new voices and rediscoveries.'[16] Several artist-women are included in these displays for the first time. These statistics, exhibitions, and collection re-hangs seek to demonstrate the progress the institution has made, but it is not clear whether things have really shifted significantly in their tackling of gender inequality, nor what they seek to achieve long-term. In discussing the pervasive sexism of museums, curator Helen Molesworth stated that the progress made in feminist thought was significant but it had at that point (she was writing in 2010), not yet been translated to museums: 'Art history needs its objects of study to be displayed, and thus the history of the museum can be seen in part as a struggle for how to display works of art.'[17]

Molesworth's point highlights the historic, and I would argue ongoing, discord between the amount of academic work carried out in feminist art history since the 1970s and real demonstrable change within mainstream museums, galleries, and institutions. Feminist academics such as Griselda Pollock, Linda Nochlin, Marsha Meskimmon, Lucy Lippard, bell hooks, Carol Duncan, Lisa Tickner, Michele Wallace, and Amelia Jones, among several others too numerous to mention, have carried out extensive work in this field. The current trend of 'rediscovering' artist-women, and interest in the politics of feminism more broadly in the art world, appears on the surface to attend to such feminist academic work as institutions appear to be correcting their prior exclusions. Art historian Angela Dimitrakaki also observed this tendency, writing that the artist-women focussed programming as discussed above could be considered a 'concerted

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[14] Cited in Julia Zorthian, 'The New Tate Modern Wing Makes Way for Women', 17 June 2016, http://time.com/4373650/new-tate-modern-art-women/ (accessed January 2019).
[15] See Tate, 'Tate Britain Unveils Complete Rehang of the World's Greatest Collection of British Art – Press Release', Tate, accessed 7 June 2023, https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/tate-britain-unveils-complete-rehang-of-the-worlds-greatest-collection-of-british-art.
[16] Cited in Tom Seymour and Gareth Harris, 'All Change at Tate Britain after First Rehang in a Decade', The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, 23 May 2023, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/05/23/all-change-at-tate-britain-after-first-thing-rehang-in-a-decade.
[17] Helen Molesworth, 'How to install art as a feminist', in Butler, C and Schwartz A (eds.), *MODERN WOMEN: Women artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, Department of Publications, MoMA: New York. 2010 (reprinted 2016), 499

effort to *present* the art institution as a progressive friend rather than a reactionary enemy of feminism.'[18] This idea that the mainstream art world is currently presenting progression is what this research interrogates and what follows is a thesis that examines the trend of rediscovery with the aim of understanding to what extent it is the result of an engagement with feminist discourse and feminist art history.

Curating at the Centre: An object of study

Art historian Amelia Jones has written that curating is the means for making arguments about feminist art histories and strategies concrete. As such curatorial practice is a critical site for the constitution of historical narratives about feminist art and feminist theories of curating and writing histories.[19] The analysis of curatorial endeavours is therefore necessary as it helps to create a discursive space between curatorial and theoretical practices. Renée Baert also championed this theory – calling for an expansion of feminisms' objects of study: 'feminist art history and theory has largely concerned itself with artworks and texts, overlooking [the site of exhibitions and feminist curatorial practice], which [have their] own specificities, contingencies and even, in some instances poetics.' Further advocating that feminist curatorial practice and its processes and outcomes, 'need[ed] to be understood as itself an object for historiography…'[20] This thesis follows the concept proposed by Baert, specifically using exhibitions of artist-women in the mainstream as my objects of study. It is directed by the following questions: what feminist curatorial strategies are present in mainstream exhibitions rediscovering previously overlooked artist-women?; what is the impact on the legacy of the artists that are being 'rediscovered'?; and does this trend signal toward wider infrastructural change among the mainstream art world?

At the time of Baert's writing on this subject (2000) curatorial practice was a burgeoning topic for academic study.[21] Baert wrote that 'to speak of feminist curatorial practice is clearly to speak of something new, something which has arisen in our lifetime.'[22] This has since changed with publications such as Baert's own edited issue of *n.paradoxa* that focused specifically on 'Curatorial Strategies' from feminist perspectives

[18] Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Feminism, Art, Contradictions', *E-Flux Journal*, no. 93 (2018): 4, *emphasis my own*.
[19] Amelia Jones, 'Feminist Subjects versus Feminist Effects: The Curating of Feminist Art (or is it the Feminist Curating of Art?)', *Curating in Feminist Thought*, *OnCurating* Issue 9 / May 2016, 5
[20] Renée Baert, 'Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies', *n.paradoxa,* March, no. 12 (2000), 6.
[21] See: Jeannine Tang 'On the Case of Curatorial History.' *The Curatorial Conundrum*, eds. Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds, Mick Wilson (MIT Press, 2016), and Terry Smith, Thinking Contemporary Curating (New York: Independent Curators international (ICI), 2012).
[22] Renée Baert, 'Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies', 6.

(2006), as well as edited academic essay collections such as Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe's *Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces* (2010) and *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions* (2013) edited by Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki. Since these studies were published there has continued to be increased attention on artist-women and their rediscovery among mainstream institutions, meaning that questions around what this means for feminism and feminist art history remain relevant and requires further critique. This thesis tracks the most recent discussions that have been evolving over the past five years (the time during which this research happened), making it a necessary and timely contribution to the field.

This project has emerged from my own lived experience as a white female curator and art historian operating within the centre or mainstream art world – I have been a curator at Tate Liverpool and Tate Modern (2005–2012), working on both the collection and on exhibitions, and I have also worked as a director of smaller organisations that showcased the work of both contemporary and historic artists (Glasgow Sculpture Studios (2012–2016) and Bonner Kunstverein, (2018)). The motivation for this thesis began in those experiences as I reckoned with my own desire to understand how to develop a feminist curatorial practice within a system that had systematically excluded artists based on their gender, race, and class. Its focus on the centre, as opposed to the margins, is the direct result of my own positionality in this field. My understanding of feminism has been influenced by curator Helen Molesworth who has written that 'a feminist methodology offers two incisive gestures. The first is a paraphrase of Peggy Phelan's definition of feminism: it is the challenge to the persistent organisation of the world through the category of gender that consistently privileges men. The second is that feminism privileges self-criticality (as opposed to self-expression, *per se*) in political aesthetic, and intellectual practice.'[23]

Dimitrakaki has written on the contradiction between autonomy and dependency in feminist work, arguing that 'the case is that women and feminists in the art field are, just like everyone else, dependent on the institutions that control the flow of cash and even credit. We are therefore dependent on the capitalist system of production for our reproduction.' Further explaining that 'feminists sought autonomy but opted for dependency: in fact, they perceived (creative and financial) autonomy as the outcome of (institutional)

[23] Helen Molesworth, 'Painting with Ambivalence', in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, Mass: Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 2007), footnote 1, 429.

dependency.'[24] Relatedly, Baert suggested that 'feminist practices today are often *"folded in"* with other issues and positions and may be less visible as such, even as they shape and inform specific contexts.'[25] These two distinct yet connected positions reinforce why it is important to examine the centre – precisely because it is a space where both artists and curators engaged in feminist thought are working with, from, and at times against, yet their feminist work might not be as visible. As Baert's theory intimates, the very act of rediscovering artist-women in recent mainstream institutional programming could perhaps be read as an example of a 'folded in' approach – whereby a museum or institutional curator fulfils their role to create outstanding, critically acclaimed exhibitions, while simultaneously accomplishing their personal feminist curatorial desires to foreground the practice of artist-women and expand or critique the canon. This thesis seeks to examine whether or not this is the case, providing a nuanced exploration of both which feminist strategies have been 'folded into' mainstream curatorial work and how they are being utilised, while also highlighting instances that still show substantial lack. To do this my research adopts the approach put forward by Katy Deepwell that 'to define what is feminist in the curation of women artists' work, we have to look at the relationships between feminist theory and feminist art history in the planning of a curatorial project as much as its reception…'[26] As an examination of the centre, this thesis does not consider grassroots spaces and practices that are 'designated in a space apart' for many such examples have feminism at their core.

For the purpose of this thesis, I define the centre or mainstream as well-established museums and institutions with governing structures (both private and public), commercial galleries, auction houses, as well as arts magazines and publications that primarily write about and respond to these spaces. Key examples include major museums such as MoMA, Tate, Centre Pompidou, or Moderna Museet; smaller-scale non-collecting institutions such as the Serpentine Galleries, Institute for Contemporary Art Miami, or Kunsthalle Basel; arts press such as *Frieze, Artforum, The Art Newspaper* or *Art Review*; and commercial galleries and auction houses such as Hauser & Wirth, Allison Jacques, David Zwirner, Sotheby's, and Christies. It borrows Howard Becker (1984) and Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) understandings of the art world as a cooperation of several different participants including artists, supplier of materials, art distributors

[24] Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Feminism, Art, Contradictions', 6.
[25] Renée Baert, 'Editorial', *n.paradoxa,* Issue 18, no. July (2006), 4.
[26] Katy Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s', in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Blackwall Publishing, 2008), 69.

(galleries, museums, institutions), critics, and audiences, as well as writer Sarah Thornton's definition of the contemporary art world as 'a loose network of overlapping subcultures held together by a belief in art. They span the globe but cluster in capitals such as New York, London, Los Angeles, and Berlin… Art world insiders tend to play one of six distinct roles: artist, dealer, curator, critic, collector, or auction house expert.'[27] In addition, I recognise that the term 'infrastructural change' is wide-reaching and could mean changes to all institutional structures from staffing, leadership, governance, and mission. While these aspects do remain of critical importance across the arts sector, for the purposes of this research I define it in relation to the display and discussion of artists and their art works within institutions and museums, for example: institutional programming and exhibition-making, and the museum collection.

My research is geographically positioned as an examination of the Western art world – namely Europe (which includes the United Kingdom) and North America – as this is both where this trend has occurred and where my curatorial practice is situated. While the Western the art world has arguably been expanding its geographical reach from its traditional Euro-American axis towards a more global outlook since the 1990s, the trend that this thesis is concerned with is the recovery of figures who have been ignored from within the Euro-American context. In addition, throughout this work I draw primarily from Anglo-American feminist scholarship. Throughout the thesis I use the terms 'artist-woman/women' and 'artist-man/men' instead of 'woman artist' and 'artist' as an attempt to move away from the othering that placing 'woman' in front of the word 'artist' inevitably creates. A more expansive explanation of this is discussed later in this introduction.

The thesis unfolds over four chapters – the first is an exploration of one genealogy of feminist curating from 1970s to the 1990s. The subsequent chapters are in-depth case studies, analysing the exhibitions and curatorial work that have showcased three artist-women – Hilma af Klint (1862–1944), Lee Lozano (1930–1999) and Betye Saar (1926–). Each of these artists has been 'rediscovered' or gained wider visibility since 2007, despite previously being largely absent from mainstream art histories. The following sections of this introduction provide the wider context on which the rest of the thesis is grounded – giving a brief overview of scholarship from the 1970s to the recent present that has examined the systemic marginalisation of artist-women from art history and its sites of visibility (namely museums and

[27] Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (London: Granta Publications, 2008), xi.

institutions). It also highlights the critical questions that arose in the scholarship around this topic after 2007, many of which remain pertinent, if not urgent, to the present moment and this research.

Feminisms' Cycles and Returns

The feminist-focussed, women-only exhibitions that emerged in 2007 and in its immediate wake became an important topic of discussion in recent feminist scholarship precisely because they had generated greater visibility for artist-women and a re-awakening of critical questions. Art historian Sue Malvern, for example, explored the concept of a 'return' within feminist exhibitions and curating, arguing that the feminist exhibitions and debates about feminist legacies that occurred in 2007 were preceded by two other conjunction points: 1996 and the early 1980s. Malvern names 1996 as significant as this is when two critically important exhibitions occurred: *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party'*, curated by Amelia Jones at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Catherine de Zegher's project *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of and from the Feminine* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston. The 1980s is noted as a decade of 'intense feminist activism, which culminated in significant exhibitions at institutional venues supported by substantial or scholarly catalogues and critical appraisal in specialised press.'[28] For this time period, the exhibitions mentioned by Malvern include: *Issue, About Time* and *Women's Images of Men* (1980) at the ICA, London; *Sense and Sensibility in Feminist Art Practice* (1982) in Nottingham. Malvern claims that,

> It is axiomatic that any listing of feminist exhibition for the last thirty years must be partial and selective… These two periods also bear some relationship to the way in which the 1970s culminated in major shows and then, it seems, fragmented. At work in this trajectory – 1980, 1996 and 2007 – is a sense of repetition and recurrence, almost as though feminist curatorship inscribes itself within a cyclical history.[29]

Art historian Francesco Ventrella also provided illuminating analysis of recent feminist curatorial projects and their public reception in 'Temporalities of the 'Feminaissance'' (2017). 'Feminaissance', was a term coined by Vivian Groskop in her article 'All hail the feminassaince!' (*The Guardian*, 2007), which she used to refer to exhibitions and feminist events that had taken place in the global art scene in recent years.[30] Similar to Malvern's analysis, the idea of a cyclical pattern in the curation of feminist exhibitions was

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[28] Malvern, 'Rethinking "Inside the Visible"', 106.
[29] Malvern, 106.
[30] Vivian Groskop 'All Hail the Feminaissance', *The Guardian*, 11 May 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/may/11/art.gender (accessed December 2018)

explored by Ventrella, who adopted Clare Hemmings' concept of how feminist art history has been consistently portrayed through one of three narratives – progress, loss, and return. Hemmings' book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (2011) proposed that these narratives, each with their own set of defining tropes, 'oversimplify this complex history and position feminist subjects as needing to inhabit a theoretical and political cutting edge in the present.'[31] The continued repetition of these narratives therefore 'refute[s] the possibilities for other versions' to be told.'[32] Ventrella deployed Hemmings' concept of progress, loss and return directly onto the accounts of feminism that three feminist survey exhibitions each presented – 51st Venice Biennale curated by Maria de Corral and Rosa Martínez (2005), *WOMAN: The Feminist Avant-garde of the 1970s* (National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome, 2010), and *Self-Portrait: Inscriptions of the Feminine in Contemporary Art* (Museum of Modern Art, Bologna, 2013) – demonstrating how Hemmings' analysis of art history can also be mapped on to feminist exhibition-making.

The problem that Ventrella highlights is that the rhetoric of 'return' in relation to such feminist exhibitions does precisely as Hemmings argued and oversimplifies feminism. If feminism, 'was over and now its back', it 'reproduces the idea that the subject of feminism remains the same.'[33] In direct relation to the exhibitions Ventrella focused upon, he asked: 'does this revival mark a new wave of feminist politics, or has the nostalgia conveyed by the narrative of revival created yet another separation between institutions and activism?'[34] This question remains relevant to this research as it seems critical to explore whether the ongoing curatorial trend of recovering previously overlooked artist-women offers a new form of feminist curating or whether it is merely part of this prolonged revival cycle, with no sustained longevity.

In his essay Ventrella intimates that through such feminist exhibitions the Anglo-American art world remains stuck on recounting the initial polarisation of the positions first discussed in feminist art history in the 1970s: 'The first [position] argued that women's work had been deliberately neglected in the past, as they still are in the present history of art; the second [position] proposed that women had always been present as artists but in a variety of positions and competencies which did not necessarily correspond to the parameters established by the canons of modern art history.'[35] The positions Ventrella outlines are

[31] Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011), 3.
[32] Clare Hemmings, 62.
[33] Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, 'Introduction: Feminism and Art History Now', in Horne & Perry (eds.) *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, (London: I.B. Lauris: 2017), 5.
[34] Francesco Ventrella, 'Temporalities of the 'Feminassaince'', in Horne & Perry (2017), 209
[35] Ventrella, 209

those given by Griselda Pollock in her 1979 text 'Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978'. She outlines the first position as being a proposition by the 'American feminists' and the second, in opposition to this, by herself and Roszika Parker in their widely acclaimed book from 1979, *Old Mistresses, Women Art & Ideology*.[36]

The contribution of second-wave American feminism, however, cannot be solely reduced to the 'neglect of women artists in the past and the discrimination of contemporary women artists.'[37] Art historians Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (who are both important feminist art historians in their own right) discussed the various American feminist art historical positions in their 1987 essay 'Feminist Art History and the Academy: Where are We Now?'.[38] Further to women's exclusion due to institutional bias one view, largely led by art historian and critic Lucy Lippard and artist Judy Chicago, explored whether there might be a separate female aesthetic. Another outlook was that of Patricia Mainardi (1942–), who proposed a re-evaluation of the female craft tradition by defending 'quilting and other needle arts as *universal* female genres, which offered qualities equivalent to those of the "fine" arts—formal complexity and beauty, personal expression, social and communal meaning—and she questioned the devaluation of textile arts, their subordination to the fine arts and their exclusion from art history.'[39] One of the final views discussed by Broude and Garrard is that of art historians Eleanor Tufts (1927–1991) and Alessandra Comini (1934–). They proposed that a 'feminist perspective can lead to the reformulation of the entire history of art,' as they each 'advocated [for] the reinvigoration of traditional art history through the inclusion of women.'[40]

One of the key perspectives in feminist art history and arguably the most enduring influence on contemporary feminist thought, however, still remains art historian Linda Nochlin's iconic 1971 essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?'[41] It is almost impossible to find literature examining feminist theory, feminist art history or feminist curating which does not reference this text since its publication. Nochlin's premise that the art establishment and institutions are structurally sexist is an argument that carries through much of the literature from second-wave feminist thought (including those positions

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[36] Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism, Femininity and the Hayward Annual Exhibition 1978', *Feminist Review*, No. 2 (1979), 34.
[37] Pollock (1979), 34
[38] Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, 'Feminist Art History and the Academy: Where are We Now?', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Spring/Summer 1987, 212–222
[39] Broude and Garrard, 215
[40] Broude and Garrard, 216
[41] Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', *ARTnews* January 1971 (accessed online October 2018: http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/)

outlined above), to what is being written today. Her article ends with an important call to women for what Griselda Pollock terms 'a paradigm shift':[42]

> …using as a vantage point their situation as underdogs in the realm of grandeur, and outsiders in that of ideology, women can reveal institutional and intellectual weaknesses in general, and, at the same time that they destroy false consciousness, take part in the creation of institutions in which clear thought—and true greatness—are challenges open to anyone, man or woman, courageous enough to take the necessary risk, the leap into the unknown.[43]

While Nochlin's text has been crucial to feminist art history, it has been rightly criticised for its lack of attendance to the issue of race which was prevalent among much feminist scholarship at that time and in the second-wave feminist movement as a whole. In *Why Are There No Great Black Artists? The Problem of Visuality in African American Culture* (1991) – a direct reference to Nochlin's text – writer and critic Michele Wallace explored the lack of visibility for many African American visual artists, writing that they have largely been ignored by mainstream arts organisations. Wallace's essay successfully critiques the failings of Nochlin's text to fully integrate black women into her argument by her use of the phrase "and blacks too," stating, 'the insight of the most recent generation of feminists of color has been that blacks (or black women or women of colour or black men) cannot be tacked onto formulations about gender without engaging in a form of conceptual violence. In no theoretically useful way whatsoever are blacks *like* women.'[44] Wallace recognises Nochlin's successes, explaining that her criticism of the institution being completely inaccessible to women as being the same for black artists: 'black artists in the U.S. context have been subject to an even more absolute and devastating restriction upon their right to genius [and] individual talent…'[45]

Wallace's text followed Black feminist thought that came to prominence in the 1970s with the insistence that white women and white feminists confront their own racism, recognising that the second-wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s often ignored or excluded the specific issues that black women and women of colour faced: namely being doubly, or often triply, oppressed by racism, sexism, and class elitism. This is now known as 'intersectionality', a term coined by the lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. The notion of triple oppression, however, had been written about by the journalist and activist

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[42] G. Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998), xiii
[43] Nochlin (1971)
[44] Michele Wallace, 'Why Are There No Great Black Artists? The Problem of Visuality in African American Culture', in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace*, by Michele Wallace, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 189.
[45] Michele Wallace, 189.

Claudia Jones in 1949 in her text 'An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman', as well as by several other black feminist writers and activists in the 1970s and 1980s including Angela Davis, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Combahee River Collective, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, Patricia Hill Collins, and Alice Walker, among many others. Outlining the position of black women Morrison wrote in *The New York Times* in 1971: 'Black women are not convinced that Women's Lib serves their best interest or that it can cope with the uniqueness of their experience… Black women are different from white women because they view themselves differently, are viewed differently and lead a different kind of life.'[46] One of black feminisms' key strategies was to challenge triple oppression, as well as to articulate the difference described by Morrison. In 1991 hooks wrote that rather than use the term intersectionality, 'interconnected is a more vital way of framing the discourse in that it serves as a constant reminder that we cannot change one aspect of the system without changing the whole.'[47]

While Ventrella did not explicitly mention some of the positions outlined here, he had sought to emphasise more generally that many of the issues highlighted by these differing feminist positions still endure today as feminism remains a developing discussion. It was for this reason that he, following Pollock (1996) and Hemmings (2011), advocated for exhibitions that did not simply revive historic feminist debates but ones that created relationships between art and feminism which would demonstrate 'a synchronic configuration of debates within feminism, all of which have something valuable to contribute to the enlarging feminist enterprise.'[48]

Recovery and Revision

Revision and recovery have been important strategies in feminist theory since the 1970s. In 1972 writer and feminist Adrienne Rich advocated for revisionism: 're-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – it is for women far more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.'[49] Further articulating why revision was so critical at that period in the beginnings of second-wave feminism and 'awakening consciousness,' Rich writes, 'we need to know the

[46] Toni Morrison, 'What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib', *The New York Times*, 22 August 1971, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1971/08/22/archives/what-the-black-woman-thinks-about-womens-lib-the-black-woman-and.html.
[47] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2015), xii.
[48] Ventrella, 210.
[49] Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', *College English*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Women, Writing and Teaching (October 1972), 18.

writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.'[50] It is not simply the case of recovering women, but to use revision as a means to change the system from within.

The nature of the art historical canon and its male-dominated structure is much explored territory in feminist art history. In *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1998) Pollock defined the canon as 'a discursive formation which constitutes the objects/texts it selects as the products of artistic mastery and, thereby, contributes to the legitimation of white masculinity's exclusive identification with creativity and with Culture.'[51] Providing a feminist critique of the canon, Pollock lays out the complexities involved in what she terms 'differencing the canon' in order to make systemic and lasting change. Differencing is an *active* re-reading and reworking, rather than a simple revision. As Nochlin had previously explored, Pollock concludes that the act of simply adding women to the existing canon could not provide an adequate solution because the very foundation of the canon relies upon the 'category of a negated femininity in order to secure the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity.'[52] A similar argument was eloquently argued by writer, feminist and political activist Audre Lorde in her critical essay *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House* (1989). Lorde argued that it is impossible for women to dismantle structures using their own systems, 'they may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.'[53]

In *Curatorial Activism* (2018) Maura Reilly echoed Rich's argument for revision writing: 'not only do [revisionist strategies] address critical exclusions, but they can also provide a deeper, more contextual understanding of key issues by creating space within white male institutions and mainstream discourses that help audiences understand the visual culture from a wholly different perspective.'[54] Writing over 40 decades later than Rich, and with the benefit of knowledge of what has happened during that period in feminist politics, Reilly ultimately devalues revisionism as an effective feminist strategy, following Pollock, arguing that it 'ultimately accepts the centrality of the white male western canon, and can even strengthen it by

[50] Rich (1972), 19
[51] Pollock (1998), 9
[52] Pollock (1998), 5
[53] Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House', in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (Silver Press, 2017), 89–93.
[54] Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: towards an ethics of curating*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 25

maintaining criteria that are prejudicial or inapplicable to disparate cultures.'[55] Art historian Patricia Allmer, in discussing artist-women in relation to the Dada and Surrealism movements, also rebuffs the usefulness of rediscovery arguing, 'periodically their excision from critical accounts creates conditions for their "rediscovery," a notion making them vulnerable to being ideologically constructed as "little-known" and thus devoid of influence. A "rediscovered" artist can have had little influence during the period prior to her "rediscovery."'[56] This critical topic of influence, both in the past and at the time of an artist's discovery, will be discussed in more depth later in my case studies.

Despite the ongoing debate over the productiveness of the strategies of revision and recovery in feminist discourse, it has been evident through the current trend in focus here that it remains a favoured approach by museums and institutions seeking to address their prior exclusions. In her foreword to Reilly's book, Lucy Lippard noted that revisionism 'is always popular at the beginning of such [feminist] journeys and can correct some past deficiencies, providing a base for contemporary work.'[57] The intention of this research, then, is to interrogate the use of revisionism and recovery within the mainstream art world, determining both the successes and failures of such a contested approach.

Differencing the Canon

In reviewing recent scholarship on the topic of the canon and art history in feminist discourse – such as Ruth E. Iskin's *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives in a Global World* (2017), and Victoria Horne and Lara Perry's collection *Feminism and Art History Now* (2017) – it is clear that the notion of the traditional canon as described by Nochlin, Pollock, and others remains largely intact. This literature consistently highlights that feminism remains a developing discussion and/or movement. In 2018, for example, Pollock pronounced that feminism was 'far from being over and in the past… [it is] a project still to be created, and the capacity of feminism to transform us and our world is as yet unrealised.'[58] In her introduction to 'Troubling Canons: Curating and exhibiting women's and feminist art, a roundtable discussion' (2017), Helena Reckitt made a critical point, arguing that in order to 'reverse the endemic

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[55] Summarised by Lucy Lippard, 'Foreword', in Reilly (2018), 11

[56] Patricia Allmer, 'Feminist Interventions: Revising the Canon', in David Hopkins (ed.), *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 366.

[57] Lucy Lippard 'Foreword', in *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*, 2018, 11.

[58] Spoken at "Feminism and art theory now" at Haus der Kunst in Munich in May 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5Ett_UsxZo, accessed October 2018.

dismissal of women's work, we don't just need better, more diverse publications, exhibitions, collections and institutions devoted to their art. We need transformations on the infrastructural level that reflect feminist ethics, promote feminist values, and sustain feminist futures'.[59] Writing about feminisms' relationship to current art historical work Horne and Perry explained that 'like all political theories and movements, feminism is in a state of constant engagement with the transformations impelled by its own internal development and by its relations with the changing world.'[60] In *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) Sara Ahmed provided a poetic yet insightful metaphor for feminist action: 'I think of feminist action as like ripples in water, a small wave, possibly created by agitation from weather; here, there, each movement making another possible, another ripple, outward, reaching.'[61] Each of these perspectives sit in relation to one another to illuminate that the work of feminism remains important and necessary in the present.

Ruth Iskin's introduction to *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon* is an attempt to address the nature of the changing world and its impact on feminism. She seeks to address the ways in which the traditional art historical canon might have changed after shifts in the contemporary art field following 'the era of globalization'.[62] Her systematic and critical analysis of a number of important thematic group exhibitions, biennales, and particular artworks provides a valuable method to evaluate this. She argues that the wave of biennales globally has undoubtedly played a role in the wider inclusion of artists who have been historically marginalised from the centre. Citing Anthony Gardner and Charles Green's argument that biennales are 'agents of potential change,'[63] Iskin observes that the roles of museum and biennales have subtly shifted to the point that 'some museum exhibitions now resemble biennales in their selection of a wide range of emerging contemporary artists from far-flung locations, and several recent biennales have included distinctly historical components of the sort typically associated with museums.'[64] This is certainly the case with Tate and MoMA, whose ongoing expanding geographical acquisition policies and subsequent collection displays now include a larger number of artists from outside the traditional Western or European–American centre (or canon).[65] This also includes an increased number of women artists entering,

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[59] Helena Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and exhibiting women's and feminist art, a roundtable discussion' in Iskin (2017), 253-254
[60] Horne & Perry (2017), 1
[61] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.
[62] Iskin (2017), 2.
[63] Anthony Gardener and Charles Green, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global", *Third Text* 27, no. 4, (2013), cited in Iskin (2017), 10
[64] Iskin (2017), 11
[65] It is important to note that while this thesis focusses on the Western art historical canon, parallel canons do exist elsewhere.

and being shown in, these major museum collections. In terms of biennials, Iskin's observation could also, for example, be mapped on to *The Milk of Dreams* (2022), the central exhibition for the 59th Venice Biennale Arte. Here Cecilia Alemani (the curator), incorporated five smaller historical sections (which she termed as time-capsules) that explored key themes and references among historic art works that linked to the contemporary art works on display in the surrounding spaces.

Iskin evidences the incremental shifts taking place in terms of artist-women through her discussion of the major survey exhibition *elles@centrepompidou* which was shown at Centre Pompidou, Paris between 2009 and 2011. The exhibition was presented as a rehang of the Pompidou's collection, which ambitiously aimed to tell a story of contemporary art through the work of artist-women by including 343 artist-women whose work all belonged to the MNAM's collection.[66] The curatorial premise of *elles* was not simply to add women to the existing canon, it instead sought to present a counter-canon. Iskin debates the benefits of such counter-canons, claiming they can be an effective strategic tool insomuch as they provide a visible space for those who have previously been excluded.[67] It could be argued that with the case of *elles* this argument is negligible as the exhibition was able to take place precisely because works by artist-women had been collected by MNAM. However, their exclusion should be understood by the fact that the works of art by women artists only make up 18% of MNAM's overall collections, and 25% of the contemporary collections.[68] In opposition to the benefits of counter-canons however, Iskin also emphasises the risk of ghettoization that *elles* puts forward, as it reinforces the notion of women as 'Other':

> As with race, so in the case of gender we find that independently of counter-canons, an androcentric viewpoint continues to stereotype women artists in ways that limit our understanding of their oeuvres. It also obscures the connections of women artists to their contemporaneous artistic circles and removes them from lineages of artists and movements so that their contribution to art's evolution goes unacknowledged. The result is that women artists are excluded from the connections established by historical accounts, connections that are crucial to establishing an artist's place in the canon.[69]

The emphasis of 'Other' is not the only issue with *elles*. Despite its public popularity – its run was extended from just over a year to a year and nine months – after it closed, the Pompidou's permanent

[66] The facts given by Iskin have been complemented by facts stated in Hilary Robinson's *Feminism Meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows since 2005*, 'Curating in Feminist Thought', *OnCurating* Issue 29 / May 2016.
[67] Iskin (2017), 13
[68] Camille Morineau, 'elles:centrepompidou: Addressing Difference', in *elles@centrepompidou*, exh. cat. (Paris: MNAM. 2009)
[69] Iskin (2017), 13–14

collection reverted back to displaying art works by 10% women and 90% men.[70] Its legacy within the institution is therefore reduced to a memory of an event that once happened, having little or no impact on subsequent displays or exhibitions within the institution, even though it had at first appeared to be pioneering in its curatorial approach. The lack of legacies provided by such an exhibition is maintained by curator Maura Reilly (curator of the exhibition *Global Feminisms* and the founding curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum). In a 2009 roundtable discussion entitled 'Feminist Curating and the "Return" of Feminist Art', when answering Amelia Jones' question in relation to 'the explosive resurgence of interest in histories of feminist art', Reilly responded with,

> while I agree wholeheartedly that there has been an enormous resurgence of interest in feminist art over the past several years—as manifest in multiple international exhibitions, symposia, publications, and so forth— I must say I question whether it truly represents "a huge shift back to taking feminism seriously"? I'm not so certain… I guess I wonder *who* is taking feminism seriously?... it needs to be said that such program "choices" are most often a one-shot deal, often never to be repeated.[71]

This opinion feels even more disheartening when you read the curator of *elles',* Camille Morineau, essay for the catalogue that accompanied her exhibition. Optimistically Morineau predicts that only after an exhibition like *elles*, 'attention to this criterion of balancing the sexes, like other equally internalised norms, will become so natural that we no longer need to count. Meanwhile we are at a stage of crucial impact.'[72]

What the example of *elles* specifically reveals is that despite a concentrated effort to create alternative narratives within the history of art, the master narrative largely remains the same; 'arguably, major modern and contemporary Western art museums play a double game when they claim their place in the era of globalisation by mounting such "revisionist" exhibitions without giving up their universalist, European Enlightenment tradition.'[73] This line of enquiry is reiterated by Elisabeth Lebovici who writes that 'women's exhibitions should take up the task of challenging the very hierarchical orders that give exhibitions its set of rules, conventions and expectations. A women artists' exhibition organised in the very rooms shaped by their exclusion seems to defeat the purpose, especially when the curators' task of recovery and inclusion is the only vehicle to interpret the art works.'[74]

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[70] Iskin (2017), 14
[71] Connie Butler, Amelia Jones, and Maura Reilly, 'Feminist Curating and the "Return" of Feminist Art' 2009, in Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminist and Virtual Cultures Reader*, (London: Routledge, Second Edition, 2010), 31
[72] Morineau (2009), 16
[73] Morineau (2009), 15
[74] Cited in Ventrella (2017), in Horne & Perry (2017), 219

In 2015 Amelia Jones emphasised a further issue with 'revisionist' survey exhibitions – the fact that commercial galleries are beginning to represent and show more artist-women in their programmes. Using the inaugural exhibition at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel's Los Angeles gallery (while Schimmel is no longer part of the partnership in LA, Hauser & Wirth is one of the art world's largest, wealthiest, and therefore influential galleries), *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016*, which called itself 'fundamentally revisionist' in its press release as an example, Jones outlines the problematic nature of such a move:

> The title of the exhibition, which includes 100 works by 34 women artists, does not include the word feminism – rather, the focus is on "sculpture by women", along with the frisson created by this unlikely combination (given the long history of masculinist values attached to sculpture in particular among the arts.) When a major commercial gallery sees fit to promote its interests by hosting a show that is marketed as "revisionist" and is thus implicitly feminist show as its inaugural event, we know feminist curating (and feminist modes of writing history) have become not only acceptable but trendy – as long as they don't announce themselves as feminist.
>
> After decades of studied neglect on the part of galleries, museums, and the art market in general, all of this renewed interest in feminist art – both historical and contemporary – makes me nervous.[75]

Jones' fears were specifically grounded in trying to understand the motivations of such projects – if the recovery of work by artist-women has become fashionable and therefore both marketable and sellable, is the incentive grounded more in capital (and this could mean cultural capital as well as monetary) than in a commitment to feminist values? This question is explored in detail in Chapter 3, where I examine Lee Lozano's representation by Hauser & Wirth Gallery.

Even though this narrative seems to offer only the shortcomings of the large-scale group exhibition, it is important to note such projects celebrating and promoting the work by artist-women and feminism more widely do remain important and necessary. This is an opinion supported by Angela Dimitrikaki who stated that feminist exhibitions 'are important, no matter what the shortcomings.'[76] Similarly Morineau, when asked this question by Helena Reckitt in a roundtable discussion said,

> all these group shows have been landmarks, if only because they have been so rare and most often the result of a fight… In terms of how these exhibitions contributed to processes of canonization, I would say they made artists and their work visible; they started a reflection, they questioned a narrative and initiated a new/a plurality of new

[75] Jones (2015),14
[76] Iskin (2007), 264

> narratives. A "canon" takes, if not centuries, then dozens of years to build. So we are in a process.[77]

These statements support the continued exhibition work in the centre that touches upon feminist themes and methods as a vital part of feminisms' ongoing project. They also give rise to the necessity of this research which is driven by the need for a more in-depth examination of how individual artists are being positioned to understand if and how old narratives are being disrupted, and what new narratives are being developed.

Modernism and the Feminist Problematic

MoMA was founded by three women – Lillie P. Bliss (1864–1931), Mary Quinn Sullivan (1877–1939), and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller (1874–1948) – who wanted to create a museum dedicated to modern art. It is Alfred H. Barr Jr. (1902–1981), however, MoMA's founding director who is more widely known and celebrated as the architect of how we now understand the history of modern art, through his favouring of a chronological and formalist approach to displaying the museum collection. Furthermore, Barr's schematic model of groups and movements of art into schools of thought and technique remains a prevalent system for how modern art is organised and thought about within the museum. This model has been rejected by feminists such as Griselda Pollock precisely because it has made it 'structurally impossible for art history to recognise the contributions and interventions made by creative women in the twentieth century that do not conform to this ahistorical chronological evolution of styles and movements.'[78] Pollock explores this impossible task of inclusion further in *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007). Pollock defines virtuality as 'the attribute of feminism as a project still to come.'[79] Her 'museum' follows the logics of connections and associations that are distinct, and opposed to 'the logics of connection and association which are permitted by canonized art history and are still apparent in contemporary art installations, art exhibitions and art curation. That is to say the cult of the individual artist, or the group show and thematic representations.'[80] Pollock states that the museum (and other institutions within the art world) remain

[77] Iskin (2007), 264-265

[78] Griselda Pollock, 'The Missing Future : MoMA and Modern Women', in *MODERN WOMEN: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Cornelia Butler and A. Schwartz, 2nd ed. (New Y0rk: Department of Publications, MoMA, 2010), 51.

[79] Lecture: "Feminism and Art theory now" at Haus der Kunst in Munich in May 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5Ett_UsxZo , accessed October 2018.

[80] Pollock (2018)

fundamentally unchanged and therefore any exhibitions within it cannot claim to have feminist values fully at their core. Furthermore, she has strongly advocated that art historians and curators need to move past their current understandings of modernist culture and open up to 'radically different models.'[81] Pollock is clearly advocating for different models inside mainstream institutions, and not the number of alternative spaces or grass-roots organisations that have been set up since the 1970s specifically for the work of artist-women, writers, and thinkers, often as a result of dissatisfaction with those larger institutions. I speak here of spaces such as Womanhouse in Los Angeles, or A.I.R Gallery in New York, which were explicitly founded as feminist spaces for the work of artist-women.

In discussing the problematics of how to begin installing (or including) the work of artist-women in the museum (in this case MoMA, New York), in part due to the manner in which they have been structured to tell patrilineal histories, curator Helen Molesworth writes,

> This is why art historians have so often turned to the task of recovery and inclusion (we can think here of recent retrospectives of Joan Snyder, Lee Lozano, Lee Bontecou, as well as *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*). The work of recovery is important; I have done it myself and will continue to do so. But I am increasingly puzzled about how to reinsert these absences, repressions and omissions into the narrative continuum favoured by the museum.[82]

This argument echoes, once again, Audre Lorde's metaphor of being unable to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. Molesworth's essay is an inspiring attempt to present a possible way of doing this. Instead of reinserting women into the chronological narrative, she offers a fantasy room within the museum showcasing the work of five women artists – Joan Synder, Cindy Sherman, Amy Sillman, Wangechi Mutu and Dana Schultz – in an ahistorical presentation where the works 'talk to each other'[83]. However, the problem still remains that in a museum which favours the narrative continuum, such displays become impossible to contextualise without the risk of ghettoization and the affirmation of the existing canon.

Pollock and Molesworth both name curator Catherine de Zegher's *Inside the Visible: an Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine* (1996) as a good example of how an exhibition can speak across time (Pollock uses the term 'generations') and geographies, in order to avoid the well-trodden narratives that encourage the exclusion of artist-women. The exhibition, as Pollock explains, 'refused the

[81] Pollock, 'The Missing Future : MoMA and Modern Women', 50.
[82] Molesworth (2010), 504
[83] Molesworth (2010), 504

directional telos of a developmental, formalist schema for the unidirectional advance of modern art.'[84] The exhibition was centred around four thematic sections that each contained art works that came from three specific time periods: 1930s-40s, 1960s-70s, and the 1990s. This allowed for 'several recurrent cycles, rather than a linear survey with its investment in artistic quality and genealogies, [to form the] structure the exhibition.'[85] Pollock described it as 'an *elliptical traverse*, a crisscrossing backward and forward as well as a circling movement across the terrain of aesthetic practices that involved placing in new and revealing relations art works made from three moments of historical and cultural significance.'[86]

In the exhibition de Zegher neither attempted to correct the existing canon, nor offered an 'alternative canon of missing women.' As such, she allowed for a variety of marginalised practices that were not typically found in mainstream accounts of art history at that time to emerge. Renée Baert argued that this allowed de Zegher to, 'identify and articulate a body of practice that doesn't 'fit' past histories and current debates, which has existed in its byways, and whose 'non-fit' speaks to aporias within modernism, and indeed within contemporary feminist theory.'[87] Further crucial aspects of this exhibition for feminist curation will be explored in more detail in Chapter 1.

This concept of creating and telling non-linear histories is the focus of Clare Johnson's book *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art* (2013), which focusses on supporting 'a model of art history that emphasises the back and forth of matrilineal resonance, not an unbroken line.'[88] Much like Molesworth's fantasy room at MoMA, Johnson's introduction discusses the need to focus on inter-generational dialogues. Her understanding of this is grounded in Julia Kristeva's belief that we need to stop thinking of generations as a chronological sequence, where one generation follows another, but rather as another type of space. As Johnson explains,

> …when Kristeva speaks of a third generation of women forming in Europe, she does not mean an overarching feminist movement. Instead she champions the idea of a third generation (a third attitude) existing in parallel to existing generations in the same historical time. In Kristeva's formulation, different generations can be understood as interwoven, rather than running in succession, which is to aid my thinking about what it means in an inter-generational space.[89]

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[84] Griselda Pollock, 'The Missing Future : MoMA and Modern Women', 51.
[85] Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Eliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine*, 2nd ed. (The MIT Press, 1996), 20.
[86] Pollock, 'The Missing Future : MoMA and Modern Women', 51.
[87] Cited in Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s', 73.
[88] Clare Johnson, *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art:* (Springer Nature, 2013), 11.
[89] Johnson, 8

Both Johnson and Molesworth's position on alternative models of time utilise the concept of a rhizomatic approach, where there are multiple entry and exit points for the viewer to understand the work. *Inside the Visible,* according to Pollock and Molesworth, was a successful way to do this. The use of liner or non-linear time and inter-generational relationships of influence are important feminist methods and are discussed multiple times across all four chapters of this thesis.

Lara Perry has suggested that the impact of feminist art history and theory is evident in many of Tate Modern's activities, including: its thematic collection displays that appear to reject the traditional museological chronological narrative; the inclusion of a wider range of media in the contemporary collections displays – performance, film, installation – reflecting a move away from the previously favoured status of painting and sculpture; and its opening up of its spaces for different types of social interaction, which Perry argues, 'defies, as feminist critique does, the notion of the disembodied viewer of art.'[90] In addition to this Perry cites the many high profile exhibitions of artist-women in the programme since its opening in 2000, including the first Turbine Hall commission by Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), which I would argue sparked the subsequent renewed interest in her career and led to a wave of major exhibitions of her work including Tate Modern's own retrospective in 2008. Doris Salcedo (1958–), Rachel Whiteread (1963–), Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (1965–) and Tacita Dean (1965–) were the four other women artists who received Turbine Hall commissions between 2000 to 2012. During this twelve-year period five out of twelve artists commissioned were women. During the same period major retrospectives by Eva Hesse (1936–1970) in 2003, Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) in 2005, Roni Horn (1955–) in 2009 and Yayoi Kusama (1929–) in 2012 were programmed. While these might be important milestones with Tate Modern's engagement with questions of femininity and gender, these exhibitions are still noticeably sporadic and account for a very small number of all exhibitions held at Tate Modern over that period.

Published in 2013, Perry's essay sits within a volume (*Politics in a Glass Case*) dedicated to evaluating the impact of the wave of interest in feminism by museums from 2007 to 2012. Since 2013, however, the landscape has continued to change and it is clear that we are currently experiencing an acceleration, or arguably a different approach, to addressing feminism and other marginalised groups by the art world and

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[90] Lara Perry, '"A Good Time to Be a Woman?" Women Artists, Feminism and Tate Modern', in *Politics in a Glass: Case Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 31–47.

its institutions. As previously mentioned, Tate are markedly signalling their increased dedication to artist-women through almost back-to-back retrospectives at Tate Modern, which followed the appointment of Frances Morris as Director in 2016. Furthermore, following a period of expansion, MoMA re-opened in October 2019 with more space and a dedication to change the way it presented its collection, with greater focus on works by women, Latinos, African Americans and other overlooked artists, and for the first time they integrated differing media within the galleries – bringing painting, sculpture, photography, installation, film, performance and design together.[91] In the pre-opening press release they stated their intentions to rotate the collection more regularly with the hope of displaying works that may have been part of the collection for many years but have been continually overlooked and left in storage.

Between 2007 and 2019 MoMA engaged in two research projects that reflected on their relationship to two separate and yet interconnected marginalised groups – artist-women and black artists. The first was *Modern Women*, which was ignited by the symposium *The Feminist Future* (previously mentioned), and aimed to 'help define the current state of feminist discourses, the role of gender in contemporary art and scholarship, and the ways in which gender is addressed by museums and in academia.'[92] This project culminated in a large book published in 2010 – *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art* – which is described as a ground-breaking examination of the Museum's collection, bringing to light the work of underrecognized artist-women.[93] The second project also produced a large publication – *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (2019) – that traced a chronological history of the institutions engagement with black artists. This publication provided an honest appraisal of this engagement and it does not shy away from highlighting MoMA's bias, blindness, and racist tendencies. It included an evaluation of its exhibition and collection display histories, acquisitions, and archival material that included letters from curators, and other office-related papers. These two research projects indicate the museum's vital reflection on its history of exclusions, and as such it would be hard not to conclude that they had an impact on how the museum decided to re-hang its collection in 2019.

In a preview of MoMA's 2019 re-hang in the *New York Times* Jason Farago celebrated the pairing of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) – one of the museum's most renowned paintings – with Faith

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[91] Robin Pogrebin, 'MoMA to Close, Then Open Doors to More Expansive View of Art', *The New York Times*, 5 February 2019. (accessed February 2019)
[92] https://www.moma.org/calendar/events/3373 (accessed February 2019)
[93] https://www.moma.org/interactives/modern_women/book/, accessed February 2019.

Ringgold's *American People Series #20: Die* (1967) writing, 'pairing Picasso with a black American artist from the 1960s would have been unthinkable here 15 years prior; it shatters the museum's chronological spine, and magnifies the colonial and sexual violence inherent in the African-influenced "Demoiselles."'[94] For her *Artforum* review, however, Helen Molesworth gave a feminist-critique of this pairing calling it 'soft.' She argued:

> Ringgold's epic picture does not disturb the iconicity of the Picasso—it confirms it, reiterating how powerful a force that painting is… Rather, the gallery feels like a ghost of the old MoMA story: you know, the one about swaggering men making triumphant pictures that change the course of history. In the game of collection rotation, I'm convinced the only winning play is to commit to keeping the Ringgold prominently on view for a few decades, in a gallery where *it* is the generating force. We can't unsee the Picasso.[95]

Both Farago and Molesworth's points are valid and thought-provoking for this research. It suggests that while there appears to be the beginnings of breaking down some of MoMA's old habits of linear progression by providing inter-generational displays, they ultimately remain tethered to displaying, and in some sense perpetuating, the power of iconicity that has consistently been imparted onto the work of 'genius' artist-men. What Molesworth is suggesting is that in order to impart the same iconicity to Ringgold's work MoMA has to commit to not only keeping it on permanent display but to use it as a work with which narratives are consistently centred around. As she reasons, '*Les demoiselles* accrued its iconicity and power through its constant display, through the way it was handled, discussed, installed, and imagined.'[96] This one example is seemingly symptomatic of some of the uneven progressiveness that MoMA's re-hang presents. As Farago later writes in his preview, 'the presentation is still broadly chronological, but features detours, anachronisms and surprise encounters.'[97] Chapter 2 includes a further discussion of MoMA's recent collection display choices by exploring its insertion of a painting by Hilma af Klint into a room that remains very much wedded to the modernist teleological history of art, evidencing that further work needs to be done to truly embed feminist principles into the museum.

These examples, which demonstrate MoMA's resistance to fully untangle itself from chronology altogether, resonate strongly with another argument made by Perry about Tate Modern. Delving into deeper

[94] Jason Farago, 'The New MoMA Is Here. Get Ready for Change.', *The New York Times*, 3 October 2019, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/03/arts/design/moma-renovation.html.
[95] Helen Molesworth, 'HELEN MOLESWORTH ON THE REINSTALLATION OF MOMA'S PERMANENT COLLECTION', *Artforum,* Vol. 58, No.5, January 2020, 146.
[96] Helen Molesworth, 146
[97] Farago, 'The New MoMA Is Here. Get Ready for Change.'

analysis of how the thematic collection displays were curated, Perry uncovered (in archived meeting minutes) that they were to remain largely dedicated to 'fine art' and centred around an 'extended modernism'. For Perry, this meant that,

> …while the Tate might present a face of modernism that may at times be unfamiliar, it was not going to be one that was properly different: it would remain a gallery of modern art in the recognised sense. What lies at the core of that distinction, and which has been evident in Tate Modern's displays from the first iteration in 2000 until the present [she is writing in 2012], is that it is *the formal character of the artworks that are subject to attention in the gallery, its curation and interpretation, rather than their political or social character*. The objects – their medium, their form, their semiotic and material references – are interpreted for the visitor; but their histories, purposed and polemics are side-lined. This means that at the same time that women's artwork, and nominally feminine themes and practices, have a greater presence in the museum than ever before, *those works are being read and represented in ways that tend to neutralise their politics*.[98]

There are two points to focus on here. One is that the persistent use of 'modernism' as the core of what informs museums such as MoMA and Tate's collections, and more importantly, display policies are something to be cautious of because while on the surface they seem to be making progress, they ultimately remain tethered to a system which has perpetually excluded female voices. Or, as Molesworth established, even when displayed the works by artist-women are made to appear 'lesser' due to the pervasive historic privileging of artist-men over artist-women.

Language

The use of language has been an important topic of feminist discussion, leading Griselda Pollock to write that 'language is a serious issue for feminism as we try to think about the racist, heteronormative, gender-normative and capitalist patriarchal universe of meanings that form our symbolic systems.'[99] As such, Perry's analysis of Tate Modern extended beyond its programmatic choices to critique the display and interpretative choices made by the museum. She notes that while the former may indicate an influence of feminist politics, 'the relationship between these innovations and feminism as a critical apparatus is disavowed: the word feminism barely surfaces in the gallery's vocabulary, and feminism's impact as a critical and political movement in art has barely been acknowledged in its displays.'[100] This relationship of the interpretation and framing of the work of artist-women is further developed by art historian Alexandra M. Kokoli in an essay

[98] Perry, '"A Good Time to Be a Woman?" Women Artists, Feminism and Tate Modern', 37, *emphases my own*
[99] Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism and Language', in *A Companion to Feminist Art* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2019), 261.
[100] Perry, '"A Good Time to Be a Woman?" Women Artists, Feminism and Tate Modern'., 32

which appears in the same volume as Perry's. Kokoli analyses how the layout, translation of ideas and text panels have an impact on the gender politics of exhibitions and display by looking more broadly at the effect of curatorial choices. Mirroring Perry's position, Kokoli introduces Joanne Heath's argument that many exhibitions of artist-women 'have been contingent upon a more or less explicit exclusion of feminism.'[101] By this Heath means that feminism is not used in text panels that show case the work of artist-women. Kokoli centres her essay around the use of (auto-)biographism in curatorial practices. She cites a text panel from a display at the Pompidou devoted to minimal painting from 2008, whereby Agnes Martin's (1912–2004) work was placed in a room with artist-men such as Robert Ryman (1930– 2019) and Martin Barré (1924–1996). The text panel Kokoli argues, through its carefully chosen wording, reduces Martin's practice to form and vague psychological references, whereas Ryman's work is discussed in terms of modernist autonomy. Kokoli reads the sentences on Bourgeois as biographical and thus concludes that the panel 'does not simply come across as sexist but impoverishes the range of Martin's possible interpretations, compromises the richness of her work and Minimalist painting alike.'[102] I agree that this disparity between how Bourgeois and Ryman are discussed is problematic, however there are cases where using (auto-) biographism is necessary and positive. For example, in her essay *Minimalism and Biography* (2000) art historian Anna C. Chave argued that Eva Hesse's refusal to divorce her work from her identity as a woman is precisely what helped 'disrupt the proceedings-as-usual.'[103]

Kokoli extended her arguments around (auto-)biographism by discussing the complexities of contemporary curating. She stated that this is in part due to a difficulty in defining it, and that it also undoubtedly includes a variety of other voices and arts professionals working across marketing, sponsorship, press etc., which may have influence over certain decisions. Despite this Kokoli suggests that,

> …even the most established and perhaps constitutionally conservative of art institutions can no longer afford to (be seen to) completely disregard feminist art history and theorisations of the visual. Nevertheless, the uptake of feminist insights has been partial at best, with sometimes confused and confusing or even altogether counterproductive results. Whether and how this situation can be rectified is the questions that this chapter culminates in; addressing it is the responsibility of future curatorial practice.[104]

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[101] Cited in Alexandra M. Kokoli, 'The "Woman Artist" as Curatorial Effect: The Case of Tracey Emin's Scottish Retrospective', in *Politics in a Glass: Case Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 187–204.
[102] Kokoli., 191
[103] Anna C Chave, 'Minimalism and Biography', *Art Bulletin* LXXXII, no. 1 (2000), 149–63.
[104] , 189-90

The second aspect to consider, as Alexandra Kokoli explored in her essay, is the careful choice of language as indications for an unchanged system. It appears that in order to really evaluate whether things have changed we need to examine how exactly the work of artist-women is being curated, discussed, and presented both inside and outside the museum or gallery. This also includes how arguments are formed and presented in accompanying catalogue essays. This has informed the ways in which I have carried out my research for this thesis, choosing textual analysis as my preferred approach. As such, I have examined the various texts associated with each of the exhibitions I focus upon from catalogues, to press releases and wall texts.

Furthermore, Élisabeth Lebovici has argued that 'in language more generally – or in languages in general – gender is only marked in the feminine.'[105] Similarly, Pollock more recently proposed, 'how shall we ensure the conjunction of women and creativity without linguistic ingenuity? Woman artist, Artist-women?' If we qualify *artist* with *woman*, we also disqualify women because, on its own, *artist* signifies men *tout court*. So, should we not also write *artist-men*? The clumsiness decolonizes the gender inflection of the word *artist* that is by default as masculine as it is white and indifferent sexually.'[106] This 'clumsiness' of using the terms artist-women and artist-men is one (as mentioned earlier) that I have followed throughout this thesis as a small, yet important, feminist intervention.

Thesis Overview

As previously stated, this thesis progresses over four chapters. Chapter 1 hones in on the subject of curating, tracing a selective history of feminist curatorial practice that aims to demonstrate important nascent interactions between feminist politics and the art world through four exemplar curators from the 1970s to late 1990s – Lucy Lippard, Marcia Tucker, Maud Sulter and Catherine de Zegher. This specific genealogy reveals the innovative methods that these curators each proposed and as such aims to provide an understanding of the possibilities inherent in a markedly feminist practice of curating. The work of each curator is outlined in individual examinations of their practice, including analysis of their curatorial projects, their own writing pertaining to those projects, their personal reflections upon their work, as well as citing

[105] Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Women's Art: What's in a Name?', in *Elles@centrepompidou*, ed. Camille Morineau (Paris: MNAM, 2009), 277.

[106] Griselda Pollock, 'Abstraction? Co-Creation?', in *Women in Abstraction*, ed. Christine Marcel and Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2021), 25.

key scholarship about their work. It reveals that while each of these curators arrived at their practice in specific contexts, the strategies they developed often overlap or mimic each other providing a non-exhaustive list of methodologies critical to the field. It begins in the emerging stages of second-wave feminism more generally, with Lippard and Tucker, and moves through the 1980s into the 1990s. This chapter stands apart from the other three chapters and as such it does not provide comparable in-depth analysis as in the proceeding artist case studies. Its function, however, is important to the chapters that follow as it provides an understanding of the potential of feminist curatorial practice to disrupt and challenge the hegemony. This research has enabled me in later chapters to measure to what extent some of these feminist strategies have entered institutions and to what effect, as well as emphasizing which ones remain outside and as yet unrealised.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present my in-depth case studies, critically examining the institutional exhibitions, and museum collection displays, that have included the work of Hilma af Klint, Lee Lozano, and Betye Saar respectively. The focus on individual artists as opposed to one select exhibition, for example, allows for the analysis of curatorial engagement with these artists over an extended period of time. This has enabled me to be able to recognise the repetitive narratives, strategies, and/or issues that appear across the curatorial work examined, as well as ones that remain singular. To carry out this research I have undertaken textual analysis through the examination of exhibition-related materials that includes texts written for press, websites, and interpretation inside the gallery spaces, the exhibition catalogue (where produced), and other relevant publications produced on the artist's work. The Covid-19 pandemic restricted archival research and exhibition visits during a critical period of this project. To circumvent this I accessed data digitally where possible and shifted my focus to interviews as a primary methodology. I carried out twenty-nine interviews in total with curators and artists, each related to my case studies and the topic more broadly. Quotations from these are found throughout the four chapters – they enliven the secondary materials and provide critical insights to the curatorial impetuses behind the exhibitions showcasing these artist-women's work.

There is no specific connection between these three artists, other than their belated recognition. They each produced significantly different work and have worked in contexts distinct from one another. They are not all feminist artists – and in fact Lee Lozano actively disavowed women altogether – but their

position in society at large has been marked by their gender, both during their lifetimes and in the present day. While the selection of artists is not arbitrary, given the volume of artist-women currently receiving mainstream attention across the art world it could have been a different selection. For example, I could have examined the work of Geta Brătescu (1926–2018), Faith Ringgold (1930–), Sophie Tauber-Arp (1889–1943), or any of the artist-women noted earlier in this introduction as having received late or posthumous recognition. The aim of each chapter is to emphasise different issues and topics that have been critical to feminist discourse. This is only possible because of the unique set of circumstances that each of my chosen case studies brings to my analysis. Each chapter begins with a brief overview of the artist's practice and career, and an examination of their rediscovery. This allows the reader to familiarise themselves with the artist, making the exhibition analysis that follows easier to comprehend.

Chapter 2 examines the renewed interest in the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint who produced a vast body of work at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her work was first introduced to art world audiences in 1986, but she has only received wider recognition in the past decade. This chapter argues that despite the flurry of exhibitions and curatorial work that have sought to bring her work to light, her repeated rediscovery exposes the inherent flaws with the mainstream art historical canon and the linear narrative of modernism that still dominates museums and their collections. Through an in-depth analysis of her posthumous solo exhibitions from 1986 to now, including Moderna Museet, Stockholm and Malmö (2013 and 2020) and The Guggenheim Museum (2018), I highlight how a lack of in-depth research from exhibition to exhibition has led to the repetition of false narratives about the artist. In addition, the way the artist has been presented has hindered a more nuanced understanding of the work and its potential meanings. I discuss three of the most prevalent narratives that have emerged about the artist – firstly how af Klint had apparently made her abstract paintings in secret, secondly that she was a 'pioneer of abstraction', and thirdly af Klint's relationship to spiritualism. In doing so, I argue that af Klint's rediscovery may have created a broader reputation for the artist but it has not troubled the art historical canon in any significant way.

Chapter 3 uses the case study of American artist Lee Lozano to examine the complex relationship between the art market, galleries, artist estates, and exhibitions in museums and institutions in the rediscovery of women artists. Lee Lozano was a successful conceptual artist in New York in the 1960s and

early 1970s. Her dramatic decision to 'dropout' of the art world in 1972 has provided a backdrop for her exclusion from mainstream art historical narratives. This chapter first examines institutional exhibitions that have showcased Lozano, exploring how the re-evaluation of her early sexualised and subversive paintings muddied previous attempts to reduce her work to a connection with one art historical movement alone, and as a result question the continued productivity of teleological narratives of art. In examining how Lozano's withdrawal from the art world has been presented this chapter exposes the reluctance of the mainstream to reflect and admit their part in her prior exclusion. Secondly, as Lozano's rediscovery has been bound up with the art market's recognition of value in the work of older, and dead, women artists as witnessed by the artist's representation by one of the world's most successful galleries Hauser & Wirth, it examines how they, along with her estate, have presented her work and whether they have done so with an understanding of feminist politics. I argue that while the market has provided a minor place for Lozano in the art world, it has done so by uncomplicating her work and actions. As galleries become more powerful, they risk potentially hindering her long-term legacy.

Chapter 4 considers American artist Betye Saar and her career trajectory from the late 1960s to the present day. It brings together two concurrent curatorial trends – the rediscovery of older artist-women, and a growing interest in the history of African American art – enabling a critical examination of how intersectionality has impacted recent curatorial practice. Here I examine the various ways that institutions have contended with Saar. Firstly, I examine a number of group exhibitions that have sought to present a counter-canon of American art history by bringing the work of black artists to the fore. It argues that Saar's presentation in these exhibitions has done much to enhance her reputation and integration into a broader art history. A consideration of her solo exhibitions brings to attention Saar's own methods for resisting sexism and racism inherent among institutions. It ultimately reveals, however, that museums still struggle to truly integrate different histories and modes of practice into their collection galleries.

While these case studies are presented as discrete explorations in their respective chapters, they are intended to highlight the wider implications of the trend on the sector as a whole. The conclusion brings the overlapping strands and issues together endeavouring to determine if feminist strategies have entered mainstream museums and institutions in tangible and effective ways that signal infrastructural change.

CHAPTER 1

FROM THE MARGINS: FEMINIST CURATORIAL METHODOLOGIES IN PRACTICE

> To think of institutions in terms of production (of work and discourse and political practice and solidarity) instead of representation would be, to my mind, a first feminist step.
> — Ruth Noack[107]

In 2016, for an issue of *OnCurating,* a roundtable of art historians and curators discussed the history of feminism's relationship to curating in the previous decade. Victoria Horne proposed that while at that point (2016) there had been increasing scholarship on feminist exhibitions and feminist organising in the arts, there was still a lack of understanding or definition for such work because a history of feminist curatorial practice was still comparatively lacking.[108] Catherine Spencer agreed, but argued that a potential roadblock to the making of such a history could be the very manner in which some feminist curating was established – in that it is often 'pitted directly against received notions of curatorship.'[109] Kirsten Lloyd furthered Spencer's argument to say that much feminist curatorial work had been carried out in smaller, more experimental institutions – the ones I refer to in the introduction as 'a space apart.'[110] In addition, Lloyd argued that feminist curatorial work has also often been done on a freelance basis, so that even if the curator is asked to work for a museum or another mainstream institution on a temporary project their position is still precarious and that of an outsider, meaning that they are not part of the institution itself and therefore not privy to the same securities or status as members of permanent staff.[111] During the course of my research, I have interviewed several curators who work or have worked in mainstream organisations (for example: Tate (London); the Guggenheim (New York); Dia Art Foundation (New York); Centre Pompidou (Paris); Moderna Museet (Stockholm and Malmö); and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles)) and each of them proffered their own unique understanding of what feminist curating is. This included

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[107] Ruth Noack, cited in Elke Krasny, Lara Perry, and Dorothee Richter, 'Curating in Feminist Thought', *OnCurating,* no. 29 (2016), 2.
[108] Victoria Horne in, Victoria Horne et al., 'Taking Care: Feminist Curatorial Pasts, Presents and Futures', *OnCurating,* no. 29 (May 2016): 117.
[109] Catherine Spencer in Victoria Horne et al, 117.
[110] Kirsten Lloyd in Victoria Horne et al, 117.
[111] Victoria Horne et al, 125.

whether they considered themselves to be one, and if they did, how that had manifested in their work. These examples provide evidence that there is still critical work to be done to establish an understanding of, and a history of feminist curatorial practice – both inside and outside of the mainstream.

This chapter, therefore, provides one genealogy of feminist curatorial practice from the 1970s to the 1990s. It proposes four curatorial models who have been exemplary in terms of their attempts to push a feminist agenda forward. These examples are: the activist-engaged work of American critic and curator, Lucy Lippard (1937–); American curator Marcia Tucker's (1940–2006) experimental approach to the founding and running of The New Museum in New York from 1977 until 1998; the Scottish-Ghanaian artist and curator, Maud Sulter (1960–2008), who had an important impact on the profile of black artist-women in the 1990s through her practice of non-hierarchal, polyphonic and transnational strategies; and finally the Belgian curator Catherine de Zegher (1955–) and her application of feminist curatorial methods in the organisation of her meaningful 1996 exhibition *Inside the Visible*. Beginning in the 1970s with Lippard, it plots the movement of feminist thought from outside of the institution to inside through the 1970s and 1980s, ending on de Zegher whose exhibition *Inside the Visible* took place at ICA Boston in 1996. The curators discussed here each worked within specific circumstances and used different methods, but each fostered a unique, and critical, approach to feminist curation. The selective history that is mapped out here has enabled the analysis that will follow in the subsequent three case study chapters, as it demonstrates a set of propositions inherent to feminist curatorial practice. The writing on these curators is interspersed with the research assembled through interviews with high profile curators working today to open up the conversation in line with current curatorial thought and practice. While there are other examples that I could have chosen (such as Cornelia Butler, Maura Reilly, Ann Sutherland, Ruth Noack, Rosa Martínez, or numerous others) the curators discussed here have been specifically critical to my thinking as they relate to the artists I examine in the subsequent chapters, as well as the time-periods and geographical contexts explored.

The work of Lippard, Tucker, Sulter and de Zegher has been studied and championed by an important academics such as Cornelia Butler, Catherine Morris, Deborah Cherry, and Griselda Pollock, for example, and this chapter is indebted to their work. The four curatorial models in discussion here have arguably each had their work more widely 'rediscovered' and celebrated by more mainstream exhibitions,

publications, articles in the past ten years.[112] This trope of 'recovery' could be read as being part of the concurrent trend of artist-women being 'rediscovered' within the art world, and as such indicates a wider development to fill in the gaps of art history and its physical manifestations (exhibitions and publications), with work that has gone silently overlooked in mainstream narratives in the past. While this remains profoundly relevant to the cultural phenomenon of recovery work that is happening today, I have chosen not to question or critique these recoveries here as it would require a more extended study that is beyond the scope of this thesis. The primary focus of this thesis is the recent curatorial attention given to the 'recovery' of previously overlooked artist-women.

As curator Ruth Noack proposed (in the quotation at the opening of this chapter), when exploring curatorial work it is important to examine the production (work, discourse, and political practices) that is present within the institution over the simple analysis of representation. Noack refers to institutions here but her argument could be applied to an exhibition or project within an institution. Noack's point recalls the statement from Katy Deepwell cited in the introduction which states: 'to define what is feminist in the curation of women artists' work, we have to look at the relationship between feminist theory and feminist art history in the planning of a curatorial project as much as its reception…'[113] These propositions are relevant to my overall thesis and guide my examination of exhibitions. They have also sparked the production of this chapter as it is necessary to understand what methodologies and principles are inherent in a feminist curatorial practice before analysing whether or not they are in fact present among the recent curatorial work of 'rediscovering' artist-women. This chapter's aim is not to move towards a set definition, but rather to ascertain what principles and values have been borne out of a commitment to feminist discourse and practice and then used by feminist curators in the production of their work. In the main, the work discussed here happened when feminist politics remained outside of mainstream organisations, but as the art world at large was becoming aware of their existence. This is an important difference between

[112] For example: Lucy Lippard's work became the focus of a ground-breaking exhibition at The Sackler Center for Feminist Art at The Brooklyn Museum, New York in 2012, and her 'Numbers' exhibitions were chosen for an edition of Afterall Book's *Exhibition Histories Series*, written and edited by Cornelia Butler. In 2019, a collection of Marcia Tucker's writings 'Out of Bounds' was published by The Getty Research Institute and The New Museum. In 2015 Maud Sulter's work was showcased in a critical exhibition organised by long term Sulter scholar Deborah Cherry at Street Level Photoworks, Glasgow, that has since sparked a wave of other exhibitions, texts and conferences showcasing and celebrating the importance of Sulter's multifaceted work. And finally, Catherine de Zegher's work was the focus of the Dutch arts magazine "See All This" in 2020, providing an opportunity for the curator to revisit her previous work, and bring it to a new audience in a new format.

[113] Katy Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s', in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Blackwall Publishing, 2008), 69.

this chapter and the ones that follow. The possibilities that are found in the curatorial practices of the curators examined here (in the margins, so to speak), therefore, helps to facilitate the analysis of the curatorial work in the centre in the artist case-studies that follow, as it helps to reveal which strategies have begun to be realised by the institutions and exhibitions that I discuss and which have not.

Paving the Way: Four Feminist Curators

Lucy Lippard

Lucy Lippard (1937–) refers to herself as a writer and critic. She does not consider herself a 'proper curator,' and yet she curated some of the most important exhibitions in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s that championed Conceptual art practices and have had a critical legacy for many artist-women and feminist curating. In her Tate Paper titled *Curating by Numbers* (2009) she wrote,

> To begin with, my modus operandi contradicted, or simply ignored, the connoisseurship that is conventionally understood to be at the heart of curating. I have always preferred the inclusive to the exclusive, and both Conceptual art and feminism satisfied an ongoing desire for the open-ended.[114]

This open-ended approach is described by curator Cornelia Butler as 'transdisciplinary, multivalent and interrogative.' In her evaluation of Lippard's early career, Butler writes that Lippard invented a feminist practice 'in a field where the social inscription of such did not exist,' stating that 'it is to a degree Lippard's transdisciplinarity that locates her practice as feminist. [Lippard was] anti-hierarchal before this became an articulated stance for feminist politics and art…'[115] As highlighted by Lippard above, there has been a long history of 'connoisseurship' in curating which denotes a certain level of hierarchy of 'taste', that a 'excellent' curator intrinsically knows what is good and valuable art. Frances Morris (former Director: Tate Modern), in discussion with me about feminism in the museum, highlighted that issues of taste still remained within museums today. She noted that they often presented roadblocks to the diversification of those museum's collections, explaining that the 'notion within modernism that there is a kind of intrinsic integrity and hierarchy within art…' still resides today in decision making processes.[116] This indicates that Lippard's

[114] Lucy R Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', *Tate Papers*, no. 12 (2009): 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1082000.
[115] Butler, Cornelia, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*, Exhibition Histories Series (London: Afterall Books, 2012).
[116] In conversation with the author, March 2021

stance to push against taste and connoisseurship is as important to feminist curatorial practice today as it was in the 1970s.

Lippard's overtly feminist practice began in 1970. At that time, she became an important member of the Ad Hoc Women's Group in New York, speaking out at many public events and advocating for women's rights. She has stated that the seeds of her feminism were in that fight against notions of quality and taste – that she was '…revolt[ing] against Clement Greenberg's patronization of artists, against the imposition of the taste of one's class on everybody…'[117] Furthermore, Lippard has said on many occasions that feminism was one of the reasons that she remained in the art world during this period: '…I was thrown back into the art world by trying to get women into the art world, because I figured they deserved to be there just as much as anybody else.'[118] Prior to her feminist awakening, Lippard had been heavily involved in the New York art world. She was part of a community of artists and cultural figures that included Sol Le Witt (1928–2007), Robert Ryman (1930–2019, to whom she was married from 1960–66), Eva Hesse (1936–1970), Tom Doyle (1928–2016), and Dan Graham (1942–2022), among many others, and she became an important supporter of the Conceptual art movement. Lippard's turn toward feminism, however, would strongly affect her curatorial and writerly output becoming her overriding motivation. She was 'ashamed' of the lack of artist-women represented in her previous exhibitions[119], and now sensed, or perhaps understood, the urgency for women-only exhibitions. She curated *Twenty-Six Contemporary Women Artists*, in 1971, at Aldrich Museum, Connecticut, declaring it a 'personal retribution to women artists I'd slighted in the past.'[120] In addition, in her exhibition *c. 7,500,* at California Institute of the Arts in 1973, she included *only* artist-women. This was her last 'Numbers' exhibition, which were a series of exhibitions that Lippard curated in the late 1960s and early 1970s that focused on the burgeoning movement of Conceptual art. They are called the numbers shows as they were each titled after the population of the city in which they were held: *557,087*, Seattle: Contemporary Art Council of the Seattle Art Museum, 1969; *955,000*, Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970; *2,972,453*, Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte e Communicacion,

[117] Cited in Bryan-Wilson, 85.
[118] Lippard, cited in Butler, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*.
[119] Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', 3. In this article Lippard explicitly states: "I am ashamed to say that there were only four and a half women in *Number 7* [Exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, May 1969]: Christine Kozlov, Rosemarie Castoro, Hanne Darboven, Adrian Piper, and Ingrid Baxter (who was half of the NE Thing Co.)".
[120] Lippard, cited in Butler, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*.

1970; *c.7,500*, Valencia, CA: California Institute of the Arts, 1973. On her curatorial impetus for *c.7500*, she explained:

> The last number show with cards as the catalogue – *c. 7, 500* in 1973 – was 'an exasperated reply,' as I wrote in the catalogue, 'to those who say "there are no women making conceptual art".'…Comparison of *c. 7, 500* with the previous mostly male shows of conceptual art highlights the contributions of women's art to the movement, primarily through an emphasis on the body, biography, transformation, as well as gendered perception.[121]

Lippard's commitment to feminism seemingly expanded her artistic frame, and she embraced different types of work by artist-women, championing work made using traditionally 'feminine' techniques, and craft-based practices. Which, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, art historian Patricia Mainardi had re-evaluated – bringing these 'feminine' types of work out of their marginalised status and into dialogue with other 'fine arts'. As art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson explains, '[Lippard] chose her subjects based on affinities and allegiances, many of which stemmed from her commitment to women artists, writing about untested figures, political propagandists, emerging artists, and other risk takers whose work she felt drawn to for a number of reasons.'[122]

Lippard's feminist approaches, however, were not just evident in her support of artist-women. Butler has argued that prior to her becoming outwardly feminist in 1970, Lippard had already begun to use strategies aligned with feminist thought, including decentring and anti-elitism in her early 'Numbers Shows'. These exhibitions, each located in arguably peripheral cities, were all but 'off-grid for the East Coast art establishment,'[123] eschewing the well-received notion that only exhibitions of any note or importance happened in the art world centre, which at that time (and some would perhaps still cling to the argument that it still is) was New York. Through these exhibitions Lippard also confirmed an interest in wider accessibility – moving art from outside of the museum or institution to non-traditional sites, such as the Seattle World's Fair Pavilion, and several outdoor sites across cities – to encourage broader public engagement and encourage anti-elitism. Through this process of decentring, Lippard was able to challenge the patriarchal orthodoxy of there being one central place of power and authority from which ideas often

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[121] Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers'.
[122] Julia Bryan-Wilson, 'Still Relevant: Lucy R. Lippard, Feminist Activism, and Art Institutions', in *Materializing Six Years: Lucy Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*, ed. Catherine Morris and Vincent Bonin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012), 85.
[123] Butler, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*.

radiate out. Lippard also classified her first numbers exhibition, *557,087* in Seattle, as 'an exercise in "anti-taste," as a compendium of varied work so large that the public would have to make up its own mind about ideas to which it had not previously been exposed.'[124] In a similar attempt to broaden a wider (non-art world) public interest in differing artist positions today, Jessica Morgan (Director: Dia Art Foundation, New York) spoke to me in a refreshing manner about how the notion of significance about certain artists (she cites the so-called father of Minimalism, Donald Judd as an example) are often overblown. She discussed that in reality 'it is such an extreme minority of people who know any of these so-called 'significant' artists at all,' which 'provides an incredible chance for the institution to show something different because the majority of people do not walk into the museum and say, "where is the Donald Judd?" because they have no idea who Donald Judd is. If you show them Dorothea Rockburne then they are going to be just as excited.'[125]

In both Lippard's early exhibitions and later work she established a multivalent engagement in art – she wrote fiction, criticism, engaged in political activism and curated many exhibitions. This approach allowed her to be subversive towards institutional or museological categories for art and exhibition making. Arguably, her statement at the beginning of this section about her not being a 'proper' curator could be read as more of a political statement against received notions of what curators should be. Curator Catherine Morris – who curated the 2012 exhibition at The Brooklyn Museum focusing on Lippard's book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973)[126] – argues that it was the numbers shows that 'were her most radical experiment in blurring the boundaries between curating, criticism and artistic production…'[127] In the 'Numbers Shows' she did not produce traditional exhibition catalogues but instead made card catalogues that were experimental in nature, and which also encouraged a dissolution of roles between the authoritative voice of the curator and the audience/viewer. Morris further clarifies:

> …the curatorial writing that she did in relation to the exhibitions also began, in a sense to dematerialise. That is, instead of describing and providing a historical context for objects, the "catalogues" that accompanied her shows reflected experimental thinking

[124] Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 110.
[125] In conversation with the author, September 2020
[126] The book's full title is: *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard.*
[127] Morris, Catherine, '"Six Years" as a Curatorial Project', in *Materialising 'Six Years': Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*, ed. Morris, Catherine and Bonin, Vincent (MIT Press and The Brooklyn Museum, 2012), 11.

> about narrative content, authorial voice and the pertinence of critical judgements. The assumed differences between a book, an exhibition, or an article in a periodical were supplanted by inquiries into their similarities, or how they could be operationally linked, hereby permanently altering the existing disciplinary models.[128]

Further to this, Butler has contended that this notion of writing utilised by Lippard in the 'Numbers Shows' catalogues, and in her book *Six Years,* 'enacted a kind of engaged viewership, where curator, artist and audience exchange roles and jointly participate in the construction of meaning.'[129] *Six Years* could perhaps be considered as a culmination of her numbers shows. It was an annotated compendium or 'bibliography' of the various exhibitions, art works, events, and texts of the Conceptual art movement. *Six Years* is a book that is in some ways quite unique. It captures a specific moment in time not by the methods art historical publications typically use – by having academic essays by experts in the field write about specific topics or ideas – instead it is literally a type of index of activities that relate to Conceptual art. In this way it describes a movement directly through its own artistic actions and outputs rather than through considered and researched commentary. Furthermore, as a continuation of her distaste for the received notions of centre and periphery the book included artists from South America, Asia, Canada, and Australia, in addition to those from the US and Europe[130] – which could be read as a type of proto-transnational strategy.

Transnational means a way of working that looks beyond the borders of nations, and as art historian Elke Krasny has argued, transnational 'curatorial approach[es] use the strategies of integrating previously marginalised artistic positions into a globalized art world.'[131] This model of curating would come to prominence in the 1990s and so Lippard seems far ahead of her time in this regard. Transnational feminism takes this proposition further to dissolve other potential 'borders' – the cultural theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty neatly defined it as 'building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on.'[132] It is this expanded definition that is most relevant to this thesis. In examining *Six Year*'s relation to Lippard's feminism, academic Melinda Guillen has written that it 'operates as a type of feminist epistemological critique of a particular hierarchal structure of historical processes by revealing overlaps and distinctions in the field—formal, thematic, interpersonal, and others. This includes

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128 Morris, 4.
129 Butler, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*.
130 Vincent Bonin, 'Lucy R. Lippard's Writing in and around Conceptual Art, 1969-73', in *Materialising 'Six Years': Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art*, ed. Morris, Catherine and Bonin, Vincent (MIT Press and The Brooklyn Museum, 2012), 66.
131 Elke Krasny, 'Curating without Borders', in *A Companion to Curation* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2019), 114,
132 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2003, 250.

presenting art, writing, and other forms of cultural production by those viewed as peripheral and marginal in the male-dominated, Western art world alongside those in the privileged center.'[133] Moreover, Guillen states that by 'critiquing the foundation of knowledge, what constitutes knowledge (and even form), *Six Years* addresses processes of exclusion as well as inclusion into distinct fields of thought and areas of art production with an understanding that patriarchy creates limited forms of knowledge while also perpetuating hierarches and marginalization.'[134]

For my research, what I find particularly significant about Lippard's approach to curating is not only her introduction and use of feminist strategies into her practice, but rather her continual self-reflexivity – or as Butler calls it, 'frank transparency'[135] – regarding her contribution to both wider art history, and feminist theory and curating. Such an approach could be linked to Feminist Standpoint theory, which was developed in the 1970s and 80s, through theorists such as Sandra Harding, Nancy M. Harstock, Donna Haraway and Patricia Hill Collins, that argued for situating knowledge in women's experiences. Harding wrote that the best feminist analysis would go beyond a critique of subject matter alone – 'it insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research.' Claiming that 'introducing this "subjective" element into the analysis in fact increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the "objectivism" which hides this kind of evidence from the public.'[136] Self-reflexivity is therefore a key feminist method. For Lippard this could be witnessed in her readiness to admit the change in her curatorial approach following her feminist awakening in 1970. She is an interesting example of a writer and curator who was not only motivated latterly by feminist insights – bringing the work of many female artists into conversation with their male counterparts and opening up the possibility for differing aesthetics – but more significantly she has been willing to admit her missteps publicly. In her essay 'The Women Artists' Movement—What Next?' which was originally published in the catalogue for the 9th Biennale de Paris, 1975, Lippard openly denounces a statement that she had made previously, while proposing her new position:

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[133] Melinda Guillen, 'Don't Need You: Conceptual Art, Feminism, and Their Discontents,' PhD Thesis. UC San Diego, 2019), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5bd1j8p2.
[134] Guillen.
[135] Butler, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*.
[136] Sandra Harding, 'Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?', in *Feminism & Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University PRess, 1987), 9.

> In 1966, I wrote for the "Eccentric Abstraction" catalogue that metaphor should be freed from subjective bonds, that "ideally a bag remains a bag and does not become a uterus, a tube is a tube and not a phallic symbol, a semisphere is just that and not a breast." At that time, I neither cared nor dared to break with that attitude, which was part of a Minimally and intellectually orientated culture in which I was deeply involved… I can no longer support the statement I quoted above. I am emotionally and contradictorily torn between the strictly experiential or formal and the interpretative aspects of looking at art. But the time has come to call a semisphere a breast if we know damn well that's what it suggests, instead of repressing the association and negating an area of experience that has been dormant except in the work of a small number of artists, many of them women.[137]

This statement is written in direct relation to Lippard's support for the feminist approach that there might be a separate female aesthetic. The exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* at Fischbach Gallery, New York in 1966 was curated prior to Lippard becoming a feminist. However, it brought Louise Bourgeois' work in conversation with several younger artists including Eva Hesse – whose work Lippard introduced to a larger audience. Lippard continued to champion Hesse's work and this exhibition was arguably instrumental in her later success. Further to this statement by Lippard, she would continue to reflect on her work throughout her career. As noted earlier, her exhibition at the Aldrich Museum and *c.7500* in Valencia, California were both attempts to redress her prior curatorial work, where she had not included enough artist-women, or worse dismissed their practices as a result of 'the common conditioning from which we all suffer,' namely inherent gender bias.[138] In looking back upon her involvement in Conceptual art and various activist movements of the late 1960s and 70s, she criticised her lack of wider social awareness at that time, writing in a 1977 article for the American feminist art journal *Heresies* on class bias in the art world:

> Conceptual art's democratic efforts and physical vehicles were canceled out by its neutral elitist content and its patronizing approach. From around 1967 to 1971, many of us involved in Conceptual art saw that content as pretty revolutionary and thought of ourselves as rebels against the cool, hostile artifacts of the prevailing formalist and Minimal art. But we were so totally enveloped in the middle-class approach to everything we did and saw, we couldn't perceive how that pseudo-academic narrative piece or that art-world-orientated action in the streets was deprived on any revolutionary content by the fact that it was usually incomprehensible or alienating to the people "out there", no matter how fashionably downwardly mobile it might be in the art world. The idea that if art is subversive in the art world, it will automatically appeal to a general audience now seems absurd.[139]

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[137] Lucy R Lippard, 'The Women's Artists' Movement—What Next?', in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 139–48.
[138] Lippard, cited in Butler, *Women – Concept – Art: Lucy R. Lippard's Numbers Shows*.
[139] Lippard, Lucy R., 'The Pink Glass Swan: Upward and Downward Mobility in the Art World', 1977, in Lippard, Lucy R. *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 122.

Lippard's self-awareness did not only extend to her reflecting on her mistakes or political blind spots, but she has also remained honest and open about her processes as well. In the preface for the 1997 edition of *Six Years*, Lippard was explicit about her methods behind the book, stating that there 'was no precise reason for certain inclusions and exclusions except personal prejudice and an idiosyncratic method of categorization that would make little sense on anyone else's ground.'[140]

Lippard's self-reflexivity and self-awareness is so critical and unusual in the history of curating, that as Bryan-Wilson has argued she 'redefined what we think of as an engaged curator and critic: someone unafraid to be sceptical and anti-institutional, someone with strongly held beliefs, motivated not by market demands but by a deep passion for art and unparalleled respect for artists.'[141] These aspects of Lippard are significant to my research because of what is currently happening across mainstream museums and institutions in Europe and North America, for example: Tate, UK; MoMA, New York; and Centre Pompidou, Paris, among others. These museums are championing new programmes that witness the increased representation and display of artist-women. However, what is often missing from the press releases and interpretation texts for the exhibitions of artist-women is the acknowledgement of the museum's role in these artist's prior exclusion and the perpetuation of structures that enabled them. For example, when presenting their major retrospective of Hilma af Klint in 2013 – claiming that they are the institution to finally bring her work to prominence – Moderna Museet did not acknowledge that the institution (under the direction of Pontus Hultén) had turned down the gift of her entire oeuvre in the 1960s, meaning that her work could have been seen publicly much earlier than it actually was. It goes without saying that there were sound reasons for this decision, but that it is actively not mentioned as it would open up a key set of questions over the institutions' own culpability in af Klint's prior exclusion. This brings to the fore how silence remains a critical strategy within institutional curating. Even if the absence of artist-women is being slowly improved, the reasons and the institution's own accountability for their absence remains conspicuously deficient. This will be discussed variously in the subsequent chapters and in the conclusion.

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[140] Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.
[141] Bryan-Wilson, 'Still Relevant: Lucy R. Lippard, Feminist Activism, and Art Institutions', 89.

Marcia Tucker

The New Museum in New York, which opened in 1977, was the brainchild of curator Marcia Tucker (1940–2006). At that time, it was one of the most original and challenging museums that came into being and it importantly remains a model that under Tucker's tenure is considered innovative in its thinking. The New Museum not only fostered an inclusive approach on all levels but was grounded in an understanding and belief in feminist thought. Unlike other exclusively 'feminist' projects that presented the work of only artist-women, The New Museum was open to all genders and races. Tucker's vision was to set-up a radically different museum that took an experimental approach to exhibition making, collecting, and funding, and one that was committed to foregrounding living, contemporary art. In a description explaining her motivation behind the project, Tucker said:

> I began to yearn for a museum—a "museum in the sky"—that would really be in touch with the sources of contemporary art… I wanted to see a museum exhibit art before it was filtered through galleries, magazines, public taste. To me, a museum of contemporary art should be a place where dialogue and controversy are synonymous. There is a posture of inquiry that certain artists have that can be shared by museums.[142]

This pioneering approach extended to every facet of the museum. She was dedicated to representing groups which had been underrepresented by the existing institutions in New York – this included the work of artist-women – and her aspiration was to foster a multi-cultural and multi-racial institution at all levels through not only the artists who were chosen for exhibitions but in its staff and governance.[143] Staffing and governance being a usually invisible aspect of an organisations' activities and output. In her proposal for the museum, Tucker outlined its scope as follows:

> It will focus on work which does not have sufficient outlet in the present museum or gallery structure of New York, and/or work which is not being presented within a critical or scholarly context […] The New Museum… would cover the area between large and small, non-historically orientated "alternative spaces" which deal with the work of younger and lesser known artists, and the larger, bureaucratically top-heavy museums […] Establishment of a permanent collection, while not an immediate priority, is intended to provide an extension of the historical framework offered by critical essays and documentation.[144]

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[142] Marcia Tucker, 1978 cited in Mara Gladstone, 'Marcia Tucker and the Birth of the New Museum', *Getty Research Journal* 4 (2012): 188.
[143] Nizan Shaked, 'Something Out Of Nothing: Marcia Tucker, Jeffrey Deitch And The De-Regulation Of The Contemporary-Museum Mode', *Mute*, January 2019. (accessed online February 2019)
[144] Marcia Tucker, "Proposal for The New Museum," in the *Marcia Tucker Papers, 1957 – 2004*, Getty Research Institute Special Collections (from box 4, file 2) cited in Shaked.

Despite Tucker's intentions, her multi-racial and multi-cultural strategies were not always successful. In 1987 curator and artist Howardena Pindell compiled and published *Art World Racism: A Documentation*, which exposed hard statistics demonstrating the exclusion of African Americans from mainstream arts organisations – museums, galleries, and publications – in the US. Worth noting here is that Pindell had included a statistic about the group exhibition *Fake* at Tucker's New Museum in 1986 where 90.7% of the artists included were white[145] – perhaps proving that while Tucker was well-intentioned statistical studies help to point out clear inconsistences and perhaps incidents of unconscious bias. This public 'shaming' may have spurred Tucker on to try to do better. For example, in 1990 she gave a lecture at a New Museum donor luncheon titled *"Who's On First?" How Race and Gender Affect American Art Museums* in which she made a powerful statement about the radical revision needed in arts organisation to be more inclusive stating, 'we need to challenge and remake the very structures that create such inequalities in the first place and to work together, all of us, toward the time when the practice of art, and the art world as we know it, will no longer come in only one colour and one gender.'[146] Tucker's argument here, and the problematics of putting theories into practice, was also brought up by Frances Morris who argued that in order for long term change to really take effect within organisations the people working there need to be 'absolutely vigilant' about their decisions over who is being shown and who is being collected, otherwise things easily 'slip back towards the status quo,'[147] by which she meant the focus on white men. Furthermore, Morris explained one of the fundamental issues facing museums today is how to get the balance right with gender and race: 'it is the intersection of race and gender which makes it much more difficult. There is always a tendency to balance 50% white men with 50% 'other',' meaning that the space for artist-women of all races is reduced.[148] What Tucker and Morris's words can provide are the need for constant and enduring critical awareness. Such sentiments were also echoed by Gabrielle Schor (Director: Verbund Collection) and Jessica Morgan in conversations I had with them. Morgan indicated to me that keeping track of what was happening in the institution was of critical importance. She argued that while using statistics on gender or race are complicated and do not necessarily always show the full picture, they are useful tools to look at what one

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145 See Howardena Pindell, 'Art (World) & Racism', *Third Text* 2, no. 3–4 (1 March 1988): 159.
146 Marcia Tucker, '"Who's on First?": How Race and Gender Affect American Art Museums' (1990), in Marcia Tucker and Lisa Phillips, *Out of Bounds: The Collected Writings of Marcia Tucker* (Los Angeles : New York, NY: The Getty Research Institute ; New Museum, 2019), 199.
147 In conversation with the author, March 2021
148 In conversation with the author, March 2021

is doing wrong and right, across all aspects of an institution, not just programmatically.[149] Similarly, Schor expressed that one had to be constantly aware of what was happening in both one's own institution and also the wider cultural sector.[150]

Tucker was anti-corporate, having witnessed a rise in corporatisation of museums during her time as curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art between 1969 and 1977.[151] In 1988 during a lecture given at MOCA, Los Angeles, Tucker astutely proclaimed that museums, 'are clearly not simply motivated by pure scholarship (if even there were such a thing). All of us are struggling competitively for funds (and some for survival), and we're differentiated only by the extent to which we understand our complicity.'[152] Furthermore, art historian Nizan Shaked describes how Tucker created her administration structure through a model based on an academic rather than a corporate system: '[Tucker] implement[ed] peer-reviewed selection processes and committee-based decision making… many of the boards and committees consisted of artists and scholars and took diversity as its primary criteria.'[153] While no director or curator I spoke with through the course of this research mentioned a flattening of hierarchy within their respective institutions there was discussion around making structural changes, not just programmatic ones. Sarah Munro (Director: Baltic, Gateshead, UK), maintained that for an institution to 'really shift diversity and systematically create change, you need your trustees, you need the governance sorted, you need your workforce, and you need the programme content all in alignment with a set of core values.'[154] Jessica Morgan argued, that while hierarchy exists as a director one could 'reduce the sense of opacity around how decisions are made, and what the institutional focus is.' She explained how she was constantly thinking about 'the ways in which we can continue to make sure that when we speak as an institution, we are speaking for everybody who works there as much as possible, it is not top-down messaging.'[155] These indicate small changes in moving away from traditional, purely hierarchical, working practices.

At The New Museum, Tucker also developed innovative fundraising ideas, which included a unique approach to collecting and acquisitions. Her idea was to begin a collection that would be changed

[149] In conversation with the author, September 2020
[150] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[151] Tucker was dismissed from The Whitney Museum following her curation of a controversial exhibition with Richard Tuttle, which had received bad reviews.
[152] Cited in Shaked, 'Something Out Of Nothing: Marcia Tucker, Jeffrey Deitch And The De-Regulation Of The Contemporary-Museum Mode'.
[153] Shaked.
[154] In conversation with the author, June 2021
[155] In conversation with the author, September 2020

regularly. Based on the principle that contemporary art was itself fluid and always changing, Tucker believed that if The New Museum, 'could collect, hold on to something for a certain period of time, and then either sell it or trade it for another work, it would help to create a more appropriate and more challenging kind of collection.'[156] The funds from the sales would be used to either fund new acquisitions or future projects and exhibitions by younger artists. Tucker's premise was an attempt to undercut many of the patriarchal value systems ascribed to museum collecting, including the dealer-collector-museum relationship. In an interview with Marina Pachmanová in 2002, Tucker outlined her position,

> What defined museums as opposed to galleries or alternative exhibition spaces in that period was the collection, which struck me as highly problematic because it created a strict value system of hierarchies and judgements that I thought was inappropriate to works that had been made recently… [she later continued] The premise for putting together such an unusual kind of collection was to acknowledge that artistic value is not absolute, and to make transparent the critical and historical judgements that create the collection.[157]

This attitude was unprecedented and sought to undermine the long-term effect of a museum having to continually defend its collecting position and policy. Needless to say, this system was unpopular with a variety of groups. Tucker explained that while some artists were upset that their works would be sold again, it was the dealers who were most outraged: 'it made a lot of sense because the concept went against the art world convention, in which the value of a work of art is considered to be timeless or unchanging, and thus also commercially very easily exploitable.'[158]

For my research, it is particularly interesting that Tucker's feminist politics underpinned her curatorial strategies. She was an outspoken feminist and political activist who after attending a Redstockings meeting in 1968[159], formed her own consciousness-raising group with around ten other women.[160] The group participated in marches, planned strikes and organised support for women inside and outside of art circles.[161] In her autobiography, Tucker writes how feminism changed how she thought and wrote about art, offering her new ways to think about exhibition making: 'it encouraged alternatives to the traditional, textual forms

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[156] Interview with Marcia Tucker: 'Art Institutions Empowerment and Responsibility,' in Martina Pachmanová, 'Mobile Fidelities', *n.paradoxa*, Issue 19 (2006): 111.
[157] Pachmanová, 2006: 111
[158] Pachmanová, 2006: 112
[159] Redstockings was a radical feminist group founded by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone in the late 1960s in New York.
[160] Marcia Tucker, *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, ed. Liza Lou (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, Ltd., 2008), 88.
[161] Marcia Tucker, *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, 88.

of interpretation, such as oral histories, personal narratives, interactive strategies, and fictions.'[162] The New Museum was therefore borne out of Tucker's acute understanding of the cross over between the social and the political:

> I believe that you cannot isolate the political from the social, the social from the aesthetic, the aesthetic from the theoretical or any combination thereof. All are part of the complex, interwoven fabric of ideas and actions that constitute any move toward social change, whether this move takes place directly in political lists or in art. The "either/or" formulation is a product of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment's separation between mind and body, idea and emotion, reason and instinct – but we are living in the twenty-first century, when this approach is archaic and outmoded, and it's time to let it go.[163]

This position remains rare, as the result was a mainstream museum programme that was underscored by feminist political thought. It also shows that feminist thought need not only apply to exhibitions and museums showing only artist-women. In addition to this was Tucker's allowance for failure, as well as continual assessment regarding its methods and procedures. Tucker wrote, 'the most rewarding place from which to learn has been, for me, the mistakes.'[164] In this respect, Tucker is closely aligned with Lucy Lippard, who also admitted and benefitted from constant self-analysis and admission of errors.

Marcia Tucker stepped down as director in 1998. While The New Museum remains one of the leading contemporary art spaces in New York – which is testament to Tucker's steadfast vision and hard work – it is unclear if the museum is still dedicated to the ethos and vision that Tucker instigated. The New Museum of Contemporary Art (it was renamed in 1998) reopened in a brand-new building on the Bowery in 2004 following a high-profile fundraising campaign, which undoubtedly attracted corporate donors. As Shaked argues, Tucker's values,

> ha[ve] been all but displaced since her departure from the museum in 1998, its feasibility as a system has not been considered in the planning, building, or expansion, of a host of recent contemporary museums (including the New Museum itself), all of which follow corporate models and seem to address first and foremost the concerns of private and corporate donors.[165]

In the notes that accompany her text, Shaked illustrates a further example of the dismantling of Tucker's anti-corporate values:

> Steeped in conflict of interest, the New Museum's exhibition *Skin Fruit* (2010) rightfully elicited a tirade of criticism for showcasing artworks from the collection of one of its

[162] Tucker.
[163] Pachmanová, 'Mobile Fidelities'.
[164] Tucker, *A Short Life of Trouble: Forty Years in the New York Art World*, 2008.
[165] Shaked, 'Something Out Of Nothing: Marcia Tucker, Jeffrey Deitch And The De-Regulation Of The Contemporary-Museum Mode'.

> trustees, Dakis Joannou, and for being curated by Jeff Koons whose artworks are collected by Joannou.[166]

These statements indicate that following Tucker's resignation, the Board have slowly moved toward a governance system more in line with other museum structures both in New York and further afield, which are not informed by feminist politics and ideals. Tucker had also maintained that following her tenure as director of The New Museum, the museum would have a director of colour. This however did not happen, and following Tucker, Lisa Phillips was appointed as Director. Tucker has been criticised for this by some black art historians and academics, such as Gilbert Coker, for her failure to diversify the staff of the New Museum, or to be as inclusive as she often appealed to others to be.[167] This feels unfortunate given the unique position that Tucker had established in the foundations of the museum. Further to this, in September 2021 former New Museum employee Dana Kopel wrote a damning article for *The Baffler* about the employment conditions for junior members of staff at the institution. 'Against Artsploitation: Unionizing the New Museum' disclosed the institution's hierarchal structure and the issues of under-paid, under-appreciated, overworked, and exploited staff. It charted a number of staff members journey toward unionization and the strong opposition (if not, hostility) from management. Kopel cites Tucker's aspirations for the New Museum: 'she wanted the museum's internal structure to be non-hierarchical. When it first opened, there were only a few employees; Tucker paid herself nothing and gave everyone else the same salary. She had everyone rotate between jobs so that everybody understood each other's work.'[168] As such, Kopel's article exposes how the institution has neglected to maintain some of Tucker's guiding principles in its current form. Each of these examples of how certain foundational values have not been maintained indicate a crumbling feminist legacy. They do not diminish Tucker's personal ambitions for her feminist project but reveal that maintaining the ideologies of one individual can be difficult when they are no longer around to both defend and enact them.

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[166] Shaked.

[167] See footnote 18 in Gilbert Coker, 'The Whitney's Golden Years', *International Review of African American Art* 15, no. 4 (April 1999): 55–60.

[168] Dana Kopel, 'Against Artsploitation | Dana Kopel', The Baffler, 6 September 2021, https://thebaffler.com/salvos/against-artsploitation-kopel.

Maud Sulter

Maud Sulter (1960–2008) was a successful Scottish-Ghanaian artist, writer, publisher, editor, cultural-historian, and curator. Her curatorial work was not bound exclusively to exhibitions – she used a wide range of forms to carry out her practice which meant that her exhibitions, as art historian Deborah Cherry has explained, 'were engaged in a broad platform of research, knowledge production and education…'[169] She curated projects in both public and independent venues, for example: by 1990 she was co-director of the artist-run-space The Elbow Room, alongside its founder artist Lubaina Himid; in 1991 she curated *Echo: Work by Women Artists 1850–1940*, an exhibition of works from the Tate Collection at Tate Liverpool; in the early 1990s she was a curatorial assistant at Rochdale Art Gallery; and for a short time in the late 1990s she ran an independent space in Clerkenwell, east London, called Rich Women of Zurich, that promoted mid-career artists and championed diversity. Preceding these curatorial endeavours, in the early 1980s, and shortly after she re-located from Glasgow to London, she had founded the Black Women's Creativity Project (BWCP) with artist Ingrid Pollard. This project was an umbrella for Sulter's artistic and curatorial endeavours but the overriding thread was to promote black women's creativity. Speaking about her work Sulter explained:

> This whole notion of the disappeared ... is something that runs through my work. I'm very interested in absence and presence in the way that particularly blackwomen's experience and blackwomen's contribution to culture is so often erased and marginalised. [It is] important for me as an individual, and obviously as a blackwoman artist, to put blackwomen back in the centre of the frame – both literally within the photographic image, but also within the cultural institutions where our work operates.[170]

As a result of this approach, Sulter's work – both artistically and curatorially – was a powerful feminist critique of the white, Western, Eurocentric and male-dominated canon. This notion of focusing on the absence, the margins, or the marginalised is similar to both Lucy Lippard and Catherine de Zegher's approaches and underscores that her work was fundamentally feminist in nature.

Sulter is in a somewhat unique position among the curators I have chosen to propose as exemplary models, precisely because she was both an artist and a curator. As Terry Smith argues in *Thinking Contemporary* (2012) the artist-curator holds a somewhat distinct position as they have historically tended to

[169] Deborah Cherry, 'With Her Fingers on the Political Pulse: The Transnational Curating of Maud Sulter', in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 205.
[170] Cited in Ella S. Mills, 'Maud Sulter: Passion', *Art Monthly*, no. 387 (June 2015): 26.

(and been able to) create more radical exhibitions that not only reimagined ways to make exhibitions, but also ways to rethink the museum.[171] Lucy Lippard could arguably also fall into this category as a multivalent figure who was a writer as much as she was a curator. However, it is important to note that Sulter belongs to this history of artist-curator, and her exhibitions and curatorial endeavours were certainly a means of claiming agency for herself and others. Sulter's curatorial and artistic practice was fundamentally tied to her feminist politics. Her intention was to provide space for marginalised and overlooked figures – more specifically the promotion of black artist-women, artist-women of colour, and lesbian artists (her own practice included) – and to foster and facilitate wider visibility for those artists. It is precisely Sulter's uncompromising dedication and commitment to this position that make her an important model for me.

Alongside her position as artist-curator, Sulter's work also cannot be separated from the specific socio-political backdrop in the UK that she was working in – namely the growing black women's movement of the 1980s. This movement sought to create radical approaches to the unique position that black women and women of colour would often find themselves in, that of being doubly, and often triply, excluded or oppressed for reasons of race, gender, class, and sexuality, or what is now termed intersectionality. Sulter was well-read, mining a wide range of black women writers who were instrumental in pioneering black feminist thought, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde. The strategies that she would employ in her work included using intervention and critique, alongside the building of radical alternatives. As Deborah Cherry explains she drew,

> on Beatrice Johnson Reagon's advocacy of 'coalition politics,' the strategic and dangerous alliances necessary for 'staying alive', Sulter linked up with white women, insisting on the recognition and specificity of difference and the importance of addressing race and racism. Widely read in African American feminist writings, she took inspiration from Betye Saar and Ntozake Shange who forged a feminism that spoke to black women, prioritised their many and diverse experiences, identities and histories, from Audre Lorde and others she developed a black lesbian politics. Sulter worked tirelessly with a fierce energy and resolute determination to advance and promote the networking, self-naming and autonomy of black women…[172]

Furthermore, Sulter adopted a specific terminology that used blackwoman and blackwomen as one word, as well as the term 'woman of colour,' before its more widespread usage today. Sulter's strong attachment to speaking from a position specifically and purposefully aligned with black feminist thought is important,

[171] See 'Chapter 3: Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists', in Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators international (ICI), 2012).
[172] Deborah Cherry, 'With Her Fingers on the Political Pulse: The Transnational Curating of Maud Sulter', 207.

namely because the issues of the 1970s second wave feminist movement and its racism still resonate today. In speaking with Zoé Whitley (Director: Chisenhale Gallery, London, and former Tate curator), for example, she explained that she has never called herself a 'feminist curator' despite using its principles in her work: 'I think being a black woman I'm acutely aware of some of feminism's failings, despite its many strengths, and so I never foreground feminism above my awareness of a need for racial equity and class equity, that we are a long way from having achieved.'[173]

Each of the projects that Sulter was involved in – such as the BWCP (Black Women's Creativity Project) or The Elbow Room – helped to significantly expand the field of curating of black art in the UK in the 1980s, as well as creating important connections and dialogues within the global art world of the 1990s. To achieve her aim of promoting the art of black artists, she needed to create environments where dialogue about 'black art' could happen, but also develop conversations between artists identified as African, African-Caribbean, and South Asian. The approaches she employed from the start of her curatorial work would remain with her throughout her career. The use of multiple platforms was a key strategy that was used with the understanding that there was a need to spread their message and tell their story as widely as possible to gain visibility. Sulter wrote, 'no one will document our future but ourselves,'[174] and therefore made it her mission to do this. She would quote the American writer Alice Walker on numerous occasions in multiple spaces – 'as Black women we must read history for clues, not facts' – to demonstrate that it was 'essential to leave clues as to a more holistic range of our artistic pursuits.'[175] Alongside the aforementioned project spaces (The Elbow Room and Rich Women of Zurich), she would write articles, guest edit journals and magazines such as *Spare Rib* and *Feminist Arts News* – often in collaboration with Lubaina Himid and others; Himid and Sulter created their own publishing press, Urban Fox Press, from where they would create publications on black artist-women and writers; Sulter ran festivals; and curated exhibitions within major museums. This broad ranging approach enabled a range of audiences.

Sulter was mindful of the different audiences she was writing and creating this content for and used this to her advantage. Her tone differs depending on the context, but significantly her messages are always consistent. For example, in her essay 'Call and Response', for her co-guest edited issue of *Feminist*

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[173] In conversation with the author, March 2021

[174] Cited in Deborah Cherry, 207.

[175] In Ardentia Verba, 'Passion: Black Women's Creativity. An Interview with Maud Sulter', *Spare Rib*, no. 220 (February 1991): 6–8.

Arts News in 1988 with Lubaina Himid, Sulter's text is a clear call for action.[176] It is a strongly worded and politically infused text where she illuminates black women-artists' struggle for recognition, of the backlash against her and others attempts to make space for women – 'the brothers they got so mad at us for making a statement about ourselves that they are still trying to get even,'[177] – of the elitism of art institutions (including art academies) and their systems, and of the need to work together internationally with women of the African diaspora. Her passion powerfully resonates through her words:

> Being written out of history can happen to you. There is no safety in collusion with those who want to oppress our art and supress our voices. They will turn their weapons on you and who will be there to help you if your contemporaries no longer exist? Who makes Black women's work visible if not other Black women? This magazine has been carved out of the contributors' own resources. We have worked for too long to be denied the space in feminist journals just because today it seems fashionable to be a black feminist artist.[178]

Conversely, in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition *Echo: Women Artists 1850-1940* at Tate Liverpool, Sulter's tone is more academic in line with art historical essays, as she interweaves pictorial analysis while outlining the narrative for her exhibition. This is perhaps to be expected within a museum catalogue as opposed to a feminist journal, however, Sulter still manages to create a polemical text by writing herself and her politics into the essay. From the beginning she is clear that the exhibition is grounded in providing audiences the opportunity to see previously hidden works by artist-women. She is explicit that there are no black artist-women included precisely because there is so little black art in the Tate Collection (it was an exhibition of works from the collection). However, the essay – and the exhibition itself – still included excerpts from women's writings (many of whom were black – Toni Morrison, Bernadine Evaristo, and Lubaina Himid), undoubtedly as a deliberate strategy to circumvent their wider artistic absence. Her essay laments the white male Eurocentric nature of the Tate Collection and demands that it be more representative: 'works by women and Black artists must be increased by more than mere token gestures, and that must include the work of the greatest anachronism in European thought – the Blackwoman artist. Scholarship and analysis should be brought to bear on this noble task.'[179]

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[176] This text was recently republished in *Art History* 44, no. 3 (2021), however my citations refer to the original 1988 publication.
[177] Maud Sulter, 'Call and Response', *Feminist Arts News* 2, no. 8 (Autumn 1988), 15.
[178] Maud Sulter, 16.
[179] Maud Sulter, *Echo: Works by Women Artists, 1850-1940* (London: Tate Gallery Publications Department, 1991), 26.

Each of Sulter's writings, however, provided a document and effectively created an archive of the work she was undertaking in order that it became a historical recording. It is important to note that throughout the various texts that Sulter wrote, they are always accessible, using a clarity of language that is critical, yet remains engaging and enthusiastic. For my research, this is a particularly relevant methodology as it demonstrates the importance of recording and documenting the work that one does (as well as the others you are championing). The significance that writing and publications have as historic documents cannot be underestimated, as they provide evidence of the various and important activities of these overlooked figures. In addition, I have found Sulter's persistent repetition of her principal ideals, no matter what the platform she was using, particularly interesting and important for my research. They demonstrate a long-term, unwavering commitment to a set of principles and a strategy – for her, this was not a one-time action.

The use of publications to create space for artist-women, and cement their contributions within art history by Sulter, is also evident as an important strategy in contemporary discussions. Gabrielle Schor has been an advocate for the writing and recording of artist-women's work within her role at the Verbund Collection, creating new publications on previously overlooked Austrian artists such as Renate Bertlmann (1943–) and Birgit Jürgenssen (1949–2003). Schor explained that not only do such monographic publications provide information on these artists, but by inviting other curators and academics to co-edit, or to write on these artist's practices, she creates a wider network which helps reach more people and thus gain more recognition for the artist.[180] Jessica Morgan similarly spoke about Dia's new strategy to produce publications on overlooked practices which not only extended to artists but to female critical writers and thinkers.[181] Camille Morineau (Director: AWARE) went one step further, and upon leaving her curatorial position at the Centre Pompidou, began a feminist non-profit organisation, AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions, to bring attention to, and collect information and scholarship on the many marginalized artist-women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of AWARE's main outputs is their website, which publishes bilingual (French and English) content about artist-women weekly on its site. AWARE's project belongs to a long history of alternative organisations doing such

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[180] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[181] In conversation with the author, September 2020

important work, including Glasgow Women's Library, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, the Women's Art Library (London), and the Feminist Library (London). Since its inception in 2014, AWARE has amassed a significant amount of content, and biographies of artists, as well as disseminating this research through essays, public symposia, round-table discussions, and seminars.

Alongside the use of multiple platforms was Sulter's inclusion of multiple types of creativity, without hierarchy, across all her projects. This strategy was strongly aligned with the Black feminist thought coming out of the United States, and writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. In 1972 Walker wrote *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, an essay which spoke powerfully of the suppression of, and lack of outlet for, black women's spirituality and creativity throughout the history of slavery and its enduring legacies:

> For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality—which is the basis of Art—that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane.[182]

Walker's text is intended to highlight these unwritten stories of black women's creativity, and to call upon herself and others to record these women's lives and work. Walker's essay ends on a discussion of her own mother's creativity which she found in her garden through the growing of flowers, and which Walker suggests should be valued in the same way as other art forms. Walker writes, 'I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.'[183] Similarly, in her 1973 novel *Sula* Toni Morrison writes of her main protagonist Sula that she has no place to put her creativity:

> …in her way, her strangeness, her naiveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artists with no art form, she became dangerous.[184]

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[182] Alice Walker, 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens', 1972, in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 402.
[183] Alice Walker, 'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens', 408.
[184] Cited in Maud Sulter, *Echo: Works by Women Artists, 1850-1940,* 13.

This text by Morrison is quoted by Sulter on numerous occasions, and she cites it as a rallying point for black artist-women in the UK in the 1980s. These women knew they had to find outlets for their work, to draw on their own experiences and to be visible. What can be garnered from Walker and Morrison is a need to recognise all forms of creativity, and to provide space for it to exist – something that Sulter was attempting to do with BWCP. This calls for a dissolving of hierarchies of forms of creativity long held by museums and other art institutions. This argument is, of course, in line with other feminist ideas surrounding the widening of the boundaries of art making to include crafts and textile practices that were too often denoted as 'women's work,' as discussed in the introduction. However, Sulter appears to have adopted this strategy in a very broad sense, and in her projects a range of creative forms co-existed under one outlet – be it hairbraiding, dance, music, fine arts, 'craft', photography, and performance. This was a value that carried through several projects by Sulter: *Check It!* in 1985 was a festival that ran for one month at Drill Hall in London, that brought together and celebrated art, music, dance, writing, poetry, performance and film; the exhibition *Passion*: *Blackwomen's creativity of the African Diaspora* in 1989 at The Elbow Room; and the publication, *Passion: Discourses of Blackwomen's Creativity,* published in 1990, which brought together women who worked with hairbraiding, performance artists, poets, artists, and even a gardener; and even in the exhibition *Echo* at Tate Liverpool, which while it primarily displayed paintings by artist-women from the Tate Collection, Sulter incorporated excerpts of women's writings, descriptions of the works themselves along with critical analysis and personal history into the exhibition display. As critic Emma Anderson noted in her review of that exhibition, this was a 'complex, but open' approach, where 'a lightness of curatorial touch combined with a strength of context [provided] freedom and new languages with which to explore these territories.'[185]

The exhibition – *Passion: Blackwomen's creativity of the African Diaspora* – was an important milestone for Sulter, as it allowed her to develop her one of her central concerns. The exhibition brought together creative practitioners from different countries in dialogue with those black artist-women in Britain. Building such a network of artistic voices was crucial to Sulter, who explained:

> In this hostile world of quota systems and the marginalisation of Blackwomen's creativity we network and maintain communication channels across oceans, continents, and time zones so that almost against all odds we know what moves are afoot to damn our flow…

[185] Emma Anderson, 'ECHO: WORKS BY WOMEN ARTISTS 1850-1940: Tate Gallery, Liverpool August 23- September 29 1991', *Women's Art Magazine (Archive: 1990-1996)*, no. 43 (November 1991): 18–19.

> we negotiate a terrain where the path has forged by our souls along a continuum which spans the Black diaspora.[186]

The publication, *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity* (1990), was the culmination (and record) of Sulter and Pollard's Blackwomen's Creativity Project, and it went even further to include a wider range of voices and geographical positions. It sought to bring these ignored histories to the forefront and could have been seen as a reaction against the marginalisation of black artist-women in feminist art history and exhibitions focussed on black art, more generally. For example, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker's 1987 *Framing Feminism; Art and the Women's Movement 1970–1985* and the exhibition *The Other Story* in 1989 at the Hayward Gallery, London curated by artist Rasheed Araeen, had both included very little women of colour. Deborah Cherry describes *Passion* as such:

> The book rewrote and redefined feminism by collecting and collating information and by establishing a polyphonic discussion and analysis on the artistic and cultural practices of contemporary diaspora women artists within and without Britain. With its discursive production and dissemination of new knowledge, it provided substantial documentation and an essential educational resource based on extensive research and archives.[187]

This notion of the polyphonic was key to Sulter. The book is not a typical exhibition catalogue – it does not 'record the exhibition', nor include texts only related to the exhibition and its artists – but was conceived to be a much wider tool for education, of writing history for both her peers and future generations. It is both an anthology, and an archival document. Sulter included overviews of her previous work including her own reflections on her work with the Blackwomen's Creativity Project, and The Elbow Room. Portfolios of artists who had worked with these organisations were included. New writing, and older texts, from various authors were published – spanning a wide range of topics from discussions of craft and 'ethnic' art forms, imperialism, an essay on Black Women Artists in the UK, to an in conversation between mother and daughter about gardening. The final section of the book is dedicated to an archive of ephemera from numerous exhibitions, events and magazines – demonstrating and documenting the wide range of activity that had taken place in the preceding ten years.

Sulter's insistence on the inclusion of black women from a range of differing geographical positions was in line with the wider transnational curatorial work that had become increasingly prevalent in the 1990s. The most notable example of this work is the Nigerian curator, art historian and critic Okwui Enwezor,

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[186] Maud Sulter, 'Viewfinders', *Feminist Art News,* 3.2 (1989), 9
[187] Deborah Cherry, 'With Her Fingers on the Political Pulse: The Transnational Curating of Maud Sulter', 212.

who came to prominence during this period, and who is often championed for reorientating the art world's focus away from the Euro-American axis and an insistence upon a more global vision.[188] Sulter's "Transnational Vision" was deeply invested in her feminist politics, and she was interested in forming long-term relationships with women globally, creating a network and discourse around the legacies of colonialism. Her commitment to presenting the work of the African diaspora had been present in her work during the 1980s, however, it was further developed in the 1990s as she brought the work of international artists such as Lorna Simpson, Betye Saar, Fiona Folley, and Carrie Mae-Weems[189] to the UK for the first time. Transnational curating has, however, been considered a contested territory. Feminist art historian Angela Dimitrakaki, for example, cites it as space hard for feminists to inhabit because there has been a focus too heavily on the concept of patriarchy rather than that of capitalism, and because of 'its subtle disposal of a politics of geography.'[190] She writes:

> This politics of geography has been commensurate with an anthology-type of femo-multiculturalism, which is how transnationalism is understood in much feminist curating and writing of art history today striving to redress the balance by showcasing women artists from around the world.[191]

Such an argument is worth bearing in mind when examining exhibitions that seek to expand geographically from the Euro-American axis, and what they hope to achieve by doing this. I would argue, however, that Sulter did frequently discuss and engage with class politics alongside race and gender, making her transnational practice align with the definition by Chandra Talpade Mohanty cited earlier in this chapter that defines a feminist transnational practice as breaking down the borders between identity, gender, class and so on.

Another feminist strategy of Sulter's was her collaborative working relationships that enabled her to carry out her work. As noted previously, Sulter regularly worked with artist and curator Lubaina Himid to curate, publish and write about black artist-women, and the Black Women's Creativity Project was a partnership with artist Ingrid Pollard. In addition to these, Sulter worked consistently with several artists

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[188] See for example: Artnet News, 'Who Was the Most Influential Curator of the Decade? Dozens of Art-World Experts Told Us Their Judgment, and Why', Artnet News, 24 December 2019, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/most-influential-curators-2010s-1729779. They write: 'Without his efforts and his vision, we would all still be operating in a racist and Eurocentric art world.' Enwezor (1963-2019) was the first African and black curator of Documenta 11 (2002) and the 56th Venice Biennale (2015).

[189] It is worth noting that Mae-Weems recently received her first 'major' UK solo exhibition at the Barbican Arts Centre, London in June–September 2023.

[190] Dimitrakaki, Angela, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique*, Rethinking Art's Histories (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013), 61.

[191] Dimitrakaki, Angela, 61.

and practitioners on several projects, generating an important network of peers. In Sulter's Oxford National Biography entry Susannah Thompson writes that 'throughout her life Sulter worked collectively and collaboratively, in community education, publishing, and curatorial projects with friends, partners, and collaborators including artists, musicians, and writers such as Claudette Johnson, Nina Edge, Bonnie Greer, Bernadine Evaristo, Marlene Smith, Lorna Simpson, Miles Ofosu-Danso, Gerry Loose and many others.'[192]

Collaboration and the creation of support networks was a topic that was brought up during my interviews with contemporary curators and directors. Each person I interviewed spoke of colleagues and other curators who they either admired or work with collectively to help them in their practice. Frances Morris spoke of a 'sisterhood' within the institution of Tate Modern, mentioning current and former colleagues including Jessica Morgan, Catherine Wood and Anna Cutler, but also a network of artists of her own generation who she had had important and formative relationships with.[193] Similarly, Jessica Morgan mentioned that she had learned a lot about feminist curating from working with colleagues, such as Gabriele Schor and Camille Morineau, gaining critical insights on artists but also the need for deeper curatorial research into artist-women and developing long-term commitment to those practices.[194]

Catherine de Zegher

Catherine de Zegher (1955–) is my final exemplar and is another curator who used feminist politics and strategies to great effect in her curatorial endeavours. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, her exhibition *Inside the Visible: an Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of, and from the Feminine* (1996) is widely celebrated as one of the most successful exhibitions including work exclusively by artist-women, and heavily championed as an important model of feminist curating by Griselda Pollock (2010), Helen Molesworth (2010) and Renée Baert (2000). While I focus here specifically on *Inside the Visible,* it is important to acknowledge that de Zegher's curatorial work more generally has been important for feminist art history and exhibition making, witnessed in her numerous exhibitions of artist-women at the various institutions she has worked within. As well as her publication *Women's Work. Is Never Done: An Anthology* (2013), a collection key essays on artist-women that she had written over the previous twenty years. As a curator de

[192] Susannah Thompson, 'Sulter, Maud (1960–2008), Artist, Curator, and Author', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 8 October 2020, https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.111291.
[193] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[194] In conversation with the author, September 2020

Zegher has held various important institutional positions including, Director of Exhibitions and Publications at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto (2007-09) and Executive Director and Chief Curator of The Drawing Center in New York (1999-2006). However, *Inside the Visible* was conceived of as an independent project.

The exhibition first opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), Boston in 1996,[195] and was divided into four sections. These were poetically titled: *Parts of/for; The Blank in the Page; The Weaving of Water and Words;* and *Enjambment: "La donne è mobile"* (which was taken from an aria in Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* (1850-1) and means "woman is fickle"). Each section focussed on the same time-periods: 1930s–40s, 1960s–70s, and the 1990s. There were thirty-seven artists included, all women, and they were only shown in one section each. Art historian Sue Malvern describes the distribution of artists across the exhibition as 'intentionally even-handed,' and clarifies that while the geographical spread of artists was wide, including 'artists who were little-known alongside less well-known works by more visible artists,' it did not include any African artists, and only one artist from Eastern Europe.[196]

Despite these geographical omissions, the use of time and geography is one of the most notable aspects of the exhibition and for which it receives the most praise. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, de Zegher's curatorial approach attempted to offer an alternative model to the linear, successive survey exhibition that presents 'modern art as a succession of art movements with progenitors, originators and successors.'[197] With this approach de Zegher hoped that *Inside the Visible* would 'communicate a memory of women's art practice in the twentieth century, rather than its persistent erasure from collective memory.'[198]

De Zegher's feminist strategy meant that she was able to create an exhibition that opened up a platform for many unknown artist-women, not simply women that were part of the feminist movement, which is very often the case with women-only survey exhibitions. Griselda Pollock has called for the deconstruction of the 'tendency to generalise these artists as merely exemplars of a gendered collective: women, a sexualising nomination by which they are, as a category, lumped together, their singularity

[195] It subsequently travelled to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC; Whitechapel Gallery, London; and the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Australia.
[196] Malvern, 'Rethinking "Inside the Visible"', 108.
[197] Malvern, 109.
[198] Catherine de Zegher in Katy Deepwell, 'An Interview with Catherine de Zegher, Curator of Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine', *n.paradoxa Online* December, no. 1 (1996): 59.

annulled.'[199] *Inside the Visible* was successful at undermining this tendency: gender was not the defining connection between the artists. It could in fact have easily included artist-men, which would have removed any criticism regarding ghettoization or marginalisation. De Zegher's decision however, to show only works by artist-women was another strategic move. She explains this choice in her catalogue essay:

> …this decision should be considered as an effort to show, in the absence of a rewriting of "history", the partiality of its structures and codes, and to display the art of women because their roles as active agents of culture have too often been minimalised, delayed, or ignored.[200]

For my research however, the most important aspect of de Zegher's project was her exploration of cyclical time and repetition, which is fundamental to my examination around the notion of rediscovery in more recent curatorial projects. Her approach actively investigated the idea of 'beginnings' as an activity that implies return and repetition over linear accomplishment. De Zegher felt that this was an active strategy by artist-women as 'their need to deconstruct existing representational codes is a search for "beginnings" in the sense described by Edward Said.'[201] Said wrote that 'beginning and beginning-again are historical whereas origins are divine; a beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention.'[202] In addition to Said, de Zegher draws upon psychoanalytical notions of repetition developed by Freud and Lacan, which had become popular topics of discussion by art historians such as Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Interpreting their research for her exhibition, she explains:

> Avoiding mechanistic speculations about priority, influence, and imitation—which too often disavow or repress marginalised art practices—this approach considers simultaneous "rediscoveries" and repetition of (avant-garde) paradigms by investigating the actual conditions of reception—the audience's disposition and demands, cultural legitimation, institutional mediation between demand and legitimation—and transformation.[203]

In 2020, de Zegher was invited to revisit her exhibition for the twentieth anniversary of the Dutch arts magazine *See All This*. De Zegher wrote a new essay that reflected on her exhibition. Within it she described why the elliptical was so important to her, cementing its importance in her feminist curating:

> Our interest lies not in linear art history but in an elliptical, cyclical movement with a multiplicity of practices, which at times tend to be peripheral. Often, over the course of the twentieth century, projects happening at the margin have eventually come to shape

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[199] Griselda Pollock, 'The Missing Future: MoMA and Modern Women', in *MODERN WOMEN: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. Cornelia Butler and A. Schwartz, 2nd ed. (New Y0rk: Department of Publications, MoMA, 2010), 54.
[200] Catherine de Zegher, *Inside the Invisible: An Eliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine*, 1996, 37.
[201] Catherine de Zegher, 23.
[202] Cited in Catherine de Zegher, 23.
[203] Catherine de Zegher, 23.

> the mainstream. Small, almost invisible and obscure at first, they have come to prominence many years later and have eventually helped to define the twenty-first century.[204]

These positions seem to attempt what Adrienne Rich promoted – that revision and repetition could be used to change the system from within. De Zegher's approach was grounded in both showcasing the work of artist-women, but also actively investigating feminist problematics – in this case their cyclical, temporal, and marginal nature – through the mechanism of exhibition making. Her more recent reflection also demonstrates her long-term commitment to the idea of the cyclical and non-linear, upholding that it remains fundamentally important to her feminist curating as an organisational principle.

Conclusion

As evidenced above, each of the four feminist curators discussed in this chapter had their own distinctive qualities, successes, and of course failures. Additionally, they belong to differing generations and worked under different social and political circumstances and contexts, which cannot be divorced from the work that they produced and the positions that they stood both for and against: Lucy Lippard and Marcia Tucker were immersed in the early stages of second-wave feminism in New York; Maud Sulter and Catherine de Zegher were working and developing their practices through the period when globalisation and post-colonial discourses were being explored – not to mention the distinct political contexts that their locations of the UK and Central Europe provided. Through the course of their careers, however, they each developed personal ways of working, and of understanding themselves, as outwardly feminist curators. Despite their individual paths, this examination of their respective practices and approaches highlights multiple overlaps and similarities, which extend from: the call to be transparent and self-reflective; to approaching curatorial work in non-hierarchical, non-binary and inclusive ways; to think without borders, and investing in feminist transnational practices; to actively work against the linear narratives that were set forth by modernism, and to think cyclically instead; to understand the contexts that both the artists' work is/was being produced, as well as the context that the exhibition is placed – as de Zegher's work has attested, the conditions for a work's reception, or (re)discovery, can be just as important as the conditions of its original creation; to record one's activities to try and evade possible erasure from the future writings of history; to be open to

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[204] Catherine de Zegher, 'Bee! I Am Expecting You!', *See All This*, No. 20, Winter 2021/2020, 18.

collaboration and experimentation in one's practice; and to demonstrate a long-term commitment to one's own developing practice and to the artists that you are working with. These compelling parallels are in no way exhaustive, but they do perhaps provide one understanding of what might constitute a feminist curatorial practice – a practice that does not focus on merely on representation, but rather a production that nurtures the multiple definitions of feminism and its teachings at its core.

As cited in the introduction chapter of this thesis, Renée Baert noted that often within institutions and museums a 'folded in' approach was at play when it came to the use of feminist principles by curators working in those environments. While the four historical exemplars written about above were not using such an approach as their work was/is inherently feminist, the contemporary curators and directors, mentioned throughout this chapter (Morris, Morgan, Munro, Schor, and Whitley) each certainly signalled towards this. The feminist strategies mined from Lippard, Tucker, Sulter and de Zegher, therefore, are intended as a backdrop to the examination of my artist case studies – Hilma af Klint, Lee Lozano and Betye Saar – and the exhibitions that have most recently showcased their work in the proceeding chapters. In those chapters I will explore whether a 'folded in' approach is indeed working, determining if we are witnessing the translation of some of the feminist methodologies cited here into the mainstream art world and its institutions.

CHAPTER 2

HILMA AF KLINT: A PERPETUAL DISCOVERY

> The more a path is used the more a path is used.
> — Sara Ahmed[205]

In 2019, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York was named 'The Risk Taker' by journalists Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin for its exhibition *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (12 October 2018–23 April 2019),[206] because as a 'little-known' artist the leadership of the museum feared that it would not attract their usual audience numbers. The opposite turned out to be true as not only did they welcome over 600,000 visitors (the largest in its history), museum membership increased by 34%, Hilma af Klint-themed merchandise accounted for over 40% of sales in the museum shop, and the exhibition catalogue sold more than 30,000 copies.[207] For Burns and Halperin the show offered its audience a moment of genuine discovery – af Klint was 'an unknown, foreign, female artist, whose work is unsupported by the market' – and thus they named the exhibition an 'instance of institutional bravery.'[208] They argued that this exhibition defied previous, more received, wisdom around what people want to see, highlighting how it enabled the opening up of a discussion on canon revision: 'contrary to what the history books have told us, af Klint could be considered the first great abstract painter, pre-dating [Wassily] Kandinsky – which calls into question the centrality of long-repeated myths surrounding male artistic genius.'[209] This chapter seeks to unpick the discovery of Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) tracing the key exhibitions of her work, her reception, and her recognition, up to and beyond the Guggenheim exhibition, to examine how the artist's legacy has been shaped to date. It will question the intentions of the curators, seeking to understand how these exhibitions sit in relation to wider feminist discourse and curatorial practice, to ultimately examine if they demonstrate feminism entering museums and institutions in meaningful ways.

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[205] Sara Ahmed, cited in Katie da Cunha Lewin, 'The Politics of Rediscovery', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, no. Online (17 August 2020), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-politics-of-rediscovery/.
[206] Burns, Charlotte; Halperin, Julia, 'Case Studies: How Four Museums Are Making Change Happen for Women Artists', *In Other Words*, 19 September 2019, https://www.artagencypartners.com/in-other-words-issue/19-september/?showsinglepage=1.
[207] Burns, Charlotte; Halperin, Julia.
[208] Burns, Charlotte; Halperin, Julia.
[209] Burns, Charlotte; Halperin, Julia.

Who was Hilma af Klint?

Born to a Swedish naval family, Hilma af Klint was academically trained at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm 1882–1887, and among the first generation of women to study alongside male colleagues.[210] She had a studio in a central location in Stockholm, which she shared with two other artist-women until 1908. As a professional artist[211] she exhibited her naturalistic paintings of landscapes, portraits and still lives in several exhibitions across Sweden, including: the Art and Industrial Exhibition in Norrköping (1906); the Art and Industrial Exhibition in Lund (1907); the Royal Academy, Stockholm (1911); and the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö (1914). She joined the Association of Swedish Women Artists in 1910, becoming the secretary for a short period (until April 1911).

Af Klint remained a lifelong follower of the Lutheran church, but at a young age she simultaneously developed an interest in spiritualism: she became a member of the Edelweiss Society in 1896 – a Swedish religious association based on spiritualist ideas and practices; she joined the Swedish branch of the Theosophical Society in 1904; and from 1920 became a lifelong member of the Anthroposophical Society, visiting the Goetheanum (its headquarters) in Dornach several times in the 1920s. Throughout her life af Klint attended lectures on various spiritual ideas, including ones by leading Theosophist Annie Besant (1847–1933), and Rudolf Steiner[212] (1869–1925). Following her association with the Edelweiss Society, in 1896, af Klint formed a group called The Five (De Fem), with four other women, who had regular spiritualist meetings and held séances. During these séances they would communicate with a group of spiritual guides, or High Masters, who revealed themselves as Amaliel, Ananda, Clemens, Esther, Georg and Gregor. The group documented the messages they received from these Masters through automatic drawing and writing. When The Five dissolved in 1908, a Group of Thirteen emerged in its place and af Klint would continue to practice mediumship throughout her life. It was through her practice of automatic writing and drawing that af Klint developed a new visual language, one that was a radical departure from her traditional academic training.

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[210] In Higgie, Jennifer, 'Longing for Light: The Art of Hilma Af Klint', in *Hilma Af Klint: Painting the Unseen* (London: König Books, 2016), 18, Higgie notes that Scandinavian countries were more advanced in admitting women to their art academies in the late nineteenth century. By comparison women were excluded from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris until 1897 and were not admitted into German academies until 1917.

[211] She was listed in the phone book as an artist.

[212] Steiner was the Head of the German branch of Theosophy from 1904–1912, after which he broke with them to form the Anthroposophical Society, whose headquarters were at the Goetheanum.

In 1904, during one of The Five's séances, af Klint was told by the High Masters that she would soon be called upon to convey the spiritual world in a series of paintings – which would be created on the astral plane, exploring the 'immortal aspects of man'[213]. Af Klint received the actual commission from Amaliel in January 1906, and it became *The Paintings for the Temple* (1906–1915) – a huge artistic undertaking resulting in 193 paintings – and which, over one hundred years after their creation, would be recognised as her most important work. Af Klint was assisted by other members of The Five, including fellow artists Anna Cassel and Cornelia Cederberg, and later by Gusten Andersson (who had joined the group around 1905).[214] For a time, and during the process of channelling, af Klint and Cassel assumed alter-egos – Asket and Vestal respectively – Asket was a masculine ascetic, and Vestal, a priestess of ancient Rome – they are often noted as forming a unity "Vestalasket". Af Klint was, therefore, assuming gender shifts in 1906.[215]

Fig. 1. Installation view: three paintings from *The Evolution. The WUS/Seven-Pointed Star Series, Group VI* (1908) from *The Painting for the Temple* series at The Guggenheim Museum, New York (2018-19).

The Paintings for the Temple have a remarkably diverse palette of warm and vivid colours and contain an impressive array of imagery – organic biomorphic forms, flowers and plants, geometric shapes, symbols,

[213] Cited in Higgie, Jennifer, 'Longing for Light: The Art of Hilma Af Klint', in *Hilma Af Klint: Painting the Unseen* (London: König Books, 2016), 16.

[214] In early 2023 the book *Anna Cassel: The Saga of the Rose* (Bokförlaget Stople) was published which includes art historical research by Hedvig Martin that Cassel's (and the other members of af Klint's spiritual circles) involvement in the production of *The Paintings for the Temple* was much more than previously thought. See: Susan L. Aberth, 'SPIRITED AWAY: Who painted Hilma af Klint's otherworldly visions?;, *Artforum,* April 19, 2023, https://www.artforum.com/books/who-painted-hilma-af-klint-s-otherworldly-visions-90405

[215] Julia Voss, *Hilma Af Klint: A Biography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2022): 135.

and letters – that interchange the figurative with the abstract (Fig. 1 and 2). They developed out of her communication with spiritual beings, and her extensive exploration of ideas associated with spiritualism and alternative beliefs including Rosicrucianism, Alchemy, Buddhism, Occultism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, as well as her interest in science. In 1906 she created her first abstract painting, which have led curators and art historians to name af Klint a pioneer of abstraction, calling into question the long-standing art historical understanding that the first abstract painting was created by Kandinsky (1866–1944) in 1910-11. These works explore dualities – male and female, spirit and matter, dark and light – and their unity, ultimately leading to transcendence – a notion that was part of the Theosophical doctrine. Af Klint created a spiritual enquiry that sought to explore knowledge surrounding all of existence, and in essence to make the invisible relationships that shape our world, visible. The paintings were created in series, groups, and subgroups, where different aspects of a theme were developed, each group varied in size – *The Ten Largest* (1907) (Fig. 2) were the largest, each measuring over three metres high (a remarkable feat for this period), while others were more modest in scale. Af Klint, and other members of her spiritualist groups, kept extensive notebooks which outlined messages they received from the higher powers, how the works were prepared and painted, who was present, and her own thoughts and questions about her task. These notebooks have been used by academics and curators to piece together the context that af Klint was working within, to gain greater understanding of her process and the work's meanings. The majority were written in Swedish, with German appearing later.

Af Klint continued practicing in this manner for the rest of her life. Later works presented series that examined spiritually inflected studies on the natural sciences, the study of the atom, plants, mosses, and the diverse range of the religions – each using an abstracted painterly language – revealing a desire to understand the messages and work she had undertaken. Following her involvement with the Anthroposophical Society, much of her final work was inspired by its teachings and she produced watercolours, using the wet-on-wet technique which studied colour. The paintings were an exploration of a spiritual search for truth. In the 1930s af Klint produced a lexicon – 'Notes on Letters and Words Pertaining to Works by Hilma af Klint'[216] – where she attempted to make sense of the letters and words

[216] Fully reproduced in Christine Burgin, *Hilma Af Klint. Notes and Methods* (New York: Christine Burgin and The University of Chicago Press, 2018): 246-285.

that are present in her paintings. There are, however, several meanings and entries attached to certain letters, making clarity difficult.[217] Af Klint also produced over 1200 typed pages – titled 'Studies on Spiritual Life' – where she attempted to find an understanding of her work. Af Klint's paintings reveal an incredible search for wisdom and spiritual experience, but the notes and texts further substantiate her work as a life-long enquiry into spiritual and scientific knowledge.

Fig. 2. Installation view: two paintings from the series *The Ten Largest* (1907) at The Serpentine Galleries, London (2016). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

The majority of the non-traditional (abstracted) paintings that af Klint produced from 1906 onwards were never seen publicly during her lifetime. She did, however, show a small number of them on two occasions: firstly, she showed seventeen works – fourteen works on paper, and three oil paintings – in 1913 at an art exhibition at the Theosophical Society's international meeting in Stockholm. The paintings belong to *The Paintings for the Temple* but they were representational, aligned with the style of work she was already known for; and secondly, in 1928 at The World Conference for Spiritual Sciences in London, organised by the English Anthroposophical Society, she exhibited works believed to be from *The Paintings from the Temple,* due to the scale of the works noted in shipping correspondence – the exact works, and number of them shown, is unknown. On this occasion she gave a lecture about the paintings.[218] Upon her

[217] Voss: 276.
[218] Voss: 250.

death in 1944 she bequeathed her entire artistic oeuvre to her nephew Erik af Klint, which comprised of over 1,300 artworks and 126 unpublished notebooks and manuscripts. Af Klint provided instructions for much of the work (in the main the paintings pertaining to spiritual ideas) to remain private for twenty years after her death. Perhaps disappointed by their reception up to that point, af Klint believed that the public were not ready for her vision.[219] She also stipulated that the full series of works from *The Paintings for the Temple* should remain together and never be sold separately.

Discovery and Rediscovery

Hilma af Klint's work was first seen by the art world at large when it was included in Maurice Tuchman's important 1986 survey exhibition *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), forty-two years after her death. The works' reception was not warm – art critic Hilton Kramer wrote of her paintings that they were 'not very good,' and that they had little 'aesthetic interest,' and were 'essentially coloured diagrams.' He dismissed their placement, stating that: 'to accord them a place of honour alongside the work of Kandinsky, [Piet] Mondrian, [Kazimir] Malevich and [František] Kupka, in the section of the exhibition devoted to the pioneers of abstraction, is absurd.'[220] Claiming that 'af Klint is simply not an artist in their class, and—dare one say it?—would never have been given this inflated treatment if she had not been a woman.'[221] Kramer's sexism is evident, and his view proves the argument made by Griselda Pollock that artist-women have not simply been '*passively* overlooked. Their brilliant careers and visibility were blighted by institutionalized gender and race prejudice.'[222]

In 1989, following the LACMA exhibition, there was a small solo exhibit at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (now MoMA P.S.1). There were also several small exhibits across the Nordic countries around this time, and the Swedish art historian Åke Fant wrote the artist's first monograph in 1989 – published in Swedish[223]. Scholars Gurli Lindén and Anna Maria Svennson also published books in

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[219] See Voss, 262–264
[220] Hilton Kramer, 'On the "Spiritual in Art" in Los Angeles', *The New Criterion*, accessed 28 November 2022, https://newcriterion.com/issues/1987/4/on-the-aoespiritual-in-arta-in-los-angeles.
[221] 'On the "Spiritual in Art" in Los Angeles by Hilton Kramer'.
[222] Griselda Pollock, 'Abstraction? Co-Creation?', in *Women in Abstraction*, ed. Christine Marcel and Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2021), pp.29-30.
[223] This monograph has recently been translated into English by Ruth Urbom, and published by Bokförlaget Stolpe, Stockholm, Sweden (2021).

Swedish on her work in the late 1990s. There was a large-scale exhibition in Sweden in 1999 at the Liljevalchs Konsthall in Stockholm. In the mid-2000s, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2004) and Camden Arts Centre, London (2006) held solo exhibitions, and af Klint was included in a three-person show – *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma Af Klint, Emma Kunz and Agnes Martin* – at the Drawing Center, New York (2005). In 2008 Moderna Museet in Stockholm entered a long-term loan agreement with the Hilma af Klint Foundation facilitating the display of her work in their permanent collection galleries, as well as enabling the works to be cared for in a professional manner.[224] Following this flurry of activity around af Klint in the mid-2000s, however, the artist would the fall victim to another moment of being 'forgotten,' and after another eight or so years, af Klint would be announced to international audiences as an exciting new 'discovery' in 2013. The largest ever exhibition of her work was held at Moderna Museet, Stockholm – *Hilma af Klint: A Pioneer of Abstraction* (16 February – 26 May 2013) – and subsequently toured to several major European venues.[225] In the same year, curator Massiliano Gioni included her in *The Encyclopedic Palace,* for the Central Pavilion exhibition at the 55th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale. This raises the question of why Burns and Halperin praised the Guggenheim Museum for its 'institutional bravery' and called af Klint a 'genuine discovery' in 2019, when this abbreviated exhibition history clearly evidences that the work of af Klint had already been circulating in the art world for thirty-three years.

On af Klint, curator Elizabeth Finch wrote, 'an artist who receives posthumous recognition after a lifetime of obscurity is renewed cause for wonder at the recondite workings of history. It is not the fact of omission but the riddle of recovery that puzzles us.'[226] Despite the proclamations made more recently by several of the key figures who have played a part in af Klint's recovery – Julia Voss, Daniel Birnbaum, Iris

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[224] The long-term agreement was part of the museum's wider project – *The Second Museum of Our Wishes* – which focused on acquiring work by women artists as a gap filling exercise, following the recognition of their overtly male-focussed collection. For more details see: See Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe and Malin Hedlin Hayden, 'A Serious Suggestion: Give up the Goat. Art Collections and Feminist Critique in Sweden', in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), 66–83. In 2018, the Hilma af Klint Foundation and Moderna Museet renewed this agreement, enabling works by af Klint to remain on continuous display in Sweden and extending their professional preservation by the museum – see: 'More Hilma Af Klint at Moderna Museet', Moderna Museet in Stockholm, 26 February 2018, https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/2018/02/26/hilma-af-klint-moderna-museet/, accessed January 2023.

[225] Following Moderna Museet the exhibition travelled to: Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany (15 June – 6 October 2013); Museo Picasso, Malaga, Spain (21 October 2013 – 9 February 2014); Louisiana, Copenhaguen, Denmark (7 March – 6 July 2014); Helsingfors konsthall, Sweden (16 August – 28 September 2014); and Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo, Norway (2 October 2015 – 3 January 2016)

[226] Elizabeth Finch, 'Making Pictures Belong: Hilma Af Klint's Order of Transcendence', in *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma Af Klint, Emma Kunz and Agnes Martin*, exh. cat. The Drawing Center, New York (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.95.

Müller Westermann, Jennifer Higgie, among others – that she has changed art history and can no longer be ignored, I would argue that her position remains unresolved. The reasons for af Klint's prior exclusion still problematize her contemporary reception and understanding. Her recovery story has taken place over several time periods, each with its own cultural milieu, which make it a complicated narrative to unpick. As writer and art critic Jean Fisher argued:

> If we talk about the context of art, it must also be its specificity and mutability, not only in terms of the conditions of its making (the perspectives of the artist) but also of its reception (its relation with a diversity of viewers). It is here that the affectivity of a work of art (its potential to act and to be acted upon) is reducible neither to essence, as in the modernist tradition, nor to socio-political forces, a tendency in some postmodern discourses.[227]

In borrowing this as a method I examine the critical exhibitions of af Klint's posthumous discovery and rediscoveries as the contexts for the work's shifting reception, interspersed with knowledge of the conditions of the work's creation. The analysis is outlined thematically through a set of recurring ideas and issues that have been highlighted variously by the exhibitions of her work. This approach enables the repetition of certain problems that surround the work to be examined, as well as areas of progression to be seen. It claims that despite the excellent exhibitions and curatorial work that have sought to bring deeper engagement to her work, there remain inherent flaws with the mainstream art historical canon and the linear narrative of modernism that still dominates museums and their collections, especially when it comes to the belated reception of artist-women.

Evolving Narratives: Exhibitions on Hilma af Klint

Hilma af Klint's extensive body of work lay dormant in an attic in Sweden for decades, meaning research into the artist only really began in earnest in the 1980s. Her work was not lauded, or even accepted, as much as it was hoped following its debut in *The Spiritual in Art*, nor after the small-scale presentations of the mid 2000s. This has meant that each subsequent exhibition has become its own exercise in recuperation – charged with seeking to bring af Klint's work to new audiences and place her among the canon of art history. The same stories have often been told and retold throughout the various exhibition texts and

[227] Cited in Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art, in, of and from the Feminine*, 2nd ed. (The MIT Press, 1996): 21.

catalogues with a few notable exceptions. The following section gives a brief account of each of the key exhibitions on af Klint's work up to and including the Guggenheim.

Fig. 3. Image of the accompanying exhibition catalogues for exhibitions at The Guggenheim Museum (2018), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2013), and Moderna Museet, Malmö (2020)

The Spiritual in Art (1986) was a ground-breaking exhibition that sought to radically rewrite the conventional understanding of the history of abstraction by foregrounding the importance of spiritualism to the development of abstract art and the artists working in that field. Tuchman proposed that the pioneers of abstraction – Kandinky, Kupka, Mondrian, and Malevich – 'moved toward abstraction through their involvement with spiritual issues and beliefs. An examination of their development, and that of the generation following them, reveals how spiritual ideas permeated the environment around abstract artists in the early twentieth century.'[228] It contained over 100 artists, and 250 art works, spanning 1890 to 1985,

[228] Maurice Tuchman, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986): 34.

with geographical focus limited to Europe and North America. Hilma af Klint was represented by nine paintings from *The Paintings for the Temple* and five notebooks, including a sketchbook of automatic drawings produced by The Five (c.1900s), and one of af Klint's *Blue Books* (late 1910s). The paintings chosen were abstract, showing both her free-flowing lines, spirals and biomorphic shapes as seen in *The Ten Largest* (1907), but also her geometric paintings from the series *The Swan* (1915) and *The Altar Pieces* (1915).[229] The catalogue was a thorough piece of research that included seventeen essays by leading art historians in that field, covering different artists and periods, all pertaining to the connections between the spiritual and abstract art. It included a glossary of terms and key groups such as Theosophy, Anthroposophy, the occult, Rosicrucianism, and spiritualism. In the catalogue af Klint was discussed by Tuchman, Sixten Ringbom, and Åke Fant – who provided the first essay devoted to her work in English. Fant's essay gives an account of af Klint's academic training, development as a medium and unconscious approach to painting – which he highlights as being the very opposite to an artist like Kandinsky, whose abstract works were a very conscious process. She was aware of and in discussion with other artists in Sweden of that time, but he writes that her library did not contain the typical ones that figured in the history of the origins of abstract art. He claims that she spoke no other languages.[230]

Hilma af Klint: A Pioneer of Abstraction at Moderna Museet (2013), curated by Iris Müller-Westermann, was the first major international retrospective of the artist. It was the result of several years of research and a huge investment by the museum to advance knowledge surrounding the artist. It built upon the 2008 long-term loan agreement between the artist's estate and the museum. Moderna Museet digitised the works and the notebooks and carried out critical conservation work on the paintings. It contained 230 artworks – spanning af Klint's entire artistic oeuvre – showing *The Paintings for the Temple*, her early naturalistic paintings, paintings from *The Atom Series* (1917), *The Parsifal Series* (1916), *On Viewing of Flowers and Trees* (1922), and her late anthroposophy-influenced watercolours. The catalogue foreword states that af Klint had waited too long for recognition, that this exhibition would be the first to give the artist

[229] The titles of some of the paintings by af Klint that were included in this exhibition have since been changed to reflect newer research and a greater understanding of the artist's archive. To avoid confusion, I have written the current titles here and not what was published in 1986. For example, in the catalogue the *Blue Book* they include was titled *Illustrated House Catalogue Related to the 1907 Paintings* and was given the wrong date of 1907. These books – now known as *The Blue Books* – are now understood to have been produced until the late 1910s.
[230] Fant's monograph on af Klint was published in Swedish in 1989, which provided a much more in-depth look at the artist. It was first translated into English in 2021.

the international breakthrough she deserves, and that she was a pioneer of abstraction. Müller-Westermann's essay evidences this position by placing her the context of other leading Modernist artists who were interested in spiritualism and the occult – Müller-Westermann sets her apart by explaining the artist's mediumship and belief in higher states of consciousness. She writes that af Klint was an artist and an artist-woman of her time, on the wider spiritual and scientific context of the early twentieth century, on the development of her mediumship and other artists who had connections to that practice, and af Klint's life-long desire to understand her work. The essay, while titled 'Paintings for the Future: Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction in Seclusion', does refute prior accounts of her work being made in complete isolation. Other essays provided by art historians Pascal Rousseau and David Lomas are geared toward situating af Klint's work in relation to abstraction. A conversation between Müller-Westermann and Helmut Zander (a professor of Religious Studies) provides further research on Spiritualism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy. In 2020, Müller-Westermann curated her second major presentation *Hilma af Klint – Artist, Researcher, Medium* (4 April – 27 September 2020) at Moderna Museet, Malmö, with the co-curator Milena Høsberg.[231] It contained over 200 works and moved the discussion from af Klint as a pioneer of abstraction towards that of her work as spiritual enquiry, to gain a greater and more nuanced understanding of her own work. The catalogue reflected this and provided contributions from scholars in fields other than art, such as physics and biology, Theosophy and Esotericism, and meditation.

The Serpentine Galleries' 2016 exhibition, *Hilma af Klint: Painting the Unseen*, due to the small scale of the institution, contained 76 artworks and 4 notebooks. The majority were from *The Paintings for the Temple* – primarily focussing on work from six key series from that body of work, they also displayed key later works from the 1920s, and some of the early automatic drawings by The Five. The exhibition repeatedly reiterated af Klint as a pioneer of abstraction and acknowledged her belated reception. It recounted the narrative of af Klint as a naturalistic painter, her attendance at séances and her membership of The Five, as a receiver of messages from the higher realm, and her interest in a wide range of esoteric ideas, including the sciences. The curators highlight the importance of Rudolf Steiner to the artist and emphasised her 20-year ban on the work's dissemination. Emma Enderby was the in-house curator, but it was co-curated with Daniel Birnbaum, director of Moderna Museet. The catalogue foreword credits Birnbaum with conceiving

[231] Høsberg was the in-house curator of the 2013 touring af Klint exhibition at Henie Onstad Kunstcenter, Oslo.

the Stockholm exhibition – which is both an incorrect assertion and an erasure of Müller-Westermann's intellectual labour. Enderby and Birnbaum's essay placed af Klint in the wider framework of twentieth century modernism, calling for canon revision. Other contributors include Jennifer Higgie, who contextualised af Klint in association to Theosophy and its provision of equality for women, as well as other artist-women working during that period. She discussed the reception and impact of af Klint's work on the generation of artists in twenty-first century. Julia Voss' essay traced wider interests and influences upon af Klint including science, particularly Darwin's evolutionary theory.

Fig. 4. Installation view: *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* in the Rotunda at The Guggenheim Museum (2018-19)

Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future at the Guggenheim (2018) had a clear revisionist agenda. The introduction stated that af Klint's work called into question the standard narratives of abstraction's development, 'demanding a re-evaluation of its timeline and key figures, as well as of the factors that shaped its trajectory—including geography, gender, and broader currents in intellectual and visual culture.' They

maintained that their exhibition, 'constitute[d] a crucial step in amending that story.'[232] The exhibition itself, which was acknowledged as being indebted to Müller-Westermann's 2013 show, created a compelling narrative surrounding af Klint's desire to build a spiral temple to house her works, and the parallels to the Guggenheim's infamous spiral architecture (Fig. 4). Curator Tracey Bashkoff made connections between af Klint and the Guggenheim's founding director, artist Hilla Rebay (1890–1967), who when commissioning architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design the museum's building had asked him to 'build a temple to the spirit'. Bashkoff created further links between the artist and the museum's history by noting that af Klint, Rebay, Kandinsky and other artists from the origins of the Guggenheim collection, were engaged in similar esoteric and scientific ideas. It contained over 200 works, and while it focussed on *The Paintings for the Temple* it spanned her entire oeuvre. The work was not shown in full chronological order due to the scale of *The Ten Largest* and the museum's architectural restrictions. Veering towards the more abstract paintings this exhibition placed af Klint among similar narratives as before, but crucially included new research uncovered by art historian Julia Voss: that af Klint had travelled more widely than previously discussed, and that she had exhibited these works during her lifetime. It also revealed the true purpose of the *Blue Books* – ten notebooks af Klint created in the late 1910s containing black and white photographs of each work from *The Paintings for the Temple*, with miniature watercolour reproductions – which both Voss and Müller-Westermann concluded were intended as a portable tool to present her work to others, as the works themselves were too large and too many.[233] (Fig. 8) The book *Hilma af Klint: Notes and Methods* was produced concurrent to the exhibition, reproducing these notebooks in full colour, with translations in English of the notes inscribed. Such discoveries contradicted previous beliefs on the artist. The exhibition also positioned her practice as a medium in line with feminist interpretations that the majority of mediums during this period were women, precisely because it allowed them 'to overcome society's marginalization of their voices by claiming direct access to an absolute authority.'[234] The catalogue contained essays by Bashkoff, Voss and a conversation between curators and contemporary artists on af Klint covering topics

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[232] Tracey Bashkoff and David Max Horowitz, *Introduction "Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future",* exhibition wall text, (Guggenheim Museum, October 2018).
[233] See Julia Voss, 'The Travelling Hilma Af Klint', in *Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2018), 49–63 and Iris Müller-Westermann, 'The Blue Books', in Christine Burgin (ed.), *Hilma Af Klint. Notes and Methods* (New York: Christine Burgin and The University of Chicago Press, 2018): 30.
[234] David Max Horowitz and Tracey Bashkoff, 'Exhibition Wall Text' for *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (Guggenheim Museum, 2018).

such as: whether she could be considered an artist; how the work can be contextualised in the present moment; and if her mediumship could be taken seriously. It also had further essays by Andrea Kollnitz, Vivien Green, David Max Horowitz, Briony Fer, Tessel M. Bauduin, and Daniel Birnbaum that provided wider perspectives including science, occultism, theosophy and Kandinsky, the relationship between spiritualism and women's agency, and af Klint as diagrammer. Across all nine texts, af Klint is referred to as a pioneer of abstraction.

These exhibitions have clearly provided wider knowledge of af Klint and brought her work increased recognition but it is evident that research is in its nascent stages. It appears that much of the work done for each new exhibition has been reliant upon the previous exhibition's work and research. This is perhaps a natural method of establishing the career of an artist and bringing the work to new audiences, but with little primary research being carried out between each exhibition, it has seemingly led to the consistent perpetuation of false narratives. I seek to highlight that the themes and topics under which af Klint's work is repeatedly discussed have at times reinforced her marginalisation, and potentially misrepresented the understanding of her work. This will be examined in the following sections under three areas that I feel have been most prevailing: af Klint working in seclusion and not exhibiting her work; af Klint as a pioneer of abstraction; and the relationship between the spiritual and art, both broadly in art history, but also specifically in her work.

Working in Seclusion, and Other Myths

Seclusion, Isolation, Secrecy

Hilma af Klint's work formally and chronologically fits into the modernist trajectory of avant-garde painting at the beginning of the twentieth century, but it was not produced nor exhibited in the same manner as other avant-garde artists working at this time. This is why curators of the Serpentine Galleries exhibition, Birnbaum and Enderby, argued that af Klint's 'belated reception is an anomaly that creates complications for anyone trying to theorise her work in the art historical terms formulated in the twentieth century.'[235] Before the Guggenheim exhibition the accepted – and most widely told – story of af Klint's practice was that she produced her body of radical work in isolation never exhibiting them or showing them to a wider

[235] Emma Enderby and Daniel Birnbaum, 'Painting the Unseen', in *Hilma Af Klint: Painting the Unseen* (Koenig Books, 2016), 9.

public. She then chose to hide them for several more years following her death. In exhibition texts on the artist up until 2016, the words 'seclusion', 'secret' and 'isolation' are repeatedly used to describe how the works came into being.[236] In 1986, writing in *The Spiritual in Art* catalogue, Swedish scholar Sixten Ringbom called af Klint 'a one-woman control group,' precisely because 'she worked in isolation.'[237] Moderna Museet and the Serpentine Galleries both repeated this narrative in 2013 and 2016, respectively, demonstrating the thirty-year longevity of the story. Even though an attempt was made by Müller-Westermann to revise the story of af Klint's isolation, by demonstrating that she was part of the Swedish art scene and fully aware of the discussions and happenings of her time, she still used 'in seclusion' in her essay title and repeated the (now disproved) story that af Klint did not exhibit her works in her lifetime.[238]

Fig 5. Image of the covers of Julia Voss: *Hilma af Klint: A Biography*. English and German versions (left and right).

When af Klint was painting the *Eros* series in 1907 she wrote that her spirit guides said that 'as long as necessary, the paintings must remain hidden from the general public, until the time to come forward is possible.'[239] This has often been used as proof that af Klint kept her work secret. Other notes from the

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[236] It is worth noting here that her 2021 exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney and City Gallery Wellington was also titled *Hilma af Klint: The Secret Paintings* and so this issue seemingly prevails.
[237] Sixten Ringbom, 'Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers', in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 143.
[238] See Julia Voss, 'The Travelling Hilma Af Klint'
[239] Julia Voss, *Hilma Af Klint: A Biography,* 138.

guides repeatedly refer to the 'future' – stating that the project was for the youth. This is not the whole truth. As Julia Voss's biography of the artist has clarified, af Klint did not keep her works a secret, she showed them to several people through the course of her life, exhibiting them, lecturing about them, inviting several people to her studio to view the works, and travelling with the *Blue Books*. On being reclusive, Voss notes, 'af Klint understood herself quite differently. 'The experiments I have undertaken,' she wrote in 1906, 'will astound humanity.' And indeed, she took many steps to win a larger audience.'[240] There is evidence of this activity in the notebooks, in scraps of letters and notes in her archive. Most exhibition texts highlight af Klint's meeting with Rudolf Steiner in 1908, which further proves that she was actively seeking an audience and contradicts the notion of working in isolation and keeping the work secret. It could be argued that she wished to show her work to a sympathetic audience, those with similar interests and beliefs. But these groups had several artist followers – for example Piet Mondrian was also a member a Theosophical branch – and so the contexts she chose to show work were not as isolated or obscure as one might initially assume.

Voss also sheds light on her decision to keep the work from dissemination immediately following her death writing that this decision occurred in 1932, at the age of seventy. Af Klint did not explicitly state her reasons for this but Voss speculates, 'she did not doubt her work, but she doubted her contemporaries, and so she made [her] decision.'[241] In providing further context, Voss explains that Steiner (of whom af Klint was a life-long follower) had distanced himself from the idea of visions and mediumistic methods thinking they were outdated and degenerate practices. Moreover, since the turn of the century admitting to having visions was a dangerous claim as people – invariably women – began to be institutionalized, or treated with lobotomies and electroshock therapy, fearing that their visions indicated the dissociative disorder of schizophrenia.[242]

Throughout history artist-women – despite their consistent neglect by museums and art historians – were part of the same cultural landscapes and active artist groups as their artist-men contemporaries. That they have been excluded from the histories of the groups in which they actively participated has been repeatedly discussed by feminist art historians since the 1970s and is a topic that still warrants new

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[240] Julia Voss, 'Hilma Af Klint, Painter and Revolutionary Mystic', in *Hilma Af Klint: The Secret Pictures* (Sydney, Australia and Wellington, New Zealand: Art Gallery of South Wales and City Gallery Wellington, 2021), 40.
[241] Julia Voss, 264.
[242] Julia Voss, 277.

scholarship. Most recently, for example, Griselda Pollock published a new work about the artist-women who were important figures in the Abstract Expressionist movement in New York in the 1950s, which argues for the recognition of 'co-creation.' Here, Pollock argues that these women stood side-by-side with artist-men and have intentionally been written out of the origin stories of the avant-garde.[243] The story of af Klint's isolation, however, indicates that she was not co-creating, she was creating alone, and in secret. Such a narrative would recall that of an 'outsider' artist, which we have come to read as "self-taught," lacking in agency or the self-awareness of their educated peers.[244] But af Klint is not that either – she was a trained artist. The use of 'isolation' and 'secrecy' therefore, negatively impacts, and at times, even negates the self-belief that she had in her work. Whether it is true or not, it aligns her to a narrative of an outsider.

The word 'seclusion' and a narrative of secrecy are attractive, they capture the imagination and as such linger in people's minds. Artist Rebecca Quaytman has written on this tendency, saying: 'the titillating word secret is often deployed like a lace pillow on which to lay blame for this ongoing exclusion – as if [af Klint] chose coquettishly to play peek a boo with the audience.'[245] The first-hand extracts written in af Klint's hand surrounding the future and keeping the work a secret, when coupled with her 20-year ban, make a compelling story about how she propelled her work into the future for future generations to understand. That we – the curators, the audience, or the writers – are that future is explained many times in the exhibition materials. This flatters our egos as we become *the* generation who finally gets it. Such language is seductive – and as academic Katie de Cunha Lewin has pointed out – it has been used several times in the process of the rediscovery of artist-women, suggesting: 'that our culture is of our own making, and it presents us, the enlightened children of the millennium, as the ideal audience, knowledgeable enough to give this poor woman the readership, or viewership, or spectatorship she has always deserved.'[246] All historiography is messy, but revision and recuperation are perhaps even messier. As queer-feminist academic Clare Hemmings has argued, 'since fullness in representation of the past can never be reached, a corrective approach will always be likely to erase the conditions of its own construction, particularly if it purports to give us the final word.' In the notes she further articulates: 'not only is the storyteller motivated

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[243] See Griselda Pollock, *Killing Men & Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2022).
[244] Zoë Lescaze, 'The Door Policy', *Even Magazine*, no. 10 (Summer 2018), http://evenmagazine.com/the-door-policy/.
[245] Rebecca Quaytman, 'Five Paintings from 1907. A Short History Lesson.', in *The Legacy of Hilma Af Klint: Nine Contemporary Responses*, ed. Daniel Birnbaum and Ann-Sofi Noring (Stockholm and London: Moderna Museet and König Books, 2013).
[246] Lewin, 'The Politics of Rediscovery'.

to tell this history, but the storytelling subject is also produced, and produced herself in the process of making that history.'[247]

While it is clear that the exhibitions focussing on af Klint have not necessarily perpetuated the isolation narrative to invalidate her practice, nor its importance, they have problematised how one can talk about her in relation to the history of avant-garde art in the early twentieth century. It calls for a better attendance to language and storytelling, as well as not assuming that all previous scholarship is fact. In this case they have inadvertently given license for a continued debate around af Klint's position in art history.

Artistic Networks

A clear example of how the isolation narratives have stunted af Klint's reception can be found in MoMA's revisionist exhibition *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925,* (23 December 2012–15 April 2013) curated by Leah Dickerman. The premise was that the advent of abstraction was not developed through individual genius as previously understood, but rather via a network of artists and intellectuals that crossed national borders and artistic media. Abstraction 'was an invention with multiple first steps, multiple creators, multiple heralds, and multiple rationales.'[248] That af Klint was making abstraction at the same time as the known key players of the style, albeit not in one of the known centres of art, would seem to warrant her inclusion. The opening wall of the exhibition, however, included a large infographic that portrayed a complex web of lines and meeting points, mapping out the connections between the international artists featured in the exhibition. The artists she included were all connected to each other via this network of influence and discussion – af Klint was excluded. Dickerman's proposition disrupted the canonical history of abstraction by broadening it out to include more voices (including artist-women) and art forms than the usual suspects, but it still adhered to a standard view of what abstraction was and its evolution. Af Klint's omission has been criticised by people working on and interested in af Klint's practice, and one Dickerman has had to defend. She argued that af Klint 'painted in isolation and did not exhibit her works, nor did she participate

[247] Clare Hemmings, 'Introduction', in *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011), 13-14, and 229.
[248] Leah Dickerman, 'Inventing Abstraction', in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012.), 18.

in public discussions of that time.'[249] In the words of Zoë Lescaze: 'Is this really a factor for how we define who's an artist and who's not?'[250]

Working in the margins is always a challenging endeavour. Sweden has never really been considered an artistic centre for the avant-garde of early modernism but it does not mean that we should ignore it as a place of creativity. The difficultly between af Klint's connections and geographic position and the ones that Dickerman is promoting lies in the quality and nature of those connections. You must know the 'right' people, at the 'right' time, in the 'right' place, and you must be having the 'right' conversation. As such Dickerman automatically devalues anyone outside of that framework. As Quaytman has argued, 'originally the concept of a network was used to undermine the white male assumed heterosexual canon by shifting focus to a wider, more realistic, and vital inclusivity. Now I worry the network concept may be deployed as another system with which to exclude and construct hierarchies.'[251] Critically, *Inventing Abstraction* contained a large proportion (twenty-five percent) of works from MoMA's own collection, of which Briony Fer contended:

> Almost as potent as the origin myths that stick so tenaciously to abstraction is the origin myth that clings to the role of MoMA itself in abstraction's history… there are moments one must ask: Is this an exhibition about the formation of abstraction, or about the formation of the Museum of Modern Art? It is about both, of course, but this duality gets in the way of thinking afresh about abstraction as a larger theoretical problem and a continuing historical project.[252]

In 1995 Carol Duncan observed that while academia had begun to problematise the 'highly selective' history of modern art through the advent of French post-structuralism, Marxist analysis, and literary theories, 'these new art histories had won very little ground in public art museums. That is, they have won very little ground that is visible.'[253] What Fer exposes then, in 2013, is the power of the big institution that still reigns over the narratives of the history of art that are being told.

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[249] Clemens Bomsdorf, 'Did a Mystic Swede Invent Abstract Painting?', *Wall Street Journal*, 28 February 2013, sec. Life and Style, https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324338604578326243889075764.html, accessed January 2023.
[250] Zoë Lescaze, 'Do It for Yourself. Belated Exhibitions of Two Women—a Swede and an Indian, Both Working in Private—Reshape the History of Abstract', *Even*, no. 4 (Summer 2016): 69.
[251] Rebecca Quaytman, 'Five Paintings from 1907. A Short History Lesson.'
[252] Briony Fer, '"Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925"', *Artforum*, Summer 2013, https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201306/inventing-abstraction-1910-1925-41248.
[253] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (Oxon and London: Routledge, 1995), 103.

Contemporary Influence

Tracey Bashkoff, curator of the Guggenheim exhibition, also called Leah Dickerman's exclusion of af Klint into question. She recalls that Dickerman referred to af Klint as a cul-de-sac – 'a dead end' – in her network scenario. Bashkoff believed that 'that is just one way of looking at things and that we could think more expansively about people's influence and importance.'[254] This was precisely the reason that Bashkoff invited Rebecca Quaytman to have an exhibition at the same time as af Klint, to demonstrate the contemporary influence that af Klint had over artists working now.[255] Quaytman spoke to me of what interested her about af Klint was 'how she re-envisioned an overarching structure for all her work as being one,' and it was this idea that inspired Quaytman to work in chapters – something that has become the mainstay of Quaytman's artistic process.[256] Quaytman's project for the Guggenheim – *x +, Chapter 34* (2018) (Fig. 6) – was her attempt to navigate and understand af Klint's working processes and in concentrating on her formal strategies she 'illuminat[ed] the ties between af Klint's radical divergence from artistic conventions and her incorporation of scientific discoveries and visual styles, most notably the diagram.'[257] Josiah McElheny, when invited to present his work *The Alpine Cathedral and the Crown* at Moderna Museet in 2006, he decided (with curator Iris Müller-Westermann) to place his work in conversation with other works in the museum's collection with the precise intention of providing an alternative history of modernism. Af Klint was an important part of their account.[258]

The curatorial choices of Bashkoff and Müller-Westermann – to present artists from differing generations in dialogue with af Klint – should be noted as a positive, and critical, method of providing the artist with a wider context than the narrow terms of traditional modernist art history. It is a method that Catherine de Zegher also used in her 2005 exhibition *3xAbstraction* – bringing af Klint's work in conversation with Agnes Martin and Emma Kunz. De Zegher's exhibition was an attempt to open the conversation about a history of abstraction to include a wider range of voices (notably women's) and provided a different way of historicising abstraction. She asked, 'what is it about these women's work that

[254] In conversation with the author, August 2020.
[255] In conversation with the author, August 2020.
[256] In conversation with the author, December 2020
[257] Press Release: 'R. H. Quaytman: + x, Chapter 34', The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, accessed 17 January 2023, https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/r-h-quaytman-x-chapter-34.
[258] Both McElheny and Müller-Westermann spoke about this collaboration in my conversations with them in December 2020, and May 2020 respectively.

has made its reception so belated, and, to some extent, its purpose so distorted?' asserting that, 'perhaps these works on paper (and canvas) did not fit the dogmas of Modernism because so much of what they were attempting went beyond the limits of the mainstream until, at last, their work came to coincide with currents of inquiry connecting to the present…'[259] These exhibitions illuminate these curators' interest in the feminist curatorial methodology outlined in Chapter 1 – and more specifically de Zegher's use of this method – of thinking in a cyclical and non-linear way, but also of how a work of art can be perhaps more influential and important at the time of its discovery, rather than the moment of its conception. Such projects also provide a counter to Dickerman's seemingly narrow view of spheres of influence and connection, which continue to maintain the very narrow confines of the traditional canon of abstract art. As Lescaze writes, 'it is not wrong to belong to the milieu, to be acclaimed, or to engage with other artists, but it is certainly not essential.'[260]

Fig. 6. Installation view: Rebecca Quaytman *x +, Chapter 34* at The Guggenheim Museum, New York (2018-19).

[259] Catherine de Zegher, 'Abstract', in *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma Af Klint, Emma Kunz and Agnes Martin.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 33.
[260] Zoë Lescaze, 'Do It for Yourself. Belated Exhibitions of Two Women—a Swede and an Indian, Both Working in Private—Reshape the History of Abstract Art', 72.

A Question of Abstraction

Abstraction as a term, as an artistic style, is steeped in complexity. As Griselda Pollock has contended, 'there is no or never has been any consensus in the history of abstract art about its origins or originators, effects, and meanings.'[261] The canonical and modernist narrative of abstraction as formulated by the revered critic Clement Greenberg, and visualised through Alfred H. Barr's MoMA[262] – of formal development, reductiveness and the universal language of form – became a problem in the 1960s precisely because of its fixity on a set linear trajectory and formal evolution, that could not allow for anything outside of its own internal logic. As artists began to explore the possibilities of abstraction in different materials and through different methods – and globally, not just Europe and North America – it became impossible to maintain the ideas set forth by the modernist notion of abstraction. Moreover, as theory around semiology developed, 'the idea that form and colour can have some kind of 'intrinsic' value or 'universal meaning', apart from language and culture, seem[ed] far less plausible. The 'neutrality' of the formal values of abstract art [can] no longer be taken for granted.'[263] As feminist art historian Mira Schor has written, 'the universalism of pure abstraction turned out to be a myth, a myth that was exposed once theory began to critique the assumptions underlying modernism's notion of universality as put forth by Western white men.'[264]

As witnessed in the exhibition summaries, the narrative of Hilma af Klint as a pioneer of abstraction has prevailed from 1986 onwards and has become a driving force behind the promotion and discussion of her work. She has almost become the poster-woman for canon-revision: she is an art historical disruption that warrants the re-writing of art history. There are of course several reasons why af Klint is worthy of her place in the history of art and particularly that of abstract art. She arrived at her abstraction at a similar time – earlier, even – than several of the revered 'pioneers'. Those artists were each similarly interested and invested in the exploration of spiritual ideas, and they influenced their work and hers. Cementing her place in the art world's consciousness and in the history of art, however, has not been a smooth journey. In 1986, this proposition was quickly and categorically rejected. Müller-Westermann titled

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[261] Griselda Pollock, 'Abstraction? Co-Creation?', in *Women in Abstraction*, ed. Christine Marcel and Karolina Ziebinska-Lewandowska (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2021), 26.
[262] MoMA is used as just one example – as the collection of canonical modernist figures and the way they have been displayed has been duplicated by almost every museum of modern art at some point since then.
[263] Ian Chilvers and John Glaves-Smith, 'Abstract Art', in *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (Oxford University Press, 2015), http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191792229.001.0001/acref-9780191792229-e-12.
[264] Mira Schor, 'Some Notes on Women and Abstraction and a Curious Case History: Alice Neel as a Great Abstract Painter', *Differences* 17, no. 2 (1 September 2006): 134.

her 2013 exhibition provocatively, *A Pioneer of Abstraction*, hoping to 'broaden art history and be more accepting to a wider range of voices and ideas.'[265] In 2018, however, Daniel Birnbaum (then Director of the museum) reflected, 'I think the institution's transformative power was overestimated.'[266] That af Klint was positioned as somewhat of an 'outsider' artist at the Venice Biennale in 2013 probably did not help. It seems that scepticism, and probably the same sexism that feminist art historians have consistently highlighted, prevailed. That is, until the Guggenheim exhibition – or perhaps more accurately – after the Guggenheim exhibition ended and the ripple effects of its popularity could be felt and no longer ignored.

Art historian Pepe Karmel argued very recently that af Klint is now recognised as a crucial figure in the history of early abstraction. He maintained that 'abstract artists always begin with a visual theme or archetype combining abstract forms with meanings generated by associations with the real world. The hidden images in the work of [Theo] Van Doesburg, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich, *and af Klint*… are not idiosyncratic exceptions, they are the norm.'[267] That Karmel included af Klint in his new history of abstraction, published in 2020, both in the introduction alongside the other early abstractionists, as well as selecting one of her paintings for the cover of the book (*The Swan, The SUW Series, Group IX: Part I, No.17* (1915)), is important and demonstrates how the exhibitions have finally succeeded in their mission to prove af Klint's significance within art history. Most likely, this is because of the persistence of these various exhibition's messaging and the selection of works that they chose to display. In examining the works chosen by each curator in various exhibitions from 1986 to now, they have always primarily been the more abstract works from af Klint's oeuvre. Müller-Westermann and Bashkoff both told me that they did this purposefully.[268] Both, while not explicitly stating it, implied that this is because those works were more palatable for the art world at large to understand and accept. Perhaps that it made it an easier sell to their museum directors and board members. It seems to have worked, especially in New York. The response that this exhibition received was overwhelmingly positive – both with the general public, and with the art world elite. It even took the curator Tracey Bashkoff by surprise, who always felt that the public would gravitate toward it but that the reception by the art world would be rockier.[269] High level curators used their

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[265] In conversation with the author, May 2020
[266] Daniel Birnbaum, 'Another Canon, or Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', in *Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2018), 214.
[267] Pepe Karmel, *Abstract Art: A Global History* (London and New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2020), 29.
[268] In conversations with the author, in May and August 2020, respectively.
[269] In conversation with the author, August 2020

Instagram accounts to sing its praises: Thelma Golden (Director, Studio Museum Harlem) wrote, "I have been drawn to the Guggenheim. Not just for the absolute amazing art historical contribution this brilliantly curated exhibition makes. That's clear and unquestioned. But also for the way it spoke so powerfully about vision and voice…" , while Scott Rothkopf (curator, who was recently named successor to Adam Weinberg as the next Diretcor of The Whitney Museum) stated emphatically, "THRILL to see af Klint mobbed near the end. The whole museum field should take note instead of chasing obvious blockbusters." More critically, however, I think it is clear that due to the Guggenheim exhibition, when MoMA re-opened in Autumn 2019, following a period of expansion and a major rethink of how it would display its collection, they hung a work of Hilma af Klint amongst their collection displays. That other museums, such as the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin[270], have followed suit is further testimony to the impact the Guggenheim exhibition has had. When analysing the various exhibitions it was difficult to discern what Bashkoff did differently to that of Müller-Westermann, in 2013, or the Serpentine in 2016 – other than including the new research about af Klint's desire to show the works in her lifetime. In fact, Bashkoff's exhibition was heavily indebted to the 2013 show and its research – something she graciously admitted: 'I'm standing on the shoulder of other curators and art historians.'[271] It is hard to deny that this has happened because it was in New York, and at one of its most important museums.

New York, New York

The Guggenheim is one of the most famous museums of modern art in the world – it is also one of the most important institutions in relation to the history of abstraction due to its collection and the origins of that collection. Julia Voss agreed, 'if they put their foot down and say, 'af Klint is part of the canon, then who is to say that she shouldn't be.'[272] Bashkoff herself told me that when she heard about MoMA's inclusion of af Klint in their displays, it was a marker for her – their exhibition had actually changed something. Bashkoff also made the case for why the Guggenheim was the best institution for the exhibition

[270] There were six works on long-loan from the Foundation for the collection exhibition *The Art of Society 1900–1945* (22 August 2021 until 24 September 2023) – *Initial Painting* (1920) and *Nr. 1-5, Series VII* (1920) – that were from a larger series using abstract language, encompassing geometrical shapes.
[271] In conversation with the author, August 2020. Bashkoff also explained that initially she considered taking the 2013 touring exhibition, but it was not possible at that time for the museum to do that for various reasons. However, they did commit to doing something with af Klint at that point. Their exhibition was originally intended to be in the smaller side-galleries, but it was moved to the Rotunda and grew from there. She therefore had a long lead in time to develop the exhibition.
[272] In conversation with the author, May 2020

– 'we have a different story of modernism than let's say MoMA – we came out of Kandinsky's expressionist approach and so with the additional focus on the spiritual that our founding director Hilla Rebay focused on, it was an appropriate subject for us to do.'[273] Moreover, it is undeniable that the connection between af Klint's desire to build a spiral temple for her work, and her work then being displayed in the rotunda at the Guggenheim makes a remarkable story, and visually it looked spectacular. Curator Helen Molesworth spoke to me about the power that New York still retained. While she argued that it is no longer the centre of art world as it once was, she admitted that 'it is still the most powerful distribution network for the art world. You know the old song: "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere." It is a place that has quality – you don't go there to see something new, but you go there to see the definitive version of a thing.'[274] What all this implies is that the centre still holds.

Fig. 7. Installation view: Hilma af Klint, *The Swan, The SUW Series, Group IX: Part I, No.17* (1915) at The Guggenheim Museum (2018-19).

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273 In conversation with the author, August 2020
274 In conversation with the author, July 2020

Although feminist art historians and critics, including Schor, Griselda Pollock, Barbara Rose, Briony Fer, among others, have critiqued the exclusion of artist-women from histories of abstraction and made attempts to bring their work to light, the invisibility of those artists has remained an issue. Analogous to Carol Duncan's research, Pollock believes that this is due to the stories largely being told by museums, as while many artist-women were part of the same groups and movements as their artist-men counterparts, the 'museums selected only, or mostly, men as the creators of modern art.'[275] As such, and in specifically in relation to abstraction, Pollock argues that 'we still understand it so little, even as our great museums have generally devised neat chronological schemes to plot a story of beginnings, and celebrate the masters, explain their philosophies, and chart uncomfortably divergent and contradictory tendencies across the twentieth century.'[276] While many museums have attempted to break-away from the confines of chronological displays in order to accommodate a more rounded, gender-inclusive and globally-minded, outlook, there still remains far less works by artist-women in those collections.[277] And so, with this in mind – is Hilma af Klint's work being placed in MoMA's collection displays a triumph for feminist art history? Yes, indisputably, but it is also fundamentally necessary to question their revisionist contextualisation of her work, which I find problematic and confusing.

The Large Figure Painting. The WU/Rose Series, Group III No.5, The Key to all Work to Date (1907), hangs in MoMA's display called 'Circa 1913'. It is visually dense, depicting radiating and intersecting circles, spirals, biomorphic shapes, and flowing lines, in blues, yellows, and shades of blush pink. In a previous iteration of this display they presented *The Swan, The SUW Series, Group IX: Part I, No.17* (1915)[278] (Fig.7), which is an arrangement of shape and colour, depicting a circle divided into various sections of colours, set against a red background. Both works are explicitly abstract. The introduction panel reads: 'Between 1911 and 1914, a new generation of artists made a radical shift toward abstraction. Rather than depict objects in the world, they experimented with interactions between forms and colors.'[279] Here, af Klint is presented in

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[275] Griselda Pollock, 'Abstraction? Co-Creation?', 25
[276] Griselda Pollock, 26.
[277] See the Burns Halperin Report on the acquisitions being made by museums of artist-women, the figures are not good: 'Perceptions of Progress in the Art World Are Largely a Myth. Here Are the Facts – Burns Studio', accessed 3 April 2023, https://studioburns.media/perceptions-of-progress-in-the-art-world-are-largely-a-myth-here-are-the-facts.
[278] I expect that the changing nature of the work on loan to MoMA is due to other exhibitions of af Klint's work taking place simultaneously. I do not know the specifics of the loan agreement but it is evident that the foundation is willing to loan works to MoMA on a long-term basis in perpetuity.
[279] See '505: Circa 1913 | MoMA', The Museum of Modern Art, accessed 23 June 2023, https://www.moma.org/calendar/galleries/5102.

exactly the context that she has been described as since 1986 – an abstract pioneer amongst other modernist abstract artists. Leaving aside the date disparity of a work from 1907 being placed in a room titled 'circa 1913' – there are other issues at play. Firstly, presented like this, af Klint has simply been "dropped in" to the existing canon of modernist abstraction, with little to no contextualisation. It reveals that while the museum is broadening its focus, it remains unequivocally tied to a certain level of chronological narrative continuum. As Molesworth reasoned, 'museums are still hanging pictures in a way that implicates triumphant progression.'[280] It should be noted that the Neue Nationalgalerie presented af Klint's work similarly to MoMA. There, she was represented by six geometric paintings from 1920, alongside the work of Kandinsky and László Moholy-Nagy in the section "Modes of Abstraction". Of such curatorial moves Zoe Lescaze contended: 'these well-intentioned attempts to shoehorn forgotten geniuses into the same old narratives are a good start but can only achieve so much: it's like wedging new letters into the alphabet when what is needed is a more capacious language altogether.'[281]

Secondly, would it not be more interesting – and honest – to place af Klint with contemporary artists, to both indicate where her influence has been felt, and also her entry point to the art world? Molesworth agreed: 'I would rather see her in a room with Amy Sillman, because Amy was a part of a group of feminist artists who – upon begin exposed to af Klint's work late in their working life – realised that they could rethink everything in the wake of the path set forward by af Klint.'[282] Molesworth's idea sits firmly amongst a model of cyclical, and trans-historical, feminist curating, and also (as previously discussed) the type of curation that Müller-Westermann, Bashkoff and de Zegher had also carried out.

The final problem lies in the nature of the works chosen. As described earlier, in order to reinforce their arguments about af Klint's status as a pioneer of abstraction, the selection of work shown in various exhibitions to date has purposefully veered toward her abstract paintings. Such decisions by curators are not new, we (I count myself as one of those) make choices about which works are more significant than others all the time, deciding which works would better illustrate our narrative arc – it is, inevitably, part of the process. It is, however, something that significantly impacts the understanding of an artist, especially one in the nascent stages of being known and understood. This is a process of curatorial editing, and

[280] In conversation with the author, July 2020.
[281] Lescaze, 'The Door Policy'.
[282] In conversation with the author, July 2020.

perhaps selective historiography. As Janice McNab wrote: 'what these paintings might "be" rather depends on who is doing the telling.'[283] I believe that the effect this has had on af Klint is that if she is only presented as a modern abstractionist then audiences remain somewhat in the dark about the full breadth of her work and life-long project. Her work was not just about abstraction, and an arrival at abstraction. Her works do not simply derive 'meaning and power from figurative associations'[284] as Pepe Karmel has written. There is fluid interchange of abstraction and figuration throughout. The two co-exist across suites of works and in individual paintings. The arrival of af Klint's Catalogue Raisonné (2020-22) has meant that finally we are able to see all of the works reproduced in full-colour and in order. It reveals that during the creation of *The Paintings for the Temple* af Klint did not abandon painting in a naturalistic style, as previously thought: there are works painted in this style throughout. Firstly, in 1907 there are three works, *Prework for Group III*, that contain a portrait of a nun, and two landscapes. Secondly, there are two complete groups – one called *Preparatory Studies for Group VIII, A Female Series* (1912) and a second called *A Male Series* (1915) – that depict 7 portraits of nuns, and 7 paintings of monks at worship, respectively. This indicates that we cannot package af Klint in simplistic terms. Yes, she arrived at abstraction in 1906 and painted in this style until her death in 1944, but to reduce her purely to the field of abstraction would seem to misrepresent what she was trying to convey with her work – which was more than merely a search for abstract form.

I am not arguing that all of the exhibitions on af Klint have done the artist a complete disservice by focussing on abstraction – they have not – it is a hugely important part of her work. And all of them have, to greater or lesser degrees, acknowledged the interplay between figuration and abstraction, as well as their founding in spiritual ideas and creation through the artist's interest in mediumship. But their use of the words 'pioneer of abstraction' has become like a marketing slogan, attached to af Klint like glue – they become her tagline, her legacy. It was stated multiple times in all nine texts in the Guggenheim catalogue and peppered across all writings connected to the Serpentine exhibition, for example. It has almost set up a potential *fait accompli* – her placement among fellow abstract pioneers at MoMA being the ultimate prize. Academic Katie de Cunha Lewin has argued, 'the more we repeat the same narratives, the more they solidify into the only ways to think about particular issues – issues that lose their complexity as a result.'[285] The

[283] Janice McNab, 'Hilma Af Klint and the Need for Historical Revision', *Religious Studies Review* 47, no. 1 (2021): 39.
[284] Pepe Karmel, *Abstract Art,* 24.
[285] Lewin, 'The Politics of Rediscovery'.

difficulty then lies in how the work will potentially be discussed from now on – at best, we will see a flurry of new research and new exhibitions on the artist that complexify these first readings, at worst – af Klint is limited to the inadequate history of modernist abstraction.

Art, the Spiritual, and 'The Big Denial'

In the twenty-first century the art world has witnessed a slow rise in popularity of topics such as magic, spirituality, the occult, witchcraft, and other forms of esoteric practices as several exhibitions appeared exploring these themes, including: *The Dark Monarch* (Tate St Ives, 2009); *As Above, So Below: Portals, Visions, Spirits and Mystics* (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2017); *The Botanical Mind* (Camden Arts Centre, London 2020); *The Crack Begins Within (11th Berlin Biennale*, Berlin 2020); *Not Without my Ghosts: The Artist as Medium* (The Drawing Room, London, 2020); *Witch Hunt* (Hammer Museum and Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2021); *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity* (Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, 2022). The 59th Venice Biennale (2022) also touched upon subjects such as magic, automatism, mediumship and the power of nature through its sprawling central pavilion exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*. Most recently, writer Jennifer Higgie – who has written on af Klint for several exhibition catalogues – published *The Other Side: A Journey into Women, Art and the Spirit World* (2023), which focuses on artist-women and their spiritual influences. Curator Pádriac E. Moore has called this the 'esoteric turn', which has shown a reengagement with esoteric ideas and practices that artists were previously influenced and engaged in in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moore believes this is a symptom of a need for such utopian, and spirit-infused togetherness or community due to the current unfolding political environmental crises across the world – the effects of climate change, the collapse of post-war infrastructures, and a rise in extreme right-wing politics.[286] It makes logical sense then – against this contemporary backdrop – that Hilma af Klint and her spiritual explorations were finally accepted into the mainstream. Sadly, it is not as simple as that. That many of the artist-women that Higgie discusses in her book, and those included in the above exhibitions, were overlooked speaks of both the age-old issue of sexism, but also of the taboo nature of the subject of spiritualism that has plagued art history for decades. And one that we must bear in mind when examining the contextualisation of af Klint's work to date.

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[286] Spoken at a Live Lecture for the Glasgow School of Art Friday Event, 3 February 2023.

'The Big Denial'

Maurice Tuchman conceived *The Spiritual in Art* in direct opposition to MoMA and its long-standing devotion to formalism. His exhibition was a critique of those conventional accounts of abstraction, and it could not take place in New York, precisely because the city was 'controlled by the ethos of MoMA.' [287] In his exhibition essay, Tuchman traced a scholarly history of the connections between spirituality and art – in the first decades of the twentieth century they were both widely discussed and celebrated, but by the 1930s and 1940s the 'links between alternative belief systems and fascism would have made critics and historians reluctant to confront spiritual and abstraction links.'[288] Following this, Barr at MoMA and the Greenberg began to champion purely aesthetic and formal concerns – for example in *The Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1939) Greenberg wrote, 'content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.'[289] In the 1960s and 70s critics such as Rosalind Krauss and Michael Fried were equally committed to formalist analysis in their work (even though they both diverged at certain points on their approaches and beliefs). In relation to any connection between the spiritual and art, in the essay *Grids* (1979), Krauss wrote, 'by now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention art and spirit in the same sentence.' [290]

In her book, *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art* (2014) art historian Charlene Spretnak wrote about the 'Big Denial' of any relationship between the spiritual and art in art history and its exhibitions, presenting shock and dismay at the clear lack of knowledge around this subject. While formalism is one reason, Spretnak also outlined that when social art historians, such as T.J Clark, emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s they equally did not support spiritual ideas: 'historical evidence about spiritual content in modern art was not to be mentioned on the grounds that it was unbearably backward, clearly irrelevant, and frankly distasteful to both of the contesting sensibilities.'[291] The topic has been consistently dismissed and brushed over by art historians and curators alike. Spretnak presents *The Spiritual in Art* as an important counter point

[287] Sam Thorne, 'An Interview with Maurice Tuchman', in *As Above, So Below: Portals, Visions, Spirits & Mystics* (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2017), 32.
[288] Maurice Tuchman, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, Revised (Abbeville Press, 1999), 18.
[289] Clement Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', in *Art in Theory 1900–2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 6th ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 541.
[290] Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October* 9 (1979): 51–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/778321, 54.
[291] C. Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art: Art History Reconsidered, 1800 to the Present* (Springer, 2014), 6.

to the art historical status quo. Tuchman, however, felt that it had had no impact whatsoever on art world sensibilities. Spretnak unpicked his conclusion, explaining:

> Tuchman meant, however, that his ground-breaking exhibition had had no effect on *his* world of high-level curators and museum directors at major art museums. No one exclaimed that he had changed art history. No one mounted additional "ideas shows" at other major museums, he noted, that would have explored particular areas of this vast history. Instead, the response from his fellow art world professionals was largely one of cognitive dissonance and silence.[292]

In this context, it is perhaps of no great surprise that Hilma af Klint's debut in such a controversial exhibition would mean that she did not suddenly get the recognition that Tuchman believed she deserved.

Fig. 8. Image of the interior of one of the artist's *Blue Books* in *Hilma af Klint: Notes and Methods.*

In the introduction to the compilation *Abstraction* (2013) Maria Lind argued that since Tuchman's exhibition, 'it has been impossible to overlook the many connections, between abstraction and spiritualism in which cosmic imagery, vibrations, duality and sacred geometry play central roles.'[293] It is now widely known and accepted that artists working during the advent of modernist abstraction were heavily influenced by the study of Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Eastern philosophy, and various Eastern and Western religions. Lind's statement is true, yet as demonstrated by Spretnak's research it has hardly been

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292 C. Spretnak, 8-9.

293 Maria Lind, *Abstraction*, ed. Maria Lind (Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2013), 14.

the dominant discourse, and it has remained a marginalised narrative thread especially in museum exhibitions and displays. Thirty years after *The Spiritual in Art*, both the cold response of museums curators towards Tuchman's show, and the long-standing formalist ethos of MoMA – and arguably New York more widely – seemingly prevailed. *The Spiritual in Art's* very existence was ignored by Leah Dickerman's *Inventing Abstraction.* In her catalogue essay Dickerman outlined explicitly what she believed was *not* abstraction, writing: 'scores of earlier images from other Western discipline—chromatic studies, theosophical and mediumistic images, cosmogonic images, scientific images—may resemble abstract art. But these are not art at all, for despite any formal similarity they were intended to produce meaning in other discursive frameworks.'[294] Dickerson's approach then, as summarised by art historian Briony Fer, was to firmly situate 'abstraction with the context of a protean image world as a key to its historical emergence, rather than (as it was common to invoke) an esoteric realm of the supernatural and the spirit. This is always an imperative: to save abstraction from itself and to extricate it from the mysticism that formed part of its early rhetoric of revelation.'[295]

Fer's statement here would seem to suggest that she supports the discussion of spiritualist subjects and mysticism associated with modern art – and by association someone like af Klint. In writing on af Klint though Fer has suggested that we need to place the spiritual aspects at arm's length: 'taking af Klint seriously as an artist, in my view, actually *requires* us to take some critical distance from the mysticism that might have enabled her to make such innovative work.'[296] Fer's argument – which can be read in two different texts connected to the artist's exhibitions[297] – is to place af Klint firmly in the image-world and not the spirit-world, and she emphatically states several times that af Klint's work was an 'aesthetic' project. Fer writes that the artist was 'less of a code-breaker than a code-maker—less a programmer of a spiritual path, more of a diagrammer of fictional abstract structures and processes.'[298] As such, she situates af Klint's occult beliefs and mediumship as the framework that provided her with 'permission' to work outside of the conventional framework within which she had been trained. She argues that there were 'a whole series of

[294] Leah Dickerman, 13-14.
[295] Fer, "'Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925'".
[296] Briony Fer, 'Hilma Af Klint, Diagrammer', in *Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2018), 164.
[297] See Briony Fer, 'Hilma Af Klint, Diagrammer', in *Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future* and Briony Fer, 'Hilma Af Klint: The Outsider Inside Herself', in *Hilma Af Klint – Seeing Is Believing* (Denmark: Bokförlaget Stolpe, 2020), which was produced with the lectures given in association with the Serpentine Galleries exhibition in 2016.
[298] Briony Fer, 'Hilma Af Klint, Diagrammer'', 167.

operations of reception and transmission that allowed Hilma af Klint to reimagine the art process. Or at least, they enable us to think of the artist as almost a technological apparatus – a recording instrument – recording not messages from the other side but her own aesthetic sensibilities.'[299] Part of Fer's case is linked specifically to a feminist argument that women were especially drawn to spiritualist practices because it provided them a certain degree of agency (this is discussed in more depth in the next sub-section). Af Klint's diagramming is her own artistic research project that is about the process of making and thinking, rather than as a direct pictorial representation of information. In accounting for her extensive messages in her notebooks and texts that have been interpreted as a means of understanding her visions, Fer writes,

> all of [af Klint's] cross-referencing, the notations, and marginalia are also *a part of* the work. They make the work what it is—a material practice of making, working through innumerable permutations on a scheme—creating in the process a vast visual and ecological network that traces the fragile connections between categories and phenomena, whether visible or invisible. The day-to-day process of diagramming cuts against the grain of occultism and mystical enchantment. Existing alongside the visionary utopianism we find interconnecting series that point to another possible ecology of vision—in a form of diagramming that is intricately handmade and material, cryptically plotting out its own processes of making rather than simply peddling the symbols of a doctrine.[300]

Fer's account is certainly compelling and disavows arguments made by Dickerman, for example, that she was not an artist as we conventionally understand it. But her thinking still belongs to the very rational framework that we have been taught to understand and think about art. It positions af Klint firmly as an abstract artist, a narrative that was discussed earlier in this chapter. That Fer is writing in connection to exhibitions on af Klint – and ones that very much promoted the revisionist take on af Klint as pioneer of abstraction – reveals that there is a certain amount of academic legitimisation occurring here – Fer provides the art world a way to understand and to allow af Klint into its fold. As such, it demonstrates that in some sense the art world is perhaps not as ready to fully accept the spirit-world into the world of 'image-making' that we call art, as the 'esoteric turn' may suggest. It perhaps also reinforces why the desire to tie her so readily to a history of abstraction remains so strong.

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[299] Briony Fer, 'Hilma Af Klint: The Outsider Inside Herself, 110.
[300] Briony Fer, 'Hilma Af Klint, Diagrammer', 168.

A Medium, or Spiritualism as Instrument

Julia Voss wrote in her biography of Hilma af Klint that 'the artist developed her own spiritual cosmology, which evolved throughout her life. She confronted life's great questions with surprising texts and images. It is perfectly consequent, then, that her spiritual perspective should be at the center of our investigations into her life and work.'[301] As mentioned briefly in the exhibition summaries, this was the angle that *Hilma af Klint – Artist, Medium, Researcher* at Moderna Museet, Malmö in 2020. In their essay for the catalogue*,* the curators explained:

> As more flexible and inclusive views on Modernism continue to emerge, it feels only natural that the spiritual should be given equal reconsideration as a base element for abstraction. Important curatorial work has been and is being done to revive neglected histories and reframe artists who are somehow "outside" the art system or in other ways don't sit comfortably inside the neat categories of art history. It seems only reasonable to consider a trained and technically skilled artist like af Klint on her own terms, to take her understanding of her work seriously, even if we might not fully understand it.[302]

This argument stands apart from nearly all previous exhibitions on af Klint – including Müller-Westermann's original 2013 exhibition – in that they are stating that we should not attempt to rationalise the artist's belief in her own clairvoyancy, but accept it at face value. The accompanying essays in the catalogue pertain to subjects outside of art in an effort to contextualise the subjects she spent her lifetime researching. They are not attempts, as previous exhibition catalogues have done, to contextualise af Klint within our known understandings of art. One could argue that this approach keeps the works firmly within the 'spirit-world', but rather the objective was to broaden the categories for which we discuss her work, and by extension allow other artists who have been similarly marginalised into those discussions. Müller-Westermann explained that for her the exhibition was about 'not taking borders for borders,' and 'expanding the frameworks.'[303]

Müller-Westermann's decision to curate a second major exhibition of af Klint, demonstrates her dedication to her subject and the advancement of knowledge on the artist through exhibition-making – which within just a short time frame (seven years) is rare, especially for an institutional curator. Müller-Westermann explained that she felt 'people were hungry for a spiritual connection,'[304] an attitude that recalls

[301] Julia Voss, *Hilma Af Klint: A Biography*.
[302] Iris Müller-Westermann and Milena Høsberg, 'Outside the Frame', in *Hilma Af Klint – Artist, Researcher, Medium* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2020), 10.
[303] In conversation with the author, May 2020.
[304] In conversation with the author, May 2020.

Pádraic Moore's idea about our current times requiring a re-connection with the spiritual. This is something that Jennifer Higgie also touches upon in her book, writing: 'I, and many of my friends, find solace in the hazy promise of words that thrive on their intermingling: magic, myth, mystery, Spiritualism, spirituality. They're the things – feelings, ideas, instincts – we can't always put our finger on but often (and often secretly) hunger for…'[305] Of her exhibition Müller-Westermann explained, 'I was dedicated to making an exhibition that was proposing something new, and the spiritual is important for each and every one of us… For a museum to invite this thinking in, makes it a courageous exhibition.'[306] She is not wrong. It is a courageous position, and one that is contrary to other exhibitions and scholarship on af Klint, including that of *The Spiritual in Art* – which while it was dedicated to establishing that spiritual subjects were an inspiration for and influence on avant-garde artists, they remained firmly under the auspices of aesthetics. I would proffer that *Artist, Researcher, Medium* could also be categorised as a feminist project apparent through its long-term commitment to its subject, its self-reflexivity over moving af Klint away from discussions of abstraction to further expand our understanding of her work, and to try to dissolve the hierarchies between the so-called 'spirit-world' and 'image-world'.

Briony Fer's feminist-leaning argument about spiritualism providing agency for af Klint, seems to sit in opposition to Müller-Westermann and Høgsberg's position, but is a perspective that has been supported, and equally applied, by several academics and curators, such as Tessel M. Bauduin (2017), and David Horowitz (2018). It could be argued that their position offers a more contemporary, realistic, and 'rational' understanding of af Klint's mediumship and links to other occult practices. As mentioned in the exhibition summaries, the Guggenheim utilised this in their exhibition to explain af Klint's use of mediumship to its audience. Horowitz (Assistant Curator for the Guggenheim exhibition) drew on research by the religious studies scholar Ann Braude, whose book *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in the Nineteenth Century* (1989) posited a clear connection between the emancipation that spiritualism provided women and the radical politics of that time, including the right to vote and abolitionism. Horowitz argues that women used mediumship as a means to subvert patriarchal gender dynamics, claiming that, 'af Klint's spiritualism allowed her to circumvent these impediments... She did not need the approval of Stockholm's

[305] Jennifer Higgie, *The Other Side: A Journey into Women Art and the Spirit World* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2023), 10.
[306] In conversation with the author, May 2020

male-dominated art world; she believed she was sanctioned by a higher power.'[307] Similarly, Tessel M. Bauduin has claimed that af Klint's mediumistic state was a strategy for her to make work that was so radically different, and one that required her to go against gendered norms at that time, on which she writes, '[gendered] norms which we have no reason to believe she had not fully internalised herself and possibly subscribed to, partly or even fully.'[308]

In a lecture given in association with the Serpentine Galleries exhibition, art historian Brandon W. Joseph similarly drew on Braude's writings but also offered a Foucauldian reading of af Klint being influenced by her own inward forces, which we understand now as the unconscious. Joseph explains why within art history and museums this approach is necessary, stating, 'the predominant notion of modernist abstraction is still fully beholden to an Enlightenment ideal of self-possessed knowledge.'[309] This means that if we acknowledge af Klint's esoteric relationship to subjective agency, then we move away from the Enlightenment ideal of self-possessed and intentional knowledge – a very foundation of modernist thinking. And so, 'despite its stunning chromatic brightness, then, af Klint's work opens onto something of a dark side: the spirit medium's lack of intentional subjectivity implies a form alterity that the prevailing Modernist history of abstraction cannot encompass, no matter how vast its diagrammatic network.'[310] To take af Klint's mediumship seriously therefore brings us to a dead end in terms of her ever being fully assimilated into the narratives that still prevail, predominantly in museums. Against this backdrop *Artist, Researcher, Medium* can be read as radical, especially as it took place in a museum whose collection is predominantly male and modernist.[311] Whether one believes af Klint's clairvoyancy or not, this exhibition offered a moment of divergence from the path paved by previous solo exhibitions and this was remarkably refreshing to encounter.

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[307] David Max Horowicz, '"The World Keeps You in Fetters; Cast Them Aside": Hilma Af Klint, Spiritualism, and Agency', in *Hilma Af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2018), 130.
[308] T. M. Bauduin, 'Að Sjá Og Sýna Hið Ósýnilega: Um Nútímalist Og Andleg Verk Hilmu Af Klint', *Ritið* 17, no. 1 (2017): 187–224. English version can be found here: https://www.academia.edu/91979386/Seeing_and_Depicting_the_Invisible_On_Hilma_af_Klint_s_Modern_Art_and_Spiritual_Paintings
[309] Branden W. Joseph, 'Knowledge, Painting, Abstraction, and Desire', in *Hilma Af Klint: Seeing Is Believing* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Stolpe, 2020), 135.
[310] Branden W. Joseph, 'Knowledge, Painting, Abstraction, and Desire', 135.
[311] It could be argued that this exhibition took place at a regional outpost of Moderna Museet and is therefore not beholden to the same schema as the museum in Stockholm. I do not think this alters my point as the museum share the same collection and history. I am sure that one of the reasons Müller-Westermann was allowed to do the exhibition so quickly after the 2013 Stockholm show, is precisely because it was at a different venue.

Julia Voss – like *Artist, Researcher, Medium* – did not agree with Fer and others in the conclusion to her biography on af Klint, writing, 'it seems to me presumptuous to ignore the artist's own experience of reality and to downgrade the status of an expedient precisely the things she regarded as key. She never questioned any of the transcendental phenomena and increasingly understood herself in later years to be a mystic. She also saw herself as an artist, healer and visionary…'[312] It seems two camps have emerged on af Klint that at first seem irreconcilable. Joseph's lecture ended by offering a third way, which is here summarised by Janice McNab:

> Joseph proposes that it is with this question that we take difference seriously. Differences in time and life experience create the possibility of belief in different forms of knowledge and so in different forms of life. Respecting this tension of comprehension is an accepted aspect of decolonizing our political histories. But by extension, it is also a way of approaching the gender bias within art history. Joseph presents af Klint's work as a Derridean supplement to the current writing of art history, but suggests that it is art history itself that needs to make way for the alterity her work presents.[313]

This argument – which is in clear alignment with feminist scholarship as outlined by Griselda Pollock in *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and Writing of Art's Histories* (1999) – is critical, in my opinion, to the future of scholarship and exhibitions on af Klint by presenting us with a way to move forward productively with the artist's work.

Conclusion

Since this research began, interest and knowledge surrounding af Klint has grown astronomically – more major museums and galleries are beginning to invest in her practice. Further to both MoMA, New York and Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin including her work in their collection displays, in 2023 she had a two-person exhibition at Tate Modern, London alongside Piet Mondrian, and in 2024 she will be shown in a two-person exhibition with Wassily Kandinsky at Kunstsammlung Nordhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Her impressive Catalogue Raisonné was published over seven volumes between 2020 and 2022. What is perhaps even more surprising, or telling, of how much interest has grown in af Klint is her expansion beyond the art world and into the cultural milieu at large, for example: her work is being sold as posters for your home in the ubiquitous Swedish furniture chain Ikea; Julia Voss's biography is now available in four languages –

[312] Julia Voss, *Hilma Af Klint: A Biography,* 307.
[313] Janice McNab, 'Hilma Af Klint and the Need for Historical Revision', 40.

German (2020), Swedish (2021), English (2022), and Korean (2023); and following the success of similar artist-biopics, such as *Basquiat* (1996), *Pollock* (2000) and *Frida* (2002) [314], she is the subject of an internationally released film, *Hilma* (2022), directed by Oscar-nominated Swedish film-maker Lasse Hallström.

One of the reasons that has been cited as to why it took so long for af Klint to be recognised was her lack of market – her work has not been for sale. Julia Voss contended that af Klint's support and promotion has always happened through individuals rather than a wider lobby of market forces, 'one person who would fall in love with the work, and they would manage to get people excited. But she would be forgotten about because there was no continuity of support.'[315] The above activities, however, attest that there are other ways than just the art market to capitalise on culture. Additionally, however, there have been two art market developments. Firstly, in November 2021 in New York the major gallerist David Zwirner held an exhibition of a newly discovered secondary version of af Klint's series *Tree of Knowledge* 1913-15, which consists of eight watercolours on paper (the first version belongs to the larger *The Paintings for the Temple* series). This version was acquired by Glenstone, a private museum in Maryland, US, founded by collectors Emily and Mitchell Rales – making them one of the rare collections to own work by the artist outside of the foundation. Secondly, in November 2022 Acute Art in collaboration with Stolpe Publishing, published *The Paintings for the Temple* as an NFT (Non-fungible token), which was available for sale via GODA (Gallery of Digital Assets). The foundation had found a way to navigate the difficulty of selling *The Paintings for the Temple* without selling the actual works. Tellingly, curator Daniel Birnbaum is on the board of the Hilma af Klint Foundation, but is also Director of Acute Art. The Zwirner sale is a standard art gallery/market move – a work is found on the secondary market and is sold to the highest bidder. The creation of a digital version of a very remarkable – and rare – set of paintings by an artist who is dead, however, seems a problematic move and a worrying precedent to set.

Academic Katie de Cunha Lewin has written that, 'to "discover" does not necessarily disrupt but may merely reinforce the status quo.' Claiming that 'rediscovery does not elevate the work but merely

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[314] *Frida* being about the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), *Basquiat* about African American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988) and *Pollock* on the American Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). It is interesting to note here that the film's about men are titled after their surnames, and the films on women use their first names as their titles – perhaps unconscious sexism at play as by using first names one could argue does not give the same gravitas as being known by just a surname.

[315] In conversation with the author, May 2020.

flattens it out into fodder for a narrative that can be duplicated, deployed with little or no thought, applicable to hundreds of other women artists who have yet to be rediscovered. No number of names we can recite can mask this problem.'[316] This chapter has perhaps showed this to be true. Af Klint may have become posthumously 'famous', but through the process of her rediscovery repetitive claims and recurring narratives have hindered a wider and more nuanced examination of her practice. Narratives of seclusion have negated her position as a self-confident artist. The ongoing debate around art and the spiritual has overshadowed interpretations of her work and created two seemingly irreconcilable camps on her claims to mediumship. The desire to prove her place among the 'pioneers of abstraction' has meant that she has been recuperated into a canon that as it stands remains inherently flawed which in turn shows that while museums are willing to start the process of widening out their perspectives, they remain wedded in some respects to chronological narratives. Through all of this, there has been a tendency to misrepresent or brush over certain aspects of her practice that simply should not be ignored. What I think we can determine, however, is that it takes time and commitment to truly begin to unravel the many layers in af Klint's practice, or of any artist whose vast work is being posthumously recovered.

The case of Hilma af Klint implies a great deal of progress for artist-women in many respects. If progress is denoted by sheer visibility, it would be hard to deny the power that af Klint's work is currently managing to wield. This is indisputably due to the hard work carried out by the curators and writers heavily invested in her work, and the exhibitions which have showcased her practice to the world. One could argue that this is just the beginning. Now she has found an audience things can be further complexified, but only time will tell. Jennifer Higgie has written that, 'it's important to remember that art, unlike science, is not reducible to a formula.'[317] It is time to move on from the mode of recuperation and remember that Hilma af Klint's life's work is definitely not reducible to a formula either.

[316] Lewin, 'The Politics of Rediscovery'.
[317] Jennifer Higgie, *The Other Side: A Journey into Women Art and the Spirit World*, 12.

CHAPTER 3

LEE LOZANO: MARKET FORCES

> I think the great man of tomorrow in the way of art cannot be seen, should not be seen, and should go underground. He may be recognised after his death if he has any luck, but he may not be recognised at all. Going underground means not having to deal in money terms with society.
> — Marcel Duchamp[318]

In 2006, feminist curator Helen Molesworth wrote:

> Those who know of Lee Lozano know she ditched the art world and stopped talking to women. But the fact is that most people don't know of her, because she ditched the art world and stopped talking to women. Feminism taught us long ago that history is written as much through its exclusions as through its master narratives. This has certainly been the case for art history, whose neglect of, and outright hostility to, women artists is amply documented. It is doubly odd, then, to come across the problem of Lozano, for the version of '60s and '70s art that most of us carry in our mind is marked by the total absence of her short but major career.[319]

The 'problem' of Lee Lozano (1930–1999) as Molesworth surmises is that her absence from art history cannot simply be attributed to her gender. Lozano is an artist who purposefully withdrew from the art world, who disappeared, and therefore 'her exclusion, *unlike* so many others, was willed, conscious, and an ongoing work of art.'[320] This conundrum – that she is responsible for her own marginalization – has beset Lozano and her entry into art history for decades. Her rediscovery can be traced through a select series of museum and institutional shows since 2004 onwards, that have sought to recover Lozano's practice and bring her the 'recognition she deserves.'[321] Notably, this has been set against a backdrop of having significant gallery backing – her estate is represented by one of the largest and most important blue-chip commercial galleries in the world, Hauser & Wirth. In 2022, in speaking about artist-women's 'belated recognitions', Griselda Pollock observed that 'beside major recent museum exhibitions, there is renewed activity on the part of commercial galleries, many taking on the estates of major but less visible mid-twentieth-century painter-women whose market value has been enhanced, not only by feminist interpretation, but by feminist

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[318] Cited in Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece*, Afterall Books: One Work (London: Afterall Books, 2014), 58–9.
[319] Helen Molesworth, 'Lee Lozano: Kunsthalle Basel', *Artforum*, 1 September 2006.
[320] Molesworth. Emphasis my own.
[321] I use this phrase with irony, as it is a generic phrase used in countless articles, press releases and texts on artist-women and their rediscovery.

agitation for at least their inclusion in the blander official histories of art.'[322] At a conference for *Elles font l'abstraction (Women in Abstraction)* (2021) at Centre Pompidou, Pollock implied that the art market's investment in artist-women would be what changes art history – or at least artist-women's inclusion in more museum collections – but that we should be nervous about how money would change it, as it lacked any 'level of our feminist understanding of what happened or what it is to read these works…'[323]

This chapter therefore seeks to try to both reconcile, and interrogate, these two intersecting positions: firstly the rediscovery of Lee Lozano and its connection to the art market, commercial galleries, artist's estates, and exhibition in institutions, questioning if, as Pollock inferred, her recuperation signals infrastructural change without any nuanced understanding of prior and ongoing feminist labour and methodologies; and secondly, whether we can regard Lozano in the same way as other artist-women who co-created, and yet had their contributions purposefully silenced? Does her withdrawal mean that the conditions of her exclusion from art history is different to other artist-women? And finally, what legacies have been created for the artist through her recovery?

Lozano's Self-Styled Short Career

Lee Lozano was an American artist who was an active part of the avant-garde New York art scene in the 1960s and early 1970s. She arrived in New York from Chicago in 1961 – where she had studied painting at the Art Institute – at a moment when artists were reacting against the dominance of Abstract Expressionism. This resulted in the emergence of movements such as Minimalism and Conceptual art. Lozano's immediate circle of peers and friends included a long list of now well-renowned male, even canonical, New York artists/art stars who were each experimenting with ideas associated with these movements, including Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Hollis Frampton, Stephen Kaltenbach, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, and Richard Serra, amongst others.[324] Lozano was successful during this period, exhibiting in solo and group exhibitions at several galleries and institutions including: Richard Bellamy's Green Gallery (often noted as one of the most important avant-garde galleries of the time); the Bianchini

[322] Griselda Pollock, *Killing Men & Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2022), 5.
[323] Spoken at 'Symposium Women in Abstraction', Centre Pompidou, accessed 28 February 2023, https://www.centrepompidou.fr/en/offer-to-professionals/research/scientific-research/symposium-women-in-abstraction.
[324] This list is all artist-men but it is important for the context of Lozano, as while she knew a lot of people, including artist-women, she spent the majority of her time in the company of men. She has retrospectively been linked to and discussed in relation to other artist-women of this period but her strongest relationships were with artist-men.

Gallery; the Whitney Museum of American Art (1970); she participated in one of Lucy Lippard's pioneering *Numbers* exhibitions – *Number 7* – at Paula Cooper Gallery (1969); and the important *Language III* at Dwan Gallery, New York (1969). In 1969, her work was also shown internationally at Ricke Gallery, Cologne (who also exhibited other American artists such as Fred Sandbach, Richard Serra, Jo Baer and later Cady Noland), and at Lisson Gallery, London (1972).

Fig. 9. Installation view: Lee Lozano, *No Title* c.1963-4 at GL Strand, Copenhagen (2022).

Lozano's 'career', however, was short, lasting approximately twelve years. Despite its brevity she produced a radical, provocative, and subversive body of work that traversed a number of artistic styles. Artist David Reed called it a 'kind of compact history of art,' as she undertook an unusual development 'from surreal, almost Pop images through large-scale abstraction that uses tool imagery, to completely abstract paintings and finally Conceptual art.'[325] Her figurative paintings and drawings from 1961–3 are images of disconnected body parts, often sexual, and are infused with a wicked, almost sadistic, humour. In many these early drawings text and imagery both appear. 'Let them eat cock!' is emblazoned across the bottom of a 1961 drawing of a face with a huge toothy grin. In many drawings from that same year, noses,

[325] David Reed, 'Making Waves', *Artforum International*, October 2001, 122.

fingers, and tools are also penises, whereas plug sockets and mouths double as vaginas. These drawings are numerous and each as amusing as the next. The small airplane paintings from c.1962, prompt similar visual puns – airplanes are noses but also sexual organs – flying in and out of orifices. In her large *Tool Paintings* from 1963–64 – cartoonish blown-up images of hammers, screws, and other work tools – imply a *double entendre* – tool is slang for penis, but it is also a put-down used when someone is being foolish or an idiot (Fig.9). 'Screw' being an obvious euphemism for sex. Lozano's minimal and geometric paintings from 1965–66 which bear titles such as *Cram, Ream, Slip*, and so forth – all elicit hidden meanings. Despite the outwardly abstracted and hard-edge appearance of the works, through the word play used in their titles, we can read them as a continuation of the subversion present in the earlier figurative tool paintings. Her *Wave Paintings* 1967-70 (which were the focus of her Whitney solo exhibition) were eleven paintings that could be read on the surface as a progression toward minimalism, but in fact were highly conceptualised and based in mathematics and science. Their production physically pushed Lozano to the limits, as they came with a set of rules – one of which was that each work had to be created in a single session. The penultimate *96-Wave*, for example was completed in a continuous three-day session fuelled by drugs. The final painting, *192-Wave* remained unfinished as she recognised it was unachievable under her self-imposed conditions.

Fig. 10. Installation view: *No Grass Piece* and *Grass Piece* (both 1969) at nGbK, Berlin (2020).

Parallel to the *Wave* series, in 1968, Lozano began creating a series of conceptual text-based works (now known as the *Language Pieces*) that were experimental and investigative, exploring different ideas and/or behaviours through a set of instructions or self-imposed rules for a set of actions that Lozano would carry out over a set period of time. For example, in *Grass Piece* and *No Grass Piece* (both 1969) (Fig.10) she observed what happened when she got high every day on marijuana and then what happened when she did not smoke marijuana over the same sequential number of days. *Dialogue Piece* began on April 21, 1969, with the instruction: 'CALL (OR SPEAK TO OR WRITE TO) PEOPLE FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF INVITING THEM TO YR LOFT FOR A DIALOGUE.'[326][327] Here, Lozano noted down the date, time, and person she spoke to, or invited, and some notes about the conversation. She did not usually include the content of the dialogues themselves, but things such as, 'LARRY WEINER & I HAVE A FAST-PACED DIALOGUE…' and 'MARCIA TUCKER STAYS 3 HRS, ASKS GOOD QUESTIONS, INTENSE IF SOMEWHAT GOSSIPISH DIALOGUE, BUT SHE ENJOYS THE PLAY OF DIALOGUE MEANING.'[328] The recording in written form of her dialogues ran until late December 1969, however, in the instructions for the piece she had noted, 'IN PROCESS FOR THE REST OF "LIFE."' During this period 1968-1970 Lozano wrote her ideas in her notebooks – a set of eleven small-format spiral bound books, and three larger "Laboratory Notebooks" – where she intermingled her artistic ideas or 'pieces' with diaristic entries on varying and random things including: sexual encounters; quotes and song lyrics; visits and calls to her loft; drugs she was buying and taking; and mathematics and science. Among these pages over eighty *Language Pieces* can be found, however less than twenty of these would become actual drawings (as she called them) with the status of a 'write-up', which were made for exhibition purposes. *CLARIFICATION PIECE* (July 28, 1969) outlined the rules for a 'write-up'. Her conceptual text pieces were written by hand – differentiating her from her male-peers such as Dan Graham or Sol Le Witt who typed their text works – but she would make xerox or carbon paper copies meaning several of these works exist as multiples.[329] As curator Iris Müller-Westermann described, it was through the *Language*

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[326] Lee Lozano, *Dialogue Piece,* 1969, reproduced in *Lee Lozano: Language Pieces* (Edinburgh and Zurich: The Fruitmarket Gallery and Hauser & Wirth Publishers, 2018).
[327] All quotes from Lozano's *Language Pieces* and from her Private Books are capitalised as this is how she wrote them / intended them to be read.
[328] Reproduced in *Lee Lozano: Language Pieces*.
[329] The only time she made typed copies was for their inclusion in Vito Acconci and Rosemary Mayer's experimental and groundbreaking mimeographed magazine *0 TO 9* that they produced in the late 1960s, and featured artists such as Dan Graham, Adrian Piper, Robert Smithson and Sol Le Witt, and poets such as Ted Berrigan, Hannah Weiner, Clark Coolidge and Dick Higgins.

Pieces that 'she advanced the "dematerialisation" of her art, shifting away from the art object and painting to works based on ideas.'[330]

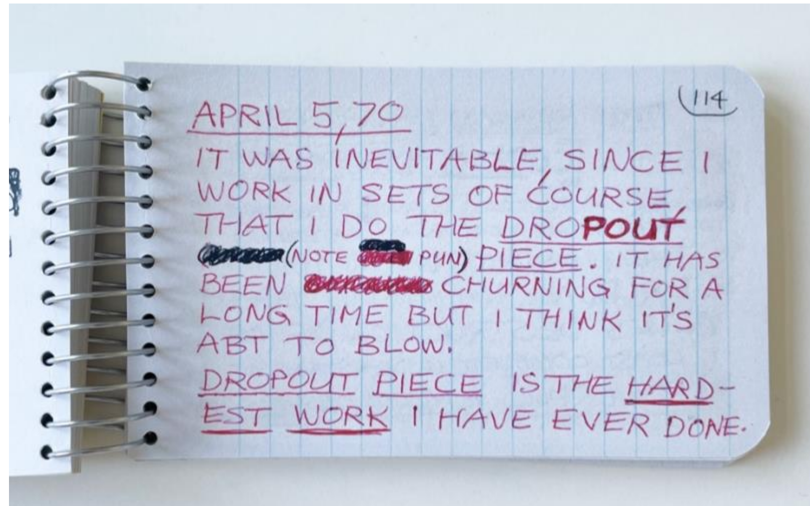

Fig. 11. *Dropout Piece* in Lee Lozano *Private Book 8* (April 5, 1970).

'Dematerialisation' was a term used most famously by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler to describe the avant-garde conceptual practices that were emerging in New York in the mid-1960s to early 1970s, where artists were increasingly disenfranchised with the commercialisation of art and as a result moved towards non-object, ideas-based practices.[331] Concurrent to this, there was also a shift toward work that merged art and life. Lozano was very much a part of this context: her version of Life-Art was arguably one of the most extreme. For example, in *General Strike Piece* (1969) (Fig. 16) she began a gradual retreat from the art world, listing her last visits to anything art-world related including galleries, film screenings, and concerts, seeking to achieve 'TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION.'[332] It ran from February to October 1969. In a work that is commonly known as 'boycott of women', in August 1971 Lozano experimented with stopping speaking to women, initially intended to continue for a couple of months, it developed into a life-long project (bar very few exceptions). Through such – arguably extreme – works Lozano demonstrated her disillusionment with the commodification of art, the harsh competitiveness of the New York art scene, and its patriarchal structures. *General Strike Piece* paved the way for *Dropout Piece* (Fig. 11) where Lozano withdrew entirely from the New York art world. The first mention of *Dropout Piece*

[330] Iris Müller-Westermann, '"Making Art Is the Greatest Act of All" Lee Lozano's Investigations', in *Lee Lozano*, Moderna Museet Exhibition Catalogue, February 13 - April 25, 2010 (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 24.
[331] Lucy Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art.', *Art International*, no. 31 (February 1968): 34–36.
[332] Lee Lozano, *General Strike Piece,* 8 February 1969, reproduced in *Lee Lozano: Language Pieces*.

is made in her notebooks on April 5, 1970: 'IT WAS INEVITABLE, SINCE I WORK IN SETS OF COURSE, THAT I DO THE DRO**POUT** (NOTE PUN) PIECE. IT HAS BEEN CHURNING FOR A LONG TIME BUT I THINK ITS ABT TO BLOW. DROPOUT PIECE IS THE HARDEST WORK I HAVE EVER DONE.'[333] As her ultimate Life-Art project, *Dropout Piece,* was a complete rejection and refusal of the scene of which she had very much been a successful part of. The most common narrative from the literature on Lozano is that in 1972 her career ended and she completely disappeared.

Feminist writer and critic Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, who has done the most research into this period of Lozano's life for her book *Lee Lozano: Dropout Piece* (2014), argues otherwise. In January 1972 Lozano edited all of her notebooks, marking the front of each of them as 'PRIVATE'. Along with her artworks these were taken in 1973 to be stored for safekeeping in Philadelphia by avid contemporary art collectors Dr Milton Brutten and his wife Helen. M. Herrick. Lehrer-Graiwer explains, 'Brutten took the initiative in advance of [Lozano's] increasing instability and inevitable eviction…' Further clarifying, 'Herrick describes the move as more of a rescue than a formal arrangement, uncertain of where the work would have otherwise ended up (considering that Lozano was known to dump art on the street occasionally even throw art out the window).'[334] After this point, Lehrer-Graiwer maintains that Lozano simply changed social circles – she began hanging out with musicians and the younger-artist punk scene around the Bowery, simply drifting. She changed her name to 'Lee Free,' and lived with younger artist Garry Morehead who insisted that 'she knew everyone and everyone knew her – she did not disappear.'[335] Moreover, Morehead asserted that 'Lozano conceived of what she was doing – her activities, actions, walks, language – as her work. She explicitly proclaimed as much, even though, intangible, private and undocumented…'[336] She was invited to be in *Documenta 6* (1977) but refused. In 1982 it is reported that she turned up in Dallas, Texas (where her parents lived), where she became simply 'E', remaining there until her death in 1999. Her estate says that she continued making work until her death, but that this work existed verbally – 'she was such a verbal person'[337] – remarked Barry Rosen (custodian of her estate). *Dialogue Piece*, for example, could have continued as she originally intended for the rest of her life from wherever she was without need for

[333] Lee Lozano, *Private Book 8*, (New York: Karma Books, 2021), 114.
[334] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece*, Afterall Books: One Work (London: Afterall Books, 2014), 48.
[335] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, 50.
[336] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, 52.
[337] In conversation with the author, November 2020.

documentation. Her last physical artwork is *QUESTIONNAIRE WITH JOKES, CONCERNING PURCHASES & PURCHASERS OF MY ART*, which she dated as 'INVENTED IN AUG, SEPT & OCT, WRITTEN & SENT NOV 2, '98.' Here she asked for the numbers and percentages of her 'purchasers' age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, male homosexuals, education, class, profession, religion, purpose of acquisition, and any other relevant information. On the bottom of the page it is written 'FOR BARRY & JAAP, NY', who are Rosen and Jaap van Liere, who were her dealers from 1984 until 1999, and who remain the caretakers of her estate.

Lucy Lippard wrote of Lozano, 'Lee was always a figure who slipped between the stools. But I don't know if she would have ever fit into anything anyway—even her conceptual work looked extreme compared to other art at the time.'[338] This point was upheld by critic Hans-Jürgen Hafner, who wrote of her entire oeuvre: 'developed over more than ten years, this body of work seems as versatile and inspiring as it is disparate and difficult.'[339] Lozano's work might not be easy to place, nor to fully understand, and yet the art world posthumously decided to try.

Seeking the Extremes

As demonstrated by her approach to her *Language Pieces* and her exit from the art world Lee Lozano increasingly pushed the boundaries of art in extreme ways. Lehrer-Graiwer argued that her work was created during 'a time of paradigm shifts and end-game strategies all round. From our historical vantage, Lozano's [Dropout] piece is significantly representative of a collective turning, when protest culture and critique translated into radical acts of inwardness and refusal for artists.'[340] It was the time of the Civil Rights Movement, of the burgeoning women's movement, and of huge protests against the Vietnam War. Artists were increasingly involved in political movements and the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), founded in New York in 1969, was one such example.[341] AWC was established by many of Lozano's immediate peer group and sought, as art historian Brandon W. Joseph summarised, 'to demonstrate for museum reforms (including those addressing the underrepresentation of Black and Puerto Rican artists) and greater control

338 Cited in REED, 'Making Waves'.
339 Hans-Jürgen Hafner, 'Portrait Lee Lozano', *Spike Art Quarterly*, (Issue 2) Winter 2004, 75.
340 Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece,* 9.
341 For a more in-depth look at this period and its political movements connected to art see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (University of California Press, 2010), and Julie Ault (ed.) *Alternative Art, New York, 1965-1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective* (New York: Drawing Center, 2002).

over copyright, exhibition, and reproduction of artists' work, issues that soon grew to encompass museums' connections (particularly through their trustees) to policies supporting the Vietnam War.'[342] Lucy Lippard, who was fully immersed in these activities, explained that as publicly accountable institutions museums became the target of protest.[343] Lozano was caught up in this, and in many ways was producing work very much of its time, but during the Open Public Hearing of the AWC of 1969 she gave a statement that seemingly pushed against her peers, stating:

> FOR ME THERE CAN BE NO ART REVOLUTION THAT IS SEPARATE FROM A SCIENCE REVOLUTION, A POLITICAL REVOLUTION, AN EDUCATION REVOLUTION, A DRUG REVOLUTION, A SEX REVOLUTION, OR A PERSONAL REVOLUTION. I CANNOT CONSIDER A PROGRAM OF MUSEUM REFORMS WITHOUT EQUAL ATTENTION TO GALLERY REFORMS AND ART MAGAZINE REFORMS WHICH WOULD AIM TO ELIMINATE STABLES OF ARTISTS AND WRITERS. I WILL NOT CALL MYSELF AN ART WORKER BUT RATHER AN ART DREAMER AND I WILL PARTICIPATE ONLY IN A TOTAL REVOLUTION SIMULTANEOUSLY PERSONAL AND PUBLIC.[344] (April 10, 1969)

Such a statement was typical of Lozano's position in the art scene of 1960s New York – present and fully networked and yet always more extreme and more defiant.

Lozano's rejection of the women's movement and feminism was another snub against organised political action, but it does not necessarily mean she was at odds with everything it was trying to achieve. Lozano, it seems, always veered to the extremities of everything. In one of her private notebooks from 1968, she wrote, 'I AM NOT A FEMINIST. I SPEAK TO BOTH MEN AND WOMEN BECAUSE I THINK BOTH MEN AND WOMEN ARE SLAVES IN TODAY'S SOCIETY'.[345] (Fig. 12) Throughout her notebooks her dislike of institutions such as marriage, religion, and the notion of the family are stated. Her remarks on gender and its biological determinism – as Lehrer-Graiwer (2014), Bruce Hainley (2006) and Applin (2018) have all asserted – are not far from the radical feminist writings of Valerie Solanas and Shulamith Firestone. Similarly, Joseph placed her outwardly idealistic AWC statement in line with the radical, Situationist-affiliated left-wing politics of the New York collective Black Mask (later known as The Motherfuckers).[346]

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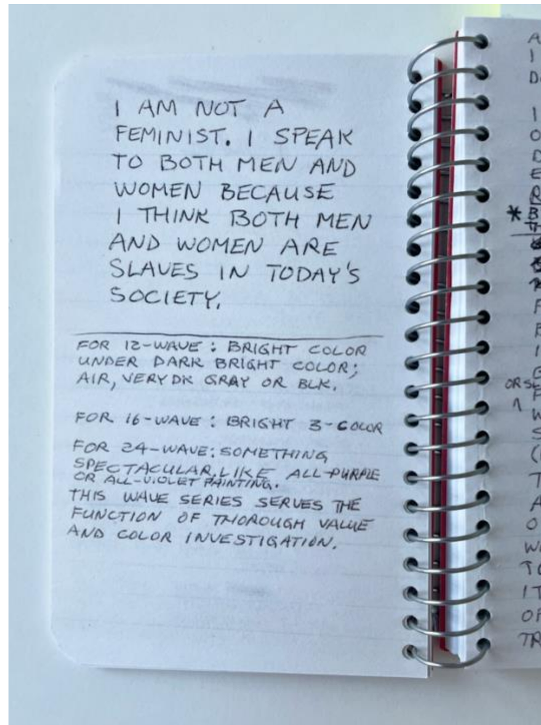
342 Branden W. Joseph, 'Lee Lozano´s Dream of Life', *Texte Zur Kunst*, no. 79 (September 2010): 133.

343 Lippard, Lucy R, 'Biting the Hand: Artists and Museums in New York since 1969', in *Alternative Art, New York, 1965-1985: A Cultural Politics Book for the Social Text Collective* (New York : Minneapolis: Drawing Center ; University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 79.

344 Lee Lozano, *Statement for Open Public Hearing, Art Workers Coalition,* reproduced in *Lee Lozano: Language Pieces*.

345 Lee Lozano, *Private Book 1*.

346 Branden W. Joseph, 'Lee Lozano´s Dream of Life'.


I AM NOT A
FEMINIST. I SPEAK
TO BOTH MEN AND
WOMEN BECAUSE
I THINK BOTH MEN
AND WOMEN ARE
SLAVES IN TODAY'S
SOCIETY.

FOR 12-WAVE: BRIGHT COLOR
UNDER DARK BRIGHT COLOR;
AIR, VERY DK GRAY OR BLK.

FOR 16-WAVE: BRIGHT 3-COLOR

FOR 24-WAVE: SOMETHING
SPECTACULAR, LIKE ALL-PURPLE
OR ALL-VIOLET PAINTING.
THIS WAVE SERIES SERVES THE
FUNCTION OF THOROUGH VALUE
AND COLOR INVESTIGATION.

Fig. 12. Image of a page from Lee Lozano *Private Book 1* (April 17, 1968).

In many academic writings about Lozano the words 'rebel', 'extreme', 'confounding', 'renegade', among many other such portrayals, come up again and again in descriptions of the artist and her work/actions. Lehrer-Graiwer stated that, 'she named her position to the world, or rather to the art world, as a designation of otherness and refusal, rejection and critical defection.'[347] In 2001 Lippard wrote, 'Lee was extraordinarily intense, one of the first, if not *the* first person (along with Ian Wilson) who did the life-as-art thing. The kind of things other people did as art, she really did as life—and it took us a while to figure that out.'[348] By leaving behind her private notebooks (which, because she edited them, were presumably meant to be read and seen), Lozano enabled a window onto her working process, her vast output of ideas, and her psyche. It is impossible to untangle Lozano's biography and day-to-day life from her work especially as she herself enmeshed them so closely. To read the work is to read her and vice versa. Of the notebooks, feminist art historian Jo Applin writes 'Lozano's voice leaps from the pages of the notebooks: strident, hilarious, outraged, outrageous, stoned and serious.'[349] While Applin contends there are pitfalls of relying on such material, we can accept her erratic writings as ways into understanding her practice. In *Grass Piece* Lozano wrote,

[347] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece,* 7.
[348] Cited in Reed, 'Making Waves', 126.
[349] Jo Applin, *Lee Lozano: Not Working* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 27.

SEEK THE EXTREMES,
THAT'S WHERE ALL
THE ACTION IS.' (April 24, 69)[350]

In analysing this statement, along with others she was making during this period, Lehrer-Graiwer surmised that 'Lozano had no patience for moderation of any kind: no middle path, no middle class, no middle management, no mainstream, no mediocrity, nothing half-assed.'[351] She was an artist fully committed.

Lozano's heavy drug use, coupled with her boycotts and defections, led many people to call her 'crazy', a term not unfamiliar to many artist-women, or women more generally, often used to undermine their achievements or protestations against their oppressed conditions. Lehrer-Graiwer comments on Lozano's volatility, arguing that the notebooks suggest 'she is emblematic as a combustible figure in and of crisis.'[352] She also explains how once back in Dallas, family friends called her 'troubled,' but that 'what might be diagnosed as illness (according to ever changing, culturally defined standards) falls somewhere on a slippery continuum of complex neurochemistry and behavioural expression that made diagnosis not particularly helpful in understanding a different artist now dead and distanced by history.'[353] Barry Rosen, from her estate, said that nothing happened with her for a while because 'everybody considered her crazy and untouchable in a way.'[354] Helen Molesworth countered such a reading by arguing that Dan Graham could be considered just as 'crazy, or whatever the correct nomenclature is for crazy, as Lozano,' but 'crazy' women and 'crazy' men get treated differently. 'Graham has an art career because everybody was okay with ameliorating and navigating what crazy looks like on Dan, and people weren't up for negotiating that around Lozano.'[355] A related point was made by Bruce Hainley in his 2006 profile of Lozano for *Frieze* – 'many of Lozano's contemporaries, most of them male, are celebrated for taking art into a romanticised sublime, in search of the miraculous, often through the paranormal and/or drug use; when women pursue similar concerns, their work is often reduced to a toothless, Mother-Earth magick.'[356] That knowledge of Lozano seemingly disappeared post 1972 would describe a similar type of fate, but her work was reduced to almost nothing.

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350 Lee Lozano, G*rass Piece,* reproduced in *Lee Lozano: Language Pieces*.
351 Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece,* 31.
352 Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, 11.
353 Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, 55.
354 In conversation with the author, November 2020
355 In conversation with the author, July 2020
356 Bruce Hainley, 'On E', *Frieze*, October 2006, 247.

Recovering Lozano

Despite Lozano's success when she was actively producing work, she is largely missing from mainstream art historical accounts of this period. For example, she is not included in *Art Since 1900* (2004), *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being* (1994), *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (1992), Tony Godfrey's *Conceptual Art* (1998), or in either *Art and Feminism* (2001) nor *Conceptual Art* (2002) – both part of the well-known publisher Phaidon's series on 'Themes and Movements' in twentieth century art. Lozano was, however, briefly included in Robert Hughes' survey of modern art, *The Shock of the New: Art and the century of change* (1980), where he writes one sentence about *General Strike Piece*, although does not name the work by its title.[357] In the first edition of the book, published in 1980, Hughes ended his note on Lozano, writing: 'what became of this Timon, the record does not show.' This line was removed in later editions of the book, however, no further elaboration on the work or the artist was provided in its place.[358] With regard to exhibitions, she was not included in several important survey exhibitions focussing on Conceptual art in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, including: *1965-1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art* (1995) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object* (1998) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; or *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970* (2005) at Tate Modern, London.

Barry Rosen and Jaap Van Liere (managers of Lozano's estate) were first introduced to the artist in 1983 following her inclusion in Donald Droll's *Abstract Art: 1960-1969* at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center (1982).[359] After this exhibition, they had begun to work with her (albeit remotely as Lozano remained in Dallas), taking care of storing the works and speaking to her regularly. They have managed her estate since her death in 1999. In 1998 there was an attempt to resuscitate knowledge of her work when four exhibitions were held in the United States – three at galleries in New York; Mitchell Algus Gallery; Rosen and Van Liere Fine Arts; and Margarete Roeder Gallery; and a major solo exhibition at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, *Lee Lozano / MATRIX 135* (who own all of the *Wave Series*) which each attracted minor attention at the time. This attempt was largely led by Rosen and Van Liere.

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[357] Hughes, Robert, *The Shock of the New: Art in the century of change*, ABC, 1st Edition, 1980. On Lozano, Hughes writes: 'Perhaps the most touching radical gesture of the time was made by a New York artist named Lee Lozano, who announced the enaction of a "piece" in which she would "gradually and determinedly avoid being present at official or public 'uptown' functions or gatherings relating to the 'art world' in order to pursue investigation of *total personal and public revolution.*"'
[358] Cited in 'The Dropout Piece | Dallas Observer', accessed 25 May 2020, https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/the-dropout-piece-6406272.
[359] Rosen manages four artist estates – Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), Dieter Roth (1930–1998), Eva Hesse (1936–1970), and Lozano (with Van Liere). All four estates are also represented by Hauser & Wirth.

A posthumous exhibition in 2004 at the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center – *Lee Lozano: Drawn from Life 1961–1971* – curated by Bob Nickas is described by Rosen and Van Liere to be the turning point.[360] It was this exhibition that sparked the 'rediscovery' of Lee Lozano as following this the major international art gallery Hauser & Wirth began representing her estate.[361] Since 2004 Lozano has had major international solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel (2006), Kunsthalle Wien (2006), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010), Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (2017), the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (2018); GL Strand, Copenhagen (2022) and Pinacoteca Agnelli, Turin (2023) – a show that toured to the Bourse de Commerce - Pinault Collection, Paris in late 2023. Lozano was also included in the major survey exhibitions *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) and *Documenta 12* (2007), as well as group shows including *SOLITAIRE. Lee Lozano, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Joan Semmel* at the Wexner Center for Arts (2008), *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968* at the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum (2010), the small exhibition *Joint Dialogue: Lozano / Graham / Kaltenbach* at Overduin & Kite, Los Angeles (2010), and *I'M NOT A NICE GIRL* at Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (K21, 2020). In 2014, as part of their One Work Series, Afterall books published the aforementioned *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece* by Lehrer-Graiwer. This in-depth study of the artist and that particular artwork was followed by Jo Applin's monograph: *Lee Lozano: Not Working* (2017). These academic analyses further bolstered both the knowledge and significance of Lozano's practice.

Lozano is perhaps a complicated rediscovery case because of her rigorous rejection of an art system that supported her, and her muddied relationship to gender. These actions, as Molesworth argued, seem 'idealistic and consummately pathological.'[362] But they do open up some very interesting questions surrounding artistic agency and the action of rediscovery. Jo Applin called Lozano's relationship to feminism difficult, as her 'withdrawals, refusals and insistence on going about things the wrong way instantiate a 'messy' and 'self-centred' feminism, in spite, or even because of Lozano's own stated resistance to the term.'[363] It is worth noting, however, that at that time rejecting feminism was not an unusual position for artist-women to take – Georgia O'Keeffe, Niki de Saint Phalle and Eva Hesse, to name a few – all made

[360] Cited in 'Barry Rosen and Jaap van Liere of the Lee Lozano... - The Fruitmarket Gallery', accessed 9 February 2020, https://www.facebook.com/fruitmarketgallery/videos/10155519739874370/.
[361] Cited in Katy Siegel, 'Lee Lozano', *Artforum International*, April 2008, 330.
[362] Helen Molesworth, 'Tune in, Turn on, Drop Out: The Rejection of Lee Lozano', *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (December 2002): 64–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2002.10792137.
[363] Jo Applin, *Lee Lozano: Not Working* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 159.

similar statements.[364] Likewise, Lee Bontecou and Jo Baer also rejected the idea of being categorised as a 'woman' artist. However, what Applin most eloquently proposes is that Lozano's work forces us to 'think dialectically about what does and doesn't 'count' as a feminist gesture.'[365] In a similar manner, the next sections will examine the revisionist exhibitions focussing on Lozano in both institutions and commercial galleries, and how they may, or may not, be contributing to a feminist future within museums and institutions, while also determining what legacies they have created for the artist.

Fig. 13. Image of the accompanying exhibition catalogues for exhibitions at Kunsthalle Basel (2006), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010), Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2006) and The Fruitmarket Gallery (2018).

Institutional Historicizing

The beginnings of Lee Lozano's rediscovery arguably began just prior to the main time period this thesis is focussed upon – from 2007 to now – but her work was included in two of the survey exhibitions singled out as critical to the trend of rediscovery, *Documenta 12* and *WACK!* (both 2007). Respected curators and

[364] It could be argued that disavowing a relationship with feminism in fact helped some of these artists to be incorporated into art historical accounts sooner than artist-women who aligned themselves with feminism.
[365] Applin, 159.

academics such as Molesworth and Applin have advocated for feminist readings of Lozano and her work. Early on, and perhaps before anyone else (in 2002), Molesworth argued that her rejection of other women exhibited the artist's acute understanding of the patriarchal system, stating that Lozano was fully aware that, 'just as you can't reform the art world by focussing only on museums, you can't alter the patriarchy by bonding only with women'.[366] Molesworth's feminist analysis of Lozano undoubtedly influenced the artist's inclusion in the major survey exhibition, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, and in fact her article 'Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out: The Rejections of Lee Lozano' (*Art Journal*, 2002), is quoted several times in the short artist text on Lozano in the exhibition catalogue. As a result of her inclusion in *WACK!* I believe that Lozano began being understood and presented through the lens of feminist art on a wider scale than she had been previously. Despite Lozano's first major exhibition occurring in 2004 at P.S.1 to much critical acclaim, her work remained largely unknown in Europe until after her Kunsthalle Basel exhibition in 2006 and inclusion in *Documenta* in 2007. In 2010, the curator of her Moderna Museet retrospective Iris Müller-Westermann maintained that she was one of the least known artists from the New York art scene of the 1960s and 1970s.[367]

The exhibitions I have chosen to evaluate are the retrospective overview presentations of Lee Lozano at P.S.1 (*Drawn from Life*, 2004), Kunsthalle Basel (*WIN FIRST DON'T CARE…* 2006), and Moderna Museet (*Lee Lozano,* 2010).[368] For the most part these exhibitions were arranged chronologically progressing through the artist's prolific output, from the 1961-3 drawings and paintings to her final Conceptual pieces. Other, smaller, and more concentrated solo presentations are Kunsthalle Wien (*SEEK THE EXTREMES…*, 2006), which displayed paintings and drawings from 1962–4, alongside the *Language Pieces* from 1969-71, and at GL Strand (*The Ultimate Metaphor is a Mirror,* 2022) which was primarily a drawing exhibition, including only five paintings and focussing on the first half of the 1960s. While the Fruitmarket Gallery (*Slip, Slide, Splice,* 2018) contained her earlier figurative work, the abstract paintings from 1965-66 and the *Language Pieces*, as a small institution it was not on the same scale as other major presentations. In terms of group exhibitions I have examined *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Joan Semmel* (Wexner

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[366] Molesworth, 'Tune in, Turn on, Drop Out'.
[367] Iris Müller-Westermann, '"Making Art Is the Greatest Act of All" Lee Lozano's Investigations', 24.
[368] I have not written about the Reina Sofia exhibition in 2017 as even though this was a major museum exhibition, the accompanying catalogue was only available in Spanish and therefore I was unable to analyse in the same way as the other exhibitions.

Centre, 2008) which placed Lozano in conversation with other painter-women. Here, only a selection of Lozano's paintings from 1962–1964 were displayed; *Joint Dialogue* (Overduin & Kite, 2010) a small show examining the relationship between Lozano and her close artist-companions of the late 1960s Dan Graham and Steve Kaltenbach; and *I'M NOT A NICE GIRL* (K21, 2020), a group exhibition on four artist-women who were associated with the first generation of Conceptual art – Eleanor Antin, Adrian Piper, Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Lee Lozano.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Griselda Pollock questioned commercial gallery understanding of reading work by artist-women, or more precisely the work done by feminist scholarship in order to 'difference the canon.' It is also safe to presume that not all institutional exhibitions focused on Lozano can fully claim to be the product of a conscious feminist curatorial practice, yet each has played a role in the rediscovery of her work, the deepening of knowledge surrounding it and its visibility. This section will explore how institutional shows have positioned Lozano, examining the prevalent narratives that they have focused on and how this can be reconciled against feminist art historical scholarship more generally. In speaking about what type of feminist curating we need to invoke institutional or canonical change, Angela Dimitrakaki identified that 'we cannot have feminism as a naïve democracy along the lines of "these people were left out, let's do a show to include them." But we can have curating based on research which seeks to expose the criteria and frameworks that have led to "absences" and "rejections." So, we don't just need celebratory feminist curating but revelatory feminist curating.'[369] This section uses this as kind of analytical touchstone, while also attending to Helen Molesworth's position of refusing 'to accept the norm as natural or given,' as one of 'feminisms most important methodological legacies.'[370]

Challenging Conventional Narratives

Lozano's success and influence (when she was active) is often noted as occurring from the mid–late 1960s when she showed with Bianchini Gallery, had her solo exhibit at the Whitney Museum, and appeared in critical exhibitions associated with the advent of Conceptual art. The works she was known for were her abstract paintings and *Language Pieces*. Lozano's early figurative paintings and drawings that she made from

[369] In Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and Exhibiting Women's and Feminist Art, a Roundtable Discussion', 255.
[370] Helen Molesworth, 'Introduction', *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Joan Semmel*, Wexner Centre for the Arts Exhibition Catalogue February 2 - April 13, 2008 (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 2008), 12.

c.1961-4, however, were never exhibited or written about at the time they were produced and were only seen publicly in 1998 in the shows dedicated to resuscitating the artist's career. Since then these 'lesser known' figurative works have been included in all of her institutional solo shows and written about widely in their catalogues and associated texts. I would argue that this is where the greatest posthumous re-evaluation of Lozano's work is found.

In writing about the problems with inserting artist-women associated with the Dada and Surrealist movements into the canon, feminist art historian Patricia Allmer argued that 'a problem lay in the fact that their affiliation to either movement constitute only a part of their total career aesthetic output. This complexity in turn challenges conventional tendencies to represent "movements," histories, artistic personalities, canons, and thoughts as coherent, linear, discrete, complete entities.' A potential solution then, Allmer continued, was that 'the work of many women artists might productively be reassessed in terms of their intersections with moments and events, practices and productions, rather than as sources or threads or trajectories within wider narratives.'[371] This concept is also applicable to Lozano. If we regard the paintings from 1965 leading to the *Language Pieces* as following a similar path toward dematerialisation that other artists at that time took, it makes logical sense to place her within the frames of art history that we have come to understand as the nascent stages of Minimal and Conceptual art. When you examine Lozano's earlier works, however, such a neat trajectory or art historical connection is perhaps harder to reconcile. The figurative paintings and drawings from 1961-4 are aesthetically at odds with her output from later in the same decade, and markedly different to any work made by her immediate peer group. The P.S.1 exhibition was the first time these works were seen in direct dialogue with the rest of her oeuvre, signalling its potential to change perspectives on Lozano's work and to muddy what some people thought they knew about her, but also render her as a someone difficult to situate.

These cartoonish, crude, expressionist-type drawings and paintings bring forth Lozano's directness, dark humour, playfulness, and an interest in erotic subversion. As Sabine Folie (curator: Kunsthalle Wien) describes, 'there are mouth/vaginas, breasts/eyes, moon/muzzles, sun/breasts, penis/tongues, traffic lights, telephones, and other props from the big city and the world of technology:

[371] Patricia Allmer, 'Feminist Interventions: Revising the Canon', in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

airplanes, motorcycles, vacuum cleaners, that monstrously destroy, gobble up and dismember everything they come across…'[372] There is tongue-in-cheek word play mixed with vulgarity: "ron k. masturbated with a vacuum cleaner but his cock got too big," "9 out of 10 eat cunt for mental health." (Fig. 14 and 15) The connection to Freud's polymorphic perversity is made by several writers and curators in the associated exhibition catalogues. Both the Basel and Vienna exhibitions liken these works to crude comics, subverting the pictorial language of advertising billboards or subway posters. Todd Allen, writing for the Basel catalogue, states that 'they plumb the libidinal underbelly of mass culture.'[373] They also demonstrate as Folie described, 'Lozano's aversion to any one-sided gender dichotomy…'[374] and as such help to bring new readings on her 'boycott of women' piece.

Fig. 14. Installation view: *Lee Lozano: The Ultimate Metaphor is a Mirror* at GL Strand, Copenhagen (2022).

In line with art historical methods the curators and writers seek forebearers, contemporaries and even progeny to try and situate the work: Folie and Allen liken the collapsing of the erotic with the industrial form to Claes Oldenburg's works; Iris Müller-Westermann (curator: Moderna Museet) writes that the

[372] Sabine Folie, 'Seek the Extreme, That's Where All the Action Is.', in *'SEEK THE EXTREMES...' Lee Lozano. Volume II*, Kunsthalle Wien, Exhibition Catalogue, July 7 – October 15, 2006 (Nürnberg, Germany: Verlag für modern Kunst Nürnberg, 200617-35), 20.
[373] Todd Allen, 'The Case Paintings Exist Because the Caves Were Toilets: Reactivating the Work of Lee Lozano', in *Lee Lozano: WIN FIRST DONT LAST / WIN LAST DONT CARE*, Kunsthalle Basel, Exhibition Catalogue, 15 June - 27 August 2006 (Basel: Schwabe AG, 2006), 14.
[374] Sabine Folie, 'Seek the Extreme, That's Where All the Action Is.': 20

phallocentric imagery 'anticipates the perverse worlds of artists such as Paul McCarthy;' Philip Guston's *Poor Richard* works (1971) are referenced; the Surrealists are cited – for the Fruitmarket exhibition catalogue, for example, feminist art historian Helena Vilalta writes on their relationship to Georges Bataille's *The Story of the Eye*. Vilalta also claims that Lozano 'appropriated and subverted the sexual idiom of a senior artist: Willem de Kooning,'[375] referencing an archival note where Lozano had scribbled down seeing *Woman and Bicycle* (1952-53) at the Whitney in 1961. Such a heady mix of references actually does what Allmer suggested as a productive way to read artist-women's work. For the readings and focus on these works in particular seemingly seeks to problematise simple or reductive interpretations of Lozano's work connected to one art historical movement.

In addition, both *Solitaire* and *SEEK THE EXTREMES…* actively endeavoured to bring the work of Lozano into conversation with other painter-women of the same generation who were similarly difficult to situate. *SEEK THE EXTREMES…* was two parallel solo exhibitions of Lee Lozano and Dorothy Iannone, bringing two previously marginalised practices into dialogue. While an exploration of erotic imagery can be found in both artist's practices Folie's intention was to highlight their fierce individualism, and their unwillingness to be absorbed into any of the dominant movements of that time.[376] Similarly, *Solitaire* brought three painter-women together under the premise of their shared commitment to an individual studio practice. While Helen Molesworth (the curator) notes that their work might seem 'out of step with the prevalent concerns of the day,'[377] this was part of her ambition. In her catalogue introduction she writes that the exhibition was an experiment to try and reconcile the dichotomy of monographic and thematic group shows, by presenting three solo presentations adjacent to one another. Her feminist methodology to question the status quo meant that the exhibition was intended to 'prod the discourse of art history (as it manifested in the museum and academy) to come an understanding of its own absences.'[378] This observes Dimitrikaki's notion of revelatory feminist curating. Questioning how previously under-recognized artists could be inserted into dominant narratives, she critically asks, 'can we accept the challenge to (or the dismissal, or refusal, or outright ignoring of) minimalism and conceptual art in future accounts

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375 Helena Vilalta, 'Lee Lozano's Erotics of Information', in *LEE LOZANO: SLIP, SLIDE, SPLICE* (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2018): 57.

376 See Sabine Folie, 'Introduction and Acknowledgements', in *'SEEK THE EXTREMES...' Lee Lozano. Volume II*, Kunsthalle Wien, Exhibition Catalogue, July 7 – October 15, 2006 (Nürnberg, Germany: Verlag für modern Kunst Nürnberg, 2006).

377 Helen Molesworth, 'Introduction', 11.

378 Helen Molesworth, 'Introduction', 11.

of the 1970s?' She ends her named feminist methodological statement with, 'in the context of the art world this rejection of the status quo has led to the productive and critical questioning of the institutions of art, and the somewhat counterintuitive organisational structure of *Solitaire* hopes to extend such a critique to the practice of exhibition making.'[379] In speaking to Folie and Molesworth for this research, they were both open about these exhibitions as feminist intervention. Molesworth spoke of learning through exhibition-making, of how to deal with a body of work wholesale when it 'is unprocessed by the system, by the museum, by the academy, by art history.'[380] *Solitaire* was her first attempt at doing this type of work. Molesworth stands out for her long-term commitment to Lozano and her recovery into art history – first by writing one of the first meaningful academic texts on her work in 2002, followed by the exhibition in 2008. Müller-Westermann and Folie also told me that they had been asking their directors for years to programme a Lozano exhibition, demonstrating their own long-term commitment to advancing knowledge of Lozano's practice. This type of labour and support of artist-women within institutions, however, is very often invisible and that these curators had to fight hard over several years demonstrates the resistance to programming both unknown artists, and particularly artist-women. It also evidences two explicit examples of the type of feminist curating that is folded-in rather than explicitly stated as proposed by Renée Baert and discussed in the overall introduction to this thesis (and in part in Chapter 1). Each of these curators at the time of these exhibitions worked for institutions under directors.

The research that these exhibitions have carried out and presented (visually and through their catalogues) allowed curators and writers to begin to examine Lozano's later work in new ways. It became clear that Lozano's radical, rebellious, and oppositional approach in her work, and in life, was not limited to the work from the late 1960s: that all her work was on the edge of subversion, fighting and agitating against systems of gender, of capital, of work. In 2008 Johanna Burton, writing for the *Solitaire* catalogue, criticised the tendency to see Lozano's work as a teleological progression. She argued that while previous accounts (exhibitions, writings and reviews up to that point) had recognised this early work, by remarking that by presenting the geometric abstractions and *Language Pieces* as a culmination of the early work meant that they just became the bedrock on which her later work was built. Burton asked, 'what if, rather than

[379] Helen Molesworth, 'Introduction', 11-12.
[380] In conversation with the author, July 2020.

marking the early years as something to overcome, we instead were to see their terms as carried through, or at least as marking a blush on every aspect of an oeuvre that too easily gets picked through for parts that can be rescued for legacies of postminimalism and/or conceptualism?'[381] Such a proposition meant that readings of her mid-60s abstract paintings could be read in new ways. Their titles – *Butt, Cram*, *Cleave*, and *Slide* – for example, suggest 'that the bodily charge of the earlier works had not been left behind.'[382] Burton's incisive essay utilises critic Meyer Schapiro's 1968 analysis of Paul Cezanne's early works, where he removes reading them as embarrassing, or "baroque", and rather as crucial and important facet of his whole output. Burton attempts the same with Lozano, concluding that, 'all Lozano's work—however far and however quickly it seems to move from the earliest drawings and canvases—retains a ripe tension between the public and private, fantasized and actual, desire and disdain.'[383]

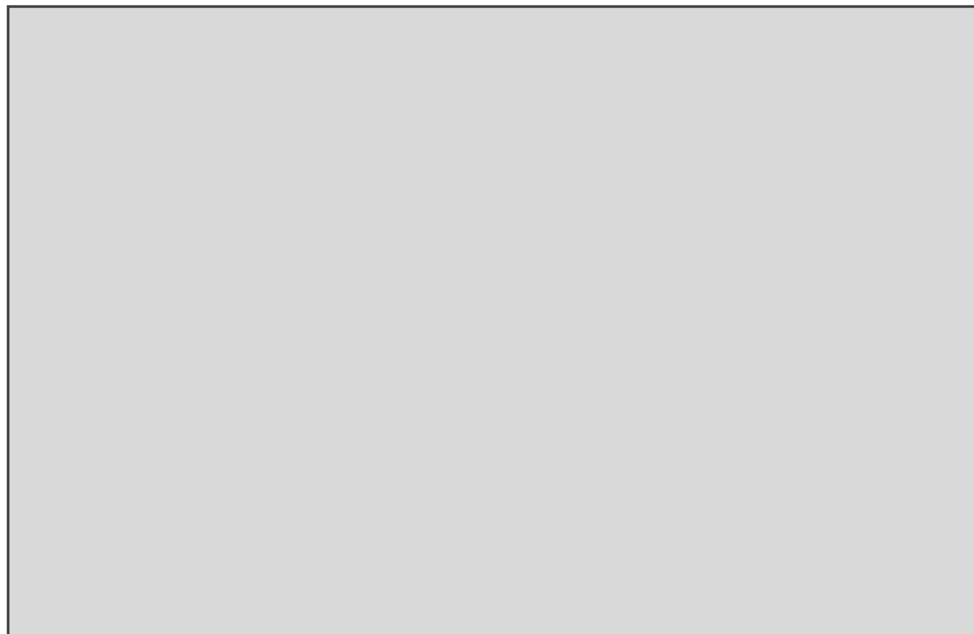

Fig. 15. Installation view: *Solitaire* at Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2008). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

Since Burton's essay, and I would argue precisely because of exhibitions like *SEEK THE EXTREMES…* and *Solitaire*, such perspectives have continually been advocated – Müller-Westermann, Fiona Bradley (curator: Fruitmarket), and Pernille Fonnesbech (curator: GL Strand), for example, all upheld

[381] Johanna Burton, '"The New Honesty" The Life-Work and Work-Life of Lee Lozano', in *Solitaire: Lee Lozano, Sylva Plimack Mangold, Joan Semmel*, Wexner Centre for the Arts, Exhibition Catalogue, February 2 - April 13, 2008 (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 2008), 22.
[382] Johanna Burton, 23.
[383] Johanna Burton, 25.

these interpretations either through their exhibition, its catalogue or in conversation with me. Jo Applin has written, 'one single reading of Lozano's oeuvre never fully suffices…'[384] The exhibitions which have contributed to her rediscovery, therefore, seem to have done an excellent job at contributing to this idea through their inclusion and analysis of Lozano's figurative work. Burton is right that not all of them may have gone far enough, but by including and discussing these works they sought to challenge received ideas of her work as well as questioning the prevalent movements and currents of 1960s art history.

Strikes and Sexual Politics

As noted by Helen Molesworth in the introduction to this chapter, the reasons why Lozano was largely overlooked by art historical accounts of the late 1960s and early 1970s until recently are typically attributed to the fall-out from her decision to boycott women and then 'drop out' of the art world. This can be witnessed in the catalogues and associated exhibition texts that accompany Lozano's early solo exhibitions from 2006 to 2018, where the explanation most often provided for the artist's 'unknown' status is credited to Lozano's rejections of the art world and women. An early example would be the curator Adam Szymczyk's foreword for the artist's first major exhibition in Europe at Kunsthalle Basel (2006), writing: 'Lozano was one of the few artists *able to put her career at risk* and in fact she *effectively destroyed it during her lifetime*…'[385] In her catalogue introduction for the Kunsthalle Wien Sabine Folie wrote that Lozano and Iannone were both marginalised in art history, but 'Lozano for *understandable reasons that have to do with her withdrawal*.'[386] In her essay accompanying Moderna Museet's retrospective Müller-Westermann stated, 'in August 1971 she began boycotting women. Originally planned as a temporary experimental project, this, together with her withdrawal at the age of forty-one, elicited much speculation. These radical measures *most certainly contributed to the fact that her work as a whole was quickly forgotten*.'[387] The Fruitmarket's introduction says: 'her systematic refusal to engage with the institutions and support structures of the art world, *led somewhat inevitably to her work being neglected and becoming much less well known over time*.'[388] These statements shy away from

[384] Jo Applin, 'Lozano's Labour', in *Lee Lozano*, Moderna Museet Exhibition Catalogue, February 13 - April 25, 2010 (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 127.
[385] Adam Szymczyk, 'WIN FIRST DONT LAST', in *Lee Lozano: WIN FIRST DONT LAST / WIN LAST DONT CARE*, Kunsthalle Basel, Exhibition Catalogue, 15 June - 27 August 2006 (Basel: Schwabe AG, 2006), 6, *emphasis my own*.
[386] Sabine Folie, 'Introduction and Acknowledgements', 7, *emphasis my own*.
[387] Iris Müller-Westermann, '"Making Art Is the Greatest Act of All" Lee Lozano's Investigations', 26, *emphasis my own*.
[388] 'Lee Lozano: Slip Slide Splice', Fruitmarket, accessed 28 March 2023, https://www.fruitmarket.co.uk/archive/lee-lozano-slip-slide-splice/, *emphasis my own*.

attributing gender bias as the reason for Lozano's neglect, and speak more to the importance of being 'present' and networked as a measure of how success is both accredited and then maintained. They also, however, demonstrate how a rejection of a group of people, or an institution/s, can lead to their rejection of you in return – an argument reinforced by Molesworth:

> Clearly, without the institutions of art buttressing her activities Lozano fell into art-world obscurity, and this suggests that when an artist abandons the institutions of art, no matter how profound and legitimate the artist's desire to merge life and art, the result will be that the "art" part of the equation will become unrecognizable.[389]

Barry Rosen said of her withdrawal and in particular of her withdrawal from New York, is that 'if you leave here, you are invisible.'[390]

The art world has had several artists who have left it and walked away. Agnes Martin, Steve Kaltenbach, Lee Bontecou, Elaine Sturtevant, and Jo Baer, for example, all left New York and stopped showing or making art for periods of time in the late 1960s and 1970s. Charlotte Posenenske and Laurie Parsons changed careers altogether. In 2000, Cady Noland decided to stop participating, and while she cannot stop museums or collections who own her work from exhibiting them, as a means to destabilize the art world's market structures she has disowned work that has come up for sale at auction. The topic of dropouts has been the subject of quiet interest in the art world with projects such as: *Short Careers* at MUMOK, Vienna in 2004; curator, art theorist and gallerist Alexander Koch's exhibition on the subject in 2002, and his paper *A Theoretical Foundation* (2011); and Martin Herbert's publication *Tell them I said No* (2016); among others. Through his research, Koch designated Lozano's withdrawal as 'regressive', because while she was trying to be critical of the art world all it achieved was to take her out of it: 'if it enabled her to better understand the art world, there is no way for us to observe her gaining such insight.'[391] His point resonates with the exhibition-related texts stated above – that Lozano effectively wrote herself out of the history books. Herbert's book is a series of short essays on individual artists who have withdrawn from the art world in some capacity. He does not write on Lozano but he highlights that within the sphere of art-world-withdrawal there is structural sexism at play, which may 'underwrite one broad cleaving along gender lines among these practices—that men are more likely to step back to a safe distance and women to quit

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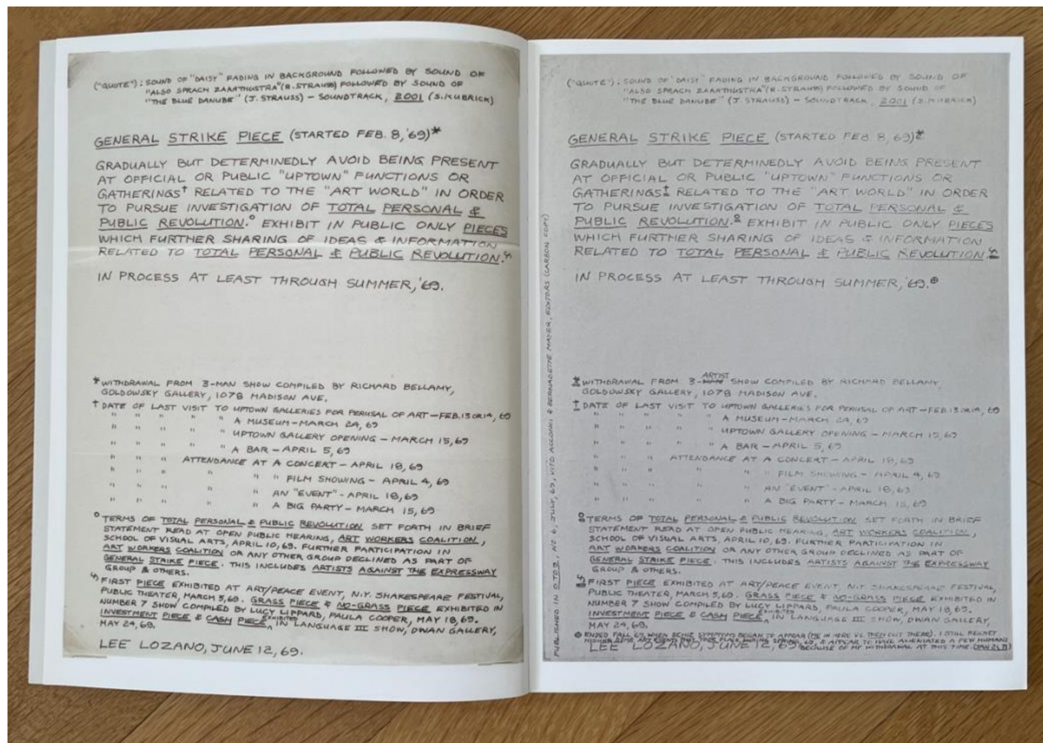
[389] Molesworth, 'Tune in, Turn on, Drop Out'.
[390] In conversation with the author, November 2020
[391] Alexander Koch, 'A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION', *KOW*, May 2011, https://kow-berlin.com/texts/opting-out-of-art-a-theoretical-foundation-1.

outright.'[392] This statement is an interesting observation for this research as I would maintain that structural sexism in the art world has to remain an equally important part of examining Lozano's exclusion. To not acknowledge it is to ignore feminist art historical scholarship.



("QUOTE"): SOUND OF "DAISY" FADING IN BACKGROUND FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF "ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA" (R. STRAUSS) FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF "THE BLUE DANUBE" (J. STRAUSS) – SOUNDTRACK, 2001 (S. KUBRICK)

GENERAL STRIKE PIECE (STARTED FEB. 8, '69)*

GRADUALLY BUT DETERMINEDLY AVOID BEING PRESENT AT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC "UPTOWN" FUNCTIONS OR GATHERINGS† RELATED TO THE "ART WORLD" IN ORDER TO PURSUE INVESTIGATION OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION.° EXHIBIT IN PUBLIC ONLY PIECES WHICH FURTHER SHARING OF IDEAS & INFORMATION RELATED TO TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION.

IN PROCESS AT LEAST THROUGH SUMMER, '69.

*WITHDRAWAL FROM 3-MAN SHOW COMPILED BY RICHARD BELLAMY, GOLDOWSKY GALLERY, 1078 MADISON AVE.

†DATE OF LAST VISIT TO UPTOWN GALLERIES FOR PERUSAL OF ART – FEB. 13 OR 14, 69
" " " " " A MUSEUM – MARCH 29, 69
" " " " " UPTOWN GALLERY OPENING – MARCH 15, 69
" " " " " A BAR – APRIL 5, 69
" " " ATTENDANCE AT A CONCERT – APRIL 18, 69
" " " " " " FILM SHOWING – APRIL 4, 69
" " " " " AN "EVENT" – APRIL 18, 69
" " " " " A BIG PARTY – MARCH 15, 69

°TERMS OF TOTAL PERSONAL & PUBLIC REVOLUTION SET FORTH IN BRIEF STATEMENT READ AT OPEN PUBLIC HEARING, ART WORKERS COALITION, SCHOOL OF VISUAL ARTS, APRIL 10, 69. FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN ART WORKERS COALITION OR ANY OTHER GROUP DECLINED AS PART OF GENERAL STRIKE PIECE. THIS INCLUDES ARTISTS AGAINST THE EXPRESSWAY GROUP & OTHERS.

FIRST PIECE EXHIBITED AT ART/PEACE EVENT, N.Y. SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL, PUBLIC THEATER, MARCH 5, 69. GRASS PIECE & NO-GRASS PIECE EXHIBITED IN NUMBER 7 SHOW COMPILED BY LUCY LIPPARD, PAULA COOPER, MAY 18, 69. INVESTMENT PIECE & CASH PIECE EXHIBITED IN LANGUAGE III SHOW, DWAN GALLERY, MAY 24, 69.

LEE LOZANO, JUNE 12, 69.

Fig. 16. Image of the original and a carbon-copy of *General Strike Piece* (February 8, 1969) in *Lee Lozano: Language Pieces*.

Jo Applin has also advocated for a more expansive look at Lozano's exclusion. While she agrees that 'because Lozano dropped out of the art world in 1971 and refused to participate in the women's movement, her work and the issues of gender and subjectivity with which her conceptual practice engaged were each, in effect, quarantined from the first wave of writings on conceptual art.'[393] She articulates that these accounts of art history chose instead to focus on, 'an almost exclusively male line-up and emphasized questions of language, logic, and so on (other female conceptual artists like Christine Kozlov received similarly short shrift in such accounts).'[394] Moreover, she highlights that Lozano was also excluded from the 1970 landmark group exhibition *Information* curated by Kynaston McShine at MoMA, which was an international survey of new conceptual art that is considered among one of the most influential exhibitions of the twentieth century. The reasons for this could be that Lozano's highly subjective Conceptual pieces

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[392] Martin Herbert, *Tell Them I Said No* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016): 13.
[393] Jo Applin, 'Cut Out, Drop Out', *American Art* 31, no. 1 (1 March 2017): 6–12, https://doi.org/10.1086/692153.
[394] Applin.

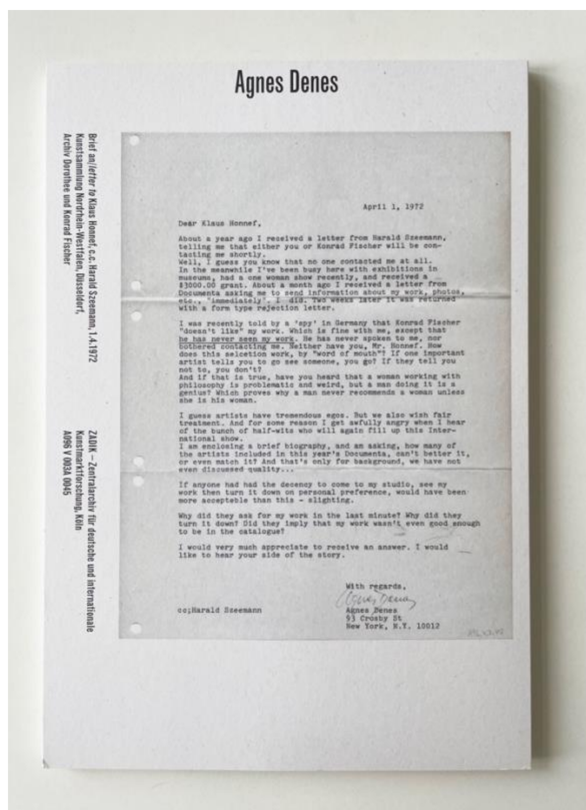
were at odds with the anti-subjective stance of most other Conceptual art at that time. I would argue that her subjective approach at times has been read as being too 'feminine' in its focus, because she covered a wide range of both universal and highly personal ideas. Lehrer-Graiwer argued that Lozano 'decidedly rejected' the type of Conceptualism of her male peers, who almost over-rationalized their ideas – 'minimising personal decisions, removing the freehand and automating voice. Lozano leapt furiously in the opposite direction, overstating her subjectivity and the private, exasperating fact of embodied perception.'[395]

Applin also cites art historian Patricia Norvell's introduction to *Recording Conceptual Art* (2001) – her edited collection of interviews with conceptual artists from the late 1970s – where she noted 'how the sexism in the art world at that time ensured not a single woman artist was suggested as a possible candidate to be interviewed by Robert Morris, the advisor for Norvell's master's degree.'[396] Applin's writings are clearly written through a feminist lens, implying that the art historical accounts of that period of Conceptual art have tended – as with other art historical periods – to focus on men's contributions and whether Lozano had remained visible or not, her work may well have been ignored regardless. Her arguments are best considered alongside the knowledge that Lucy Lippard did include six of Lozano's *Language Pieces* among the bibliography of her ground-breaking book: *Six Years: The dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (1973). This reveals that she was 'present' in at least one art historical account of this period, albeit one by an outwardly feminist writer and curator who was actively pushing against male-dominated perspectives. In addition, Lippard named Lozano the major female figure in the New York Conceptual art movement of the 1960s, in her essay 'Escape Attempts' (1995) which was originally commissioned for the catalogue of *1965-1975: Reconsidering the Object of Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles' in 1995 – an exhibition that ironically did not include Lee Lozano.[397]

It is worth noting that the Conceptual art movement produced a significant and important number of writings by artists which were published in mainstream arts press, as well as artist's small press editions. The term itself – 'Conceptual art' – was defined by Sol LeWitt in his essay 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' that was published in *Artforum* in June 1967. The fact that artists themselves were writing this history, and many of the texts were by artist-men, could be one reason why women's voices were often overlooked in

[395] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece,* 28.
[396] Applin, *Lee Lozano*, 105.
[397] Lippard, Lucy R, 'Escape Attempts', in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xii.

later art historical accounts. Some of Lozano's *Language Pieces*, however, were published in many of small artist's presses during this period including Vito Acconci and Rosemary Mayer's *0 TO 9*, and Dan Graham's mimeographed magazine *End Moments*. As Todd Allen notes, that when Graham's collective writings *Rock my Religion* were published in 1993, discussion on and contributions by Lozano were significantly reduced.[398] Widening out from the limits of Conceptual art (for as I explored in the previous section Lozano is limited to no one art historical movement or style) there are other ways that artist-women were marginalised during this period. In an *Artforum* roundtable about the 1980s 'death of painting' debate, David Reed made a pertinent point about the erasure of painter-women during this time: 'I am convinced that one reason that the innovations of the '70s painting were unrecognised is that four of the leading practitioners were women: Lee Lozano, Jo Baer, Dorothea Rockburne, and Ree Morton. It's very strange that the history of painting could be thought to end just as women were beginning to make their contributions.'[399]



Agnes Denes

Brief an/letter to Klaus Honnef, c.c. Harald Szeemann, 1.4.1972
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf,
Archiv Dorothee und Konrad Fischer

ZADIK – Zentralarchiv für deutsche und internationale
Kunstmarktforschung, Köln
A096 V 0034 0045

April 1, 1972

Dear Klaus Honnef,

About a year ago I received a letter from Harald Szeemann, telling me that either you or Konrad Fischer will be contacting me shortly.
Well, I guess you know that no one contacted me at all.
In the meanwhile I've been busy here with exhibitions in museums, had a one woman show recently, and received a $3000.00 grant. About a month ago I received a letter from Documenta asking me to send information about my work, photos, etc., "immediately". I did. Two weeks later it was returned with a form type rejection letter.

I was recently told by a 'spy' in Germany that Konrad Fischer "doesn't like" my work. Which is fine with me, except that he has never seen my work. He has never spoken to me, nor bothered contacting me. Neither have you, Mr. Honnef. How does this selcetion work, by "word of mouth"? If one important artist tells you to go see someone, you go? If they tell you not to, you don't?
And if that is true, have you heard that a woman working with philosophy is problematic and weird, but a man doing it is a genius? Which proves why a man never recommends a woman unless she is his woman.

I guess artists have tremendous egos. But we also wish fair treatment. And for some reason I get awfully angry when I hear of the bunch of half-wits who will again fill up this International show.
I am enclosing a brief biography, and am asking, how many of the artists included in this year's Documenta, can't better it, or even match it? And that's only for background, we have not even discussed quality...

If anyone had had the decency to come to my studio, see my work then turn it down on personal preference, would have been more acceptable than this - slighting.

Why did they ask for my work in the last minute? Why did they turn it down? Did they imply that my work wasn't even good enough to be in the catalogue?

I would very much appreciate to receive an answer. I would like to hear your side of the story.

With regards,

Agnes Denes
93 Crosby St
New York, N.Y. 10012

cc;Harald Szeemann

Fig. 17. Image of a letter from Agnes Denes to Klaus Honnef (1972) in the card catalogue for *I AM NOT A NICE GIRL* (2020)

[398] Todd Allen, 'The Case Paintings Exist Because the Caves Were Toilets: Reactivating the Work of Lee Lozano', 19.
[399] David Reed in 'The Mourning After', *Artforum International*, March 2003, 210.

Such sexist exclusion was the theme of the exhibition *I'M NOT A NICE GIRL* (2020) at K21, which explicitly exposed the layers of sexual politics at work in the art world of the late 1960s and 1970s. Its point of departure was the Archive Dorothee and Konrad Fischer. Fischer was an influential gallerist based in Düsseldorf, who focused on artists working with minimal and conceptual art and introduced several key players from the American scene to Europe for the first time. In the exhibition, curator Isabelle Malz chose to display a series of rarely seen documents, ranging from letters, artistic proposals to Fischer for exhibitions, and photographs – revealing that Fischer knew about and was in contact with many of these artist-women, and had an ongoing correspondence with Lucy Lippard (Fig. 17). In her introductory essay Malz writes, 'although Fischer contributed substantially to the establishment of Conceptual art as a movement, these women played virtually no role in his exhibition program.' She therefore proposed that 'a critical reading of the archival material reveals structural mechanisms of discrimination within our society, along with questions about hidden narratives in art (history).'[400] In a more indirect manner, *Joint Dialogue*, curated by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, also sought to expose the side-lining of Lozano from art history by bringing her in dialogue with her closest peers of the late 1960s – Dan Graham and Steven Kaltenbach. Lehrer-Graiwer describes it as being about 'close personal relationships between artists and the way ideas are traded down forking paths of influence to become variously manifest, suppressed, and rerouted in art. It's about staging a conversation between works that came out of dialogues between friends.'[401] From reading the catalogue for the exhibition, and in speaking to Lehrer-Graiwer about this show it became clear that it was a loose, non-academic exhibition that was not trying to promote some kind of authority over this period in art history. Rather, it attempted to tell the story of these artists through their personal connections to one another, not to an overarching art historical notion of a movement and its perceived success stories. She places like-minded works by Lozano in direct dialogue with Graham's, demonstrating the closeness of the two. In doing so she challenged the power status historically imparted on Graham. (Fig. 18) *Joint Dialogue* pre-dates Lehrer-Graiwer's *Dropout Piece* book but they are clearly approached in a similar manner. As Catherine Wagley has argued they are models 'for how to historicize differently.'[402]

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[400] Isabelle Malz, *I'M NOT A NICE GIRL*, On the Occasion of the Exhibition 'I'M NOT A NICE GIRL' at K21 18 January – 28 June 2020 (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordhein-Westfalen, 2020).
[401] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Joint Dialogue Book* (Los Angeles: Overduin and Kite, 2010), 3.
[402] Catherine Wagley, '"The Hardest Work I Have Ever Done": "Dropout Piece" by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, accessed 27 June 2019, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/hardest-work-ever-done-dropout-piece-sarah-lehrer-graiwer/.

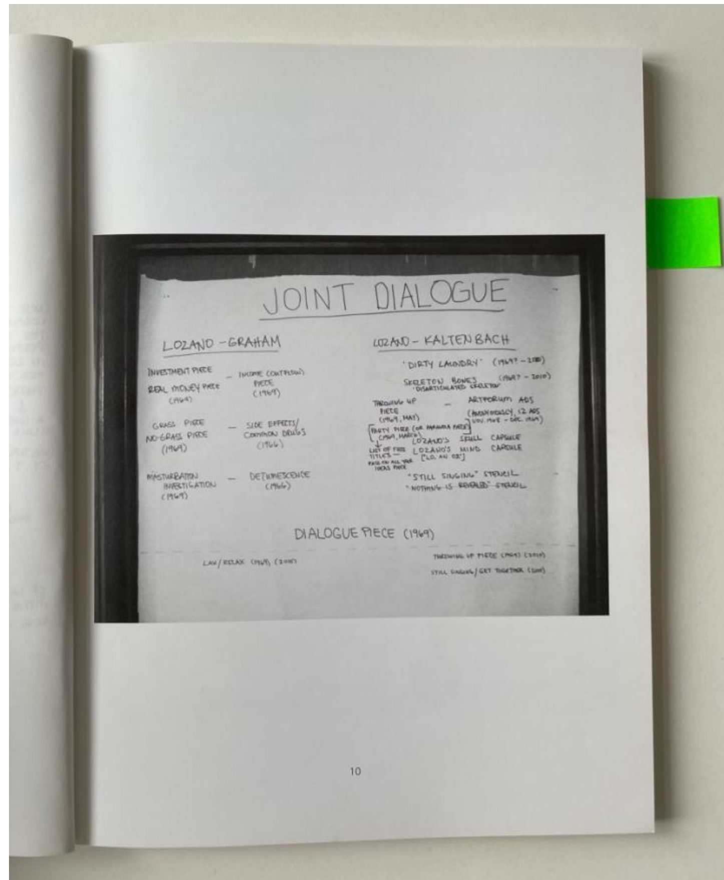

Fig. 18. Image of *Joint Dialogue Book* depicting the relationship between art works by Lee Lozano, Dan Graham, and Steven Kaltenbach

What I am trying to indicate here is that even though many of the solo exhibitions and their accompanying texts give involved discussions of Lozano's work, and many, if not all, give feminist readings of her work throughout, to repeatedly maintain that the main reason she was ignored was due to her own withdrawal is perhaps too neat and undoes some of the feminist understandings we have come to know about how art history has been shaped. Queer-feminist academic Clare Hemmings has argued,

> the recuperative moment is always a closure. It has to proceed from a certainty. You have to know who can be proclaimed as the forgotten lesbian or black or feminist artist before you go looking for her because the parameters of that recuperation are already set through a prior set of judgments. In itself I don't think that this is uninteresting, or even redundant, but it closes down meanings of political histories if it isn't accompanied by reflexivity around that 'certainty's' exclusions.[403]

By this logic, group exhibitions such *Solitaire* (discussed earlier for its take on painter-women from this period), as well as *Joint Dialogue* and *I'M <u>NOT</u> A NICE GIRL* stand apart from other recuperative exhibitions. For each attended to feminist curatorial methods and reflected upon the wider reasons for the

[403] In Katy Deepwell, 'Why Feminist Stories Matter: Katy Deepwell Interviews Clare Hemmings', *n.paradoxa* Issue 40 (July 2017): 64.

artist's exclusion, exploring the context of the wider art scene. As a result they are able to provide more rounded and expansive views on Lozano's marginalisation from art history. In Chapter 1 I discussed the importance of self-reflective practice to the advancement of feminism and Hemmings' argument follows this logic. It seems critical that in order for structural change to truly happen institutions need to openly acknowledge their accountability for artist-women's prior exclusions.

Museological Legacies

In a 2017 roundtable discussion on curating and exhibiting artist-women's work, curator Camille Morineau remarked that,

> collecting women artists is and will be the strongest way to build a new narrative and reinvent the canon. If museums have recently been exhibiting more women artists, they are still slow in collecting them at the same level of male artists. That is a crucial point to change. And private collections might very well be in the future also as important, as they now represent a very strong power in the market.[404]

Taking this observation and applying it to Lozano would indicate that very little is changing as while she has received solid posthumous institutional exhibition support, her work remains in very few major museum collections. According to data provided by Hauser & Wirth, her works are owned by just ten museums across the United States, and with very few works. Only four of these could be considered major internationally renowned collections: the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), who own a *Tool Painting* from 1964 and several works on paper, including some of early drawings and the *Language Pieces*; the Whitney Museum's collection includes *Span* (1964) – a large abstract diptych, one 1962 drawing, and three preparatory sketches or studies connected to her later paintings; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles have one 1961-3 drawing; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, own *Breech* (1966), an abstract painting. The other collections are smaller, lesser known, regional museums or university collections. In Europe, only six museums own work. The most notable examples being Moderna Museet, Stockholm who owns three early drawings and one painting, and MMK Frankfurt, which has three paintings that are part of the Rolf Ricke Collection (her former Cologne Gallerist). In terms of when these acquisitions took place, the majority were not before 2004.[405] The largest body of work across all collections

[404] Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and Exhibiting Women's and Feminist Art, a Roundtable Discussion', 267-8.
[405] The exceptions to these posthumous acquisitions are the donation of the painting *Clash* (1965) to the Weatherspoon Art Gallery, UNCG, Greensboro, New York in 1967 by curator Donald Droll, and *Peel* (1964), acquired via a gift in 1981. And the acquisition of the 11 paintings that formed Lozano's *Wave Series* by Wadsworth Atheneum, Connecticut in 1998 and 1999.

belongs to the Pinault Collection, a private collection which has three dedicated museum spaces for public access, two in Venice, and one in Paris. They own fourteen works, including three paintings, which means that they hold the most comprehensive overview of Lozano's career. They have works from 1962 to 1968, covering most phases of her practice except her Conceptual *Language Pieces*. This is illuminating in light of Morineau's words on private collections representing a strong power in the market. Morineau hints at a dissolution of the authority imparted on to public museums as the only places to tell the stories of art.

Regardless of Pinault's strong commitment to Lozano, the overall picture is disappointing. In writing about finding a place for feminism in MoMA, curator Aruna D'Souza contended:

> The curators who wish to redress the historical marginalization of work by women artists must contend with doing so in a collection that has serious gaps; whatever the Museum's current commitment to filling such absences, it is made all the more difficult with the passage of time, the prescient collecting strategy of other institutions, and the exigencies of the art market, whose prices now reflect a renewed interest in works by post-1970s feminist and women artists.[406]

While D'Souza writes specifically about MoMA, it could apply to other major museums. The fact that the Pinault Collection is a private collection owned by one of the world's richest men – François Pinault[407] – denotes his ability to pay premium prices for whatever he desires. As a private collection, it is not accountable to the same rigorous board and funding structures as museums – in the UK, Europe, or the United States. What D'Souza implies is that as the work of artist-women becomes more desirable, their prices increase and then museums are potentially priced out of the market. This argument falls a little short when the same museums are still acquiring work by highly desirable and more expensive artist-men. It sounds like a convenient excuse to blame the market. The problem most likely lies in the fact that it is harder for museums to encourage board members and patrons to fund the acquisition of artist-women they know little about – demonstrating how little things have changed when it comes to mindsets over the value of artist-men over artist-women. The Burns-Halperin report in 2022, for example, proved that 'only 11 percent of acquisitions at 31 U.S. museums between 2008 and 2020 were of work by female-identifying artists.'[408]

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[406] Aruna D'Souza, '"Float the Boat": Finding a Place for Feminism in the Museum', in *MODERN WOMEN: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Department of Publications, MoMA, 2010), 61.
[407] Pinault is the 28th richest person in the world, with a current net worth of around $45 billion. See: 'Bloomberg Billionaires Index', *Bloomberg.Com*, 4 April 2023, https://www.bloomberg.com/billionaires/
[408] See 'Perceptions of Progress in the Art World Are Largely a Myth. Here Are the Facts – Burns Studio', accessed 3 April 2023, https://studioburns.media/perceptions-of-progress-in-the-art-world-are-largely-a-myth-here-are-the-facts/.

In a review of Lozano's May 2022 exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, New York – *All Verbs* – Noah Dillon wrote, 'that 30 of the 32 pieces on view come directly from Lozano's estate suggests just how little of her work has been collected.'[409] I noted similar at the GL Strand exhibition in October 2022 where much of the work on display was still credited to the estate. This indicates that despite declarations from reviewers of Lozano's 2004 P.S.1 exhibition that 'art history gets rewritten from here,'[410] these exhibitions are not having the long-term impact that is needed to effect real change for both artist-women in art history and the structures that tell its stories.

Market Worth

In their April 2008 issue, *Artforum* ran a special section titled 'Art and it's Markets: Market Index', where Katy Siegel's wrote on Lee Lozano charting her re-entry into the art world and art market. Siegel argued that rediscovery is 'good value', using Lozano's radical rejection of the art world as the perfect case to demonstrate this:

> The negation of the economy is the fundamental condition for belief in art, as Pierre Bourdieu writes; certain artists simply take this principle to the extreme. No one has embodied a more stringent refusal than Lee Lozano. The attention recently lavished on her work exemplifies the irony that there is nothing that sells better than the principled rejection of money, status, and career.[411]

Siegel asserts that Lozano's revival is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's "Circle of Belief" – the circle of people involved in making an artist's reputation, and the sincere belief that they have in that artist.[412] The intricate circle of curators, dealers and writers that supported the first wave of recuperation (named earlier in the chapter) gave rise to Hauser & Wirth's representation. This was significant because Hauser & Wirth is currently one of the art world's powerhouses, a blue-chip gallery alongside Gagosian, David Zwirner, and Pace and only a handful of others. They have 16 galleries over 12 global locations including London, New York, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and Monaco.[413] At the time of writing they represent 58 contemporary living artists, and 37 artist estates. When the Lozano estate first joined Hauser & Wirth in 2004-5, they had

[409] Noah Dillon, 'Lee Lozano's Subtle Verbs', *Frieze Magazine*, July 2022, accessed March 2023, https://www.frieze.com/lee-lozano-all-verbs-2022-review.
[410] See Bruce Hainley's contribution in Alison M. Gingeras et al., '13 Critics and Curators Look at the Year in Art', *Artforum International; New York*, 2004.
[411] Siegel, 'Market Index: Lee Lozano', 330.
[412] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1993), 77-78. It can be argued that Bourdieu adapted his theory from Howard Becker's notion of artistic production as a collective action – see Howard Saul Becker, *Art Worlds*. University of California Press, 1984.
[413] They also have two additional smaller galleries called 'Make' that specialise in contemporary making and the crafted object, which appear to be more like high-end shops in countryside locations in Somerset, England and Southampton, New York.

only two locations – Zurich and London.[414] At that time, they also only represented 35 artists, alongside a handful of estates, including Eva Hesse and Lee Lozano. On face value, the upward trajectory of Lozano's recuperation seemingly runs alongside the astronomical rise of the gallery who represents her estate.

Siegel argues that even in 2005 Hauser & Wirth were able to elevate Lozano's practice – placing her in context with artists such as Paul McCarthy and Eva Hesse because their 'cultural capital is backed by real capital.'[415] Siegel maintains that Hauser & Wirth's representation was the decisive moment in Lozano's rediscovery story, and she provides the increase in prices as testament to this fact: 'between the time I saw Lozano's paintings in a barn in Pennsylvania, in 2001, and their appearance in Basel [Hauser & Wirth dedicated their 2006 Art Basel booth to Lozano to coincide with the Kunsthalle Basel exhibition], their prices had rocketed from the low tens to nearly a million dollars.'[416] This price increase is staggering given Hauser & Wirth had only been representing her estate for two years at that point, and prior to 2006 her works had not really been seen in Europe. Several people intimated to me in interviews that before 2004 you could buy a Lozano drawing for a couple of hundred dollars. Siegel provides an extraordinary summary of how one particularly powerful gallery can impact the posthumous market value of an artist. This pointedly speaks of the power machinations at play in the art world.

In 2016 journalist Harriet Finch Little wrote, 'as Andy Warhol once put it: "death means a lot of money, honey". In today's inflated art market, the significance of securing an artist's estate seems all too obvious.'[417] Finch Little maps out the rise of artist estate representation and management within the contemporary art world, explaining: 'Art's value — both cultural and monetary — is established by it being seen, sold, and talked about. With this in mind, galleries are increasingly taking on the representation of artists' estates alongside their representation of living artists.'[418] Hauser & Wirth are a natural example as their roster of estates grew exponentially in the decade 2006 to 2016, and this is continuing to grow. Finch-Little argues that this is because the contemporary market is so competitive that unknown artist estates began to offer galleries new 'treasures' they could bring to the surface. This is a perspective reinforced by

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[414] During this time, from 1999 to 2009 Iwan Wirth had partnered with David Zwirner to form Zwirner & Wirth in New York, whose purpose was to exhibit and sell secondary market work. This closed when Hauser & Wirth decided to open their own primary gallery in New York.
[415] In conversation with the author, November 2020
[416] Siegel, 330.
[417] Harriet Finch Little, 'How an Artist's Legacy Became Big Business', *Financial Times*, 26 August 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/d77d5e74-69e5-11e6-ae5b-a7cc5dd5a28c, accessed February 2023.
[418] 'How an Artist's Legacy Became Big Business'.

feminist art historian Angela Dimitrakaki who has argued that 'the art world [is] an extremely competitive working environment and market – one so extreme that it makes the dead compete with the living.'[419]

In my research, when asking curators why the trend of rediscovering artist-women was happening, the market was repeatedly mentioned with many arguing that it played a role which would seem to uphold Griselda Pollock's claim made in the introduction to this chapter. Jessica Morgan (Director: Dia Foundation), for example, said 'the cynical part of me would say there is a commercial factor here – the galleries are looking for more work to sell…'[420] Bob Nickas said 'it's a veritable cottage industry. Galleries are always looking to where they can make money.'[421] Today, Lozano is one of a larger number of older and dead women artists whose work and estates are represented by Hauser & Wirth. Their ever-growing stable of artists and their estates includes figures such as Phyllida Barlow, Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Maria Lassnig, Alina Szapocznikow, Geta Brătescu and Luchita Hurtado – all artists who were overlooked for long periods of time. In 2019 it was reported that thirty-four percent of their artists are women, and they were making thirty-three percent of sales from those artists,[422] demonstrating that contrary to received wisdom artist-women can be good for business. With this in mind, it is difficult to not think cynically about Hauser & Wirth's motives for taking on so many artist-women both posthumously or perhaps even more telling just before they die (Geta Brătescu and Luchita Hurtado, for example)[423] – what could the motivation be other than money? Helen Molesworth agreed, 'it is much easier for something to be assimilated whole cloth into a market if it had no previous market. You just take it on and don't have to navigate any problematic history. You don't have to navigate the problem of class, taste, generational taste, national taste, you can just take this very grand authoritative move that appears frictionless…'[424]

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[419] In Helena Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and Exhibiting Women's and Feminist Art, a Roundtable Discussion', in *Re-Envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives on a Global World, Routledge: London and New York,* ed. Ruth E. Iskin (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 254.
[420] In conversation with the author, September 2020
[421] Email to the author, July 2022
[422] Reported in: Burns, Charlotte; Halperin, Julia, 'Special Issue: Women's Place in the Art World—Why Recent Advancements for Female Artists Are Largely an Illusion', *In Other Words*, September 2019, https://www.artagencypartners.com/in-other-words-issue/19-september/?showsinglepage=1.
[423] Geta Brătescu had her first exhibition with Hauser & Wirth in 2017, she died in 2019, age 92. Luchita Hurtado's first exhibition was in 2019, she died in 2020, age 100.
[424] In conversation with the author, July 2020

Fig. 19. Installation view: *Lee Lozano* at Hauser & Wirth, Zurich (2008). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

Despite such cynical readings, many curators I interviewed also praised the estate (Rosen and Van Liere) and Hauser & Wirth in their handling of Lozano's work and their assistance in making their exhibitions happen. They remarked that without Hauser & Wirth, Lozano's work could not have been cared for in the manner it needed. Molesworth explained that the first thing they did with the estate was to clean the paintings, including archiving and digitizing the material – 'making all the work that all of us did possible.'[425] Fiona Bradley (Director: Fruitmarket Gallery) is a great supporter of Rosen and she has worked with him twice, first for their Eva Hesse exhibition in 2009 and then their Lozano exhibition in 2018.[426] She claimed that Hauser & Wirth provided a safe haven for the works but also that Rosen knew that they could provide the right context: the works would have quality exhibitions, be taken to the right fairs, therefore helping 'the works accrue the right meaning and conceptual values. The art market value comes after that.'[427] Rosen confirmed this, explaining that Hauser & Wirth 'are fantastic to work with… [they] have the resources to make things happen.'[428] What this perhaps demonstrates is Rosen and Van Liere's strategic intentions, Hauser & Wirth are a wealthy – both culturally and monetarily – means to an end.

Finch Little's aforementioned article argued that estate management is necessary to maintain an artist's legacy and increasingly establish a reputation for someone who has been overlooked or simply

[425] In conversation with the author, July 2020
[426] Following the Hesse show, Bradley invited Rosen to sit on the Fruitmarket's board.
[427] In conversation with the author, June 2020
[428] In conversation with the author, November 2020

forgotten. She quoted Barry Rosen: '"It's hard to think of somebody who doesn't exist because they botched it, because we don't even remember them."'[429] He was not speaking of Lozano but within this framework it is a revealing statement on his motivations. In a conversation with me Rosen remarked 'I'm the first person who ever noticed that there's a difference between what estates need and what living artists need and it's a completely different thing. It cannot be just about selling, selling, selling. Eva Hesse for instance, we never sell anything… That's ok because what is important is the artist's legacy and not the market.' He is unequivocal about this fact: 'Legacy is the most important thing. Unfortunately legacy turns into money. But legacy is not money.'[430] That profit was not the primary goal, as Siegal pointed out, is also signalled by the fact that 'Rosen and Van Liere took care of Lozano for years with little financial reward.'[431] And so, the pertinent question for this research is: have Hauser & Wirth been good for Lozano's artistic legacy and what has their representation of her achieved? And what, if anything, does it have to do with feminist understandings of previously overlooked artist-women?

Blue-Chip Legacies

Writing about blue-chip galleries critic James Panero explained:

> Those four or five commercial empires upon which the sun never sets, and which cast an ever-lengthening shadow over the global art trade, now look to confer prestige on their artists by mounting their own "museum-quality" exhibitions. For this they can deploy their museum-sized venues. They can bring in one-time independent scholars and former museum professionals to secure high-end loans and publish voluminous catalogues. They can create a market, usually for name-brand artists with overlooked (and therefore undervalued and available) bodies of works.[432]

As one of these galleries Hauser & Wirth have the means, the networks, and the space(s) to build and enhance an artist's reputation and, of course, create a market. Since 2005, Lee Lozano has had eight solo exhibitions at Hauser & Wirth at various sites – four in New York, two in London, one in Zurich and one in Somerset. These have tended to focus on her paintings, complemented by drawings and archival materials, from differing periods in Lozano's oeuvre: the early sexualised paintings from 1962-3; the cartoonish tool paintings and drawings of 1963-4; the increasingly abstract works of 1964-5; and a series of works from 1969 where she punctured holes in earlier canvases. On rare occasions a couple of her *Language*

[429] 'How an Artist's Legacy Became Big Business'.
[430] In conversation with the author, November 2020
[431] Siegel, 330.
[432] James Panero, 'Gallery Chronicle', *The New Criterion* 34, no. 10 (2016): 48.

Pieces have been shown but they have never been the focus of the exhibitions and (from what I can gather from installation images) when shown they are used more like footnotes rather than stand-out moments.

In reading through the various texts associated with these exhibitions, which are found on the gallery's website, there is a clear pattern of elevation that comes across – quotes from well-positioned and respected curators and academics are used to legitimise and enhance Lozano's artistic merits and art historical context. Lozano's successful achievements between 1961 and 1972 are repeated: her affiliation to famous (and authoritative) artist-men; her showing with the 'legendary' Green Gallery; the 'influential' Bianchini Gallery; her solo show at the Whitney; and so forth. In the early exhibition texts they write that she was influential but it is never clear exactly who she was influential over: other artists of her time, or those working now. In 2017, they quote Bob Nickas naming her as a 'misfit.' In 2021, they write she is a cult figure in American art history which is clearly meant to make Lozano sound 'cool,' but I find it implies a kind of outsider status that not only contradicts what they state earlier about her being an art world insider. Moreover, to position her as an outsider is problematic in relation to artist-women more generally who have in the main seen their careers systematically pushed to the fringes. The statement by Lucy Lippard about Lozano being the foremost female conceptual artist of her era is used frequently – signposting her importance – and yet they have not held an exhibition that has focussed on the conceptual works that Lippard was speaking about. Lippard has written that Lozano's 'paintings had all the things Donald Judd didn't want: color, shape, and brushstrokes. They were marvelous, but they didn't fit in any movement, and people like me were not very interested in painting.'[433] This would have been a more medium-appropriate statement to use but perhaps it is too honest and not nearly as emphatic. Feminist readings of certain paintings are given which have clearly been informed or co-opted by the scholarship carried out by curators and academics invested in her work. The statement 'since 1998, Lozano's work has been subject to an intensive re-evaluation' is used in the section 'About the Artist' at the end of most texts, before listing the various institutional shows that Lozano has had since this date. They, again, do not extrapolate why this is the case or what this re-evaluation has achieved. If they did, they might have to admit that she has largely been side-lined from art history and that her work is still found in very few major public art collections.

[433] Cited in REED, 'Making Waves'.

In 2014, writer Catherine Wagley reviewed Lehrer-Graiwer's book on Lozano. She highlighted the artist's rising market status and critiqued an exhibition text by Hauser & Wirth from 2008, or specifically the use of a quote by Carl Andre that they edited to make it sound like 'an unconflicted compliment, not the wavering recollection it actually was.'[434] Hauser & Wirth's edited quote reads: 'To me, matter must stand on its own, not be an image, not disappear when the lights go out. Lee could and did make pigment matter… Her paintings were right and tight.'[435] Andre's actual statement says:

> We argued about her painting. Now I see her pictures were so good, I could not stand them. To me, matter must stand on its own, not be an image, not disappear when the lights go out. Lee could and did make pigment matter. I thought that unholy. We argued. Her paintings were right and tight.
>
> I was wrong. Lee Lozano's notebooks of the 1960s contain some of the most beautiful depictions of matter I have ever seen. Then, mattering pigment was no longer enough. Matter outside of the mind became unimportant. It became necessary to dye the canvas of the brain.[436]

As Wagley argues, 'this instinct to uncomplicate in order to legitimate is entirely understandable especially for a gallery working to sell what an artist made before ceasing to make anything at all. But Lozano defied legitimacy so actively and effectively during her lifetime that to impose it on her now seems almost cruel.'[437] Wagley makes a critical observation here about uncomplicating artists and making selective choices over what to show, discuss, elevate, and so forth – and, as the example of Andre shows, which parts of a statement suits their needs. Hauser & Wirth's exhibition approach then (which is by in large their most visible labour aside from art fairs) reveals a markedly surface approach to Lozano's practice. They consistently make big authoritative claims that seemingly minimise both the complexity of Lozano's work and its extreme, radical, and complicated nature. Feminist scholar Amelia Jones has said 'the more one succeeds at infiltrating systems of power, the less radical one's work can be viewed as being.'[438] Jones was speaking of her own feminist practice at work in academic institutions, however, its meaning could be applied here. By primarily focusing on Lozano's paintings, for example, the more complex Life-Art works that came to later define her exit from the art world, and her very complicated relationship to women, are

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[434] Wagley, '"The Hardest Work I Have Ever Done"'.
[435] Cited on 'Lee Lozano – Hauser & Wirth', accessed 3 March 2023, https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/2870-lee-lozano/.
[436] Carl Andre, 'In the Matter of Lee Lozano', in *Lee Lozano: WIN FIRST DONT LAST / WIN LAST DONT CARE*, ed. Adam Szymczyk, Kunsthalle Basel, Exhibition Catalogue, 15 June - 27 August 2006 (Basel: Schwabe AG, 2006), 83.
[437] Wagley, '"The Hardest Work I Have Ever Done"'.
[438] Cited in Dimitrakaki, Angela, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique*, Rethinking Art's Histories (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2013), 26.

largely unseen and are only alluded to in brief sentences in the accompanying texts. It is among those pieces that Lozano's critique of the art world system, of competition, of commodification came into play most acutely. This is not to say that Lozano's paintings are not as subversive or radical as the later written works (as explored earlier) but through Hauser & Wirth's exhibitions there appears to be a shying away from demonstrating the more complex, the questioning and doubting sides of Lozano. The dangers of such an approach have been touched upon by Griselda Pollock, who has written on the rediscovery of artist-women: 'framed curatorially, critically and art historically in ways that, however progressive or recalcitrant in intention, must not 'frighten' the viewers with the real complexity and challenging psycho-material processes of any artmaking, we may only be learning to consume a few more artist-women, one at a time, backed by galleries.'[439]

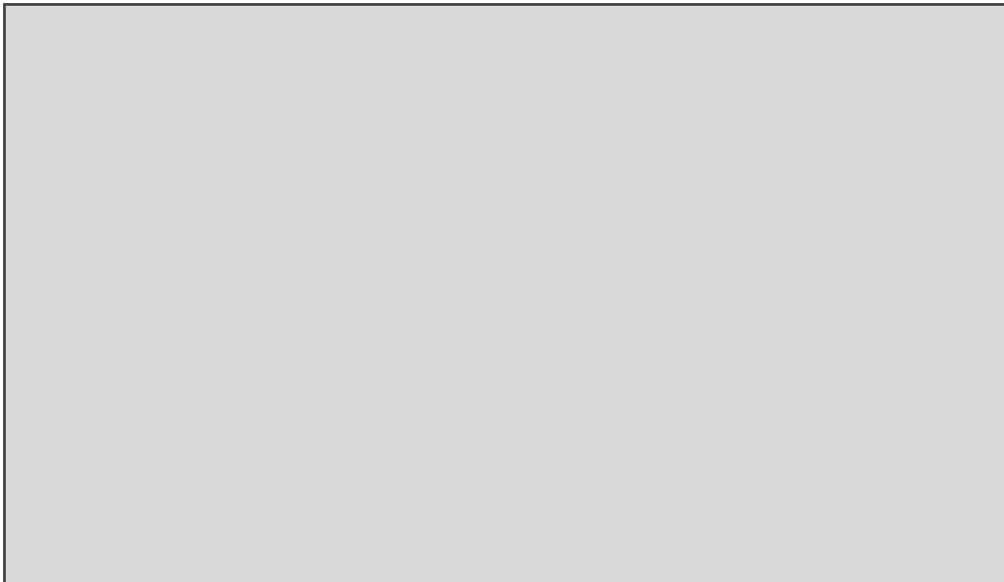

Fig. 20. Installation view: *Lee Lozano: ALL VERBS* at Hauser & Wirth, New York (2022).
[Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

Rosen and Van Liere are undoubtedly aware of the power of canonising – their job is to ensure Lozano is placed in the right contexts in the present, in order to illuminate her significance in the past. In my conversation with Rosen about Lozano and the estate's relationship to Hauser & Wirth he was keen to remind me of Lozano's original context, stating, 'I think it is really important to actively remember and revive what that world was, as opposed to applying what happened then to the standard of what we think we have now.' Later he remarked, 'I think that we're in a very difficult, interesting, and perilous time where

[439] Pollock, *Killing Men & Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting*, 25.

the real content of the past is forgotten and needs to be remembered. Everything moves so quickly now that there is no real content that matters. There's sensation, everything is about sensation, but I don't think it goes much deeper than that.'[440] In relation to the cultural capital Lozano is potentially able to wield by being associated by big-name artists on the roster of Hauser & Wirth he said, 'Lozano already came from a roster of big-name artists – she was at Green Gallery.'[441] He denies any narrative that can be made by simply looking at a gallery's roster of artists saying, 'I think those narratives suit the gallery, but I don't think they have any real application.'[442] With all of this, he implies that we should understand Lozano's relation to the art world of her time: she was active, well-known, exhibiting at top galleries, part of the art conversation, but also that her work was about much more than merely product or selling. 'She existed in a way that is hard to have an imagination for now because everything is so commercial.'[443] His point may in some senses be valid in terms of how the art world has changed and yet it also signals selective historicising. As Clare Hemmings has explained, 'which story one tells is always motivated by the position one wishes to occupy in the present.'[444] Rosen (and seemingly Hauser & Wirth's) position appears to be to view Lozano as a successful artist of her time and that she should be remembered as such. Such a position, however, does precisely as Pollock feared as it seems to ignore any feminist understanding of how to read the work, its reception both at the time and subsequently, and how the art historical canon has been formed and perpetuated.

One could ask why this matters – a gallery's role differs to that of an institution, their purpose is to sell and to entice collectors to buy work. This is typically achieved by legitimizing an artist's work and also selling the works that are the most marketable – which painting is undoubtedly the obvious choice. But if we take Panero's analysis that blue-chip galleries are increasingly 'performing' the role of a museum then they are signalling authority and the lines between market building and legacy building (or worse, the appearance of making corrective art historical gestures) become blurred. Furthermore, Hauser & Wirth have consistently employed ex-museum and institutional curators such as Gregor Muir (currently Director of Collections, International Art, Tate Modern), Kate Fowle (former Director of P.S.1 MoMA), and Tanya

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440 In conversation with the author, November 2020
441 In conversation with the author, November 2020
442 In conversation with the author, November 2020
443 In conversation with the author, November 2020
444 Clare Hemmings, 'Introduction', in *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Duke University Press, 2011), 13.

Barson (former Chief Curator, MACBA and Tate Curator), for example. As feminist curator Mirjam Westen has argued, while 'canonising helps us systematically turn information into knowledge. And knowledge grows and deepens only when there are certain frames of reference that are shared.'[445] In order to challenge or "trouble" the canon, 'we need "bundled knowledge" which subverts existing art history canons at the same time as it functions as a focus and shared starting point from which teachers, students, curators, and artists can depart, get stimulated, analyse, and criticise, inspiring them in turn to carry out new feminist research. Canonizing, to me, means acknowledging feminist legacies, with all their contradictions, and turning them into a productive field for new generations.'[446]

In her examination of Lozano's market position, Siegel questioned where the artist's autonomy sat in relation to all of this – in which she was specifically speaking of Lozano's decision to drop out. Autonomy, Siegel suggests, 'in part, offers a kind of digestif for the current bloated market, a reassertion of artist's agency amid the continuing and inequitable redistribution of income (and perhaps a bid for long term value against fear of a market crash).'[447] As a result, Lozano's autonomy is (re)interpreted as integrity rather than failure. Siegel concluded by suggesting that,

> Of course, this assertion on autonomy—this career suicide—can ultimately be good for business, although someone other than the artist usually makes the money. (You may not be interested in the market, but the market is interested in you.) That's one ending to this story. A happier version would be the correction of history achieved by putting Lozano back into the picture. But folding a handful of recovered names into the canon only slightly readjusts our understanding of art, increasing blue-chip inventory more than rewriting history.[448]

Siegel's final point is critical to this research. While Hauser & Wirth's are undoubtedly a powerful gallery – and they have certainly managed to help the Lozano estate to lift the artist out from her prior obscurity – as attested by Lozano's minimal appearance in the collections of major museums, her rediscovery has hardly troubled the canon as we understand it in any real way.

Conclusion

Feminist philosopher and theorist Elisabeth Grosz has written on the issue of time, exploring its relationship to evolutionary models and their temporal logics. In doing so she determined that over time

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[445] In Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and Exhibiting Women's and Feminist Art, a Roundtable Discussion', 255.
[446] Cited in Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and Exhibiting Women's and Feminist Art, a Roundtable Discussion', 255.
[447] Siegel, 330.
[448] Siegel.

all systems, including cultural ones, 'face events, transformations, challenges, upheavals, as does the natural world. Such systems are time-sensitive: they grow more rather than less complex over time; they develop unexpected properties or qualities not given in their past; and as time moves forward, their characteristics are capable of major upheaval and realignment.'[449] If we examine Lee Lozano's body of work and her extreme choices according to this idea, they have seemingly done just this. By dropping out and rejecting women she complicated any readings and presentations of her work, both in their immediate aftermath and in the future. Her decisions have only become even more complex as the art world currently seeks to recuperate marginalised figures, both as a corrective action to infrastructural sexism and one arguably linked to capital (the art market). As Catherine Wagley has argued, however, 'acknowledging the daring intensity of the life choices and persona of an artist such as Lozano makes her potential influence that much more powerful. That such choices and personas have been perceived and received differently in the past is one of the reasons for *re*-presenting these older female artists.'[450]

This chapter examined the exhibitions that have 're-presented' Lozano, as well as how the market has contended with her evolving complexities, paying close attention to if and how feminist discourse has played a role in her recovery. On the whole it revealed that Lozano's institutional exhibitions have done a good job of demonstrating Lozano's knottiness. Many of her posthumous exhibitions used her subversive early drawings and paintings to muddy any simple reading of her practice being aligned to Minimal or Conceptual art. Group exhibitions such as *Solitaire* and *SEEK THE EXTREMES* provided excellent examples of how to use feminist intervention to productively critique conventional histories of art, as well as the ways of presenting art and artists. It is apparent, however, that museums and institutions still fall short on reflecting upon their own infrastructural sexism. This undoubtedly played a role in Lozano's prior marginalisation by effectively blaming her for her own omission from art history. The example of exhibitions such as *I AM NOT A NICE GIRL* and *Joint Dialogue*, however, proved that it is possible to undercut these readings by exposing the systemic gendered hierarchies present in both art history and exhibition making.

[449] Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Duke University Press, 2004), 247-248.
[450] Catherine Wagley, 'The Conversation: The Young Female Artist as Historian', *X-Tra Online* 17, no. 3 (Spring 2015), https://www.x-traonline.org/article/the-conversation-the-young-female-artist-as-historian.

Lozano's recovery has for better or worse coincided with a growing market interest in the work of artist-women. Her representation by Hauser & Wirth has shown that the art market also has played a role in widening visibility and securing her work's longevity through making exhibitions, selling, archiving, and conserving the works. This chapter has observed, however, that their exhibitions fail to follow any feminist understanding of how to read and present her work. Their surface approach often results in uncomplicating Lozano, which as Wagley noted removes some of her potential influence. Moreover, with lines becoming increasingly blurred between the commercial and non-profit (institutional) sectors there needs to be more mindful attendance to sweeping authoritative claims that only serve to bolster an artist's capital rather than providing new perspectives. This follows what seems to be a desire to remember the Lozano of the past where she was a figure among major well known and canonical artists. A feminist method would be to read her work in both contexts of past and present.

In the post-script to her book on *Dropout Piece*, Lehrer-Graiwer wrote,

> withdrawal and self-redaction point to art world fickleness and the contingencies by which figures fall out of favor or through the cracks to be forgotten, or may be recognised again decades later and then vaulted to posthumous heights. If it led to anonymity and obscurity in the short term, the act of dropping out had long-term benefits, producing a peculiar longevity, integrity and intrigue gained by flying under the radar. *Dropout* anticipated and set the stage for [Lozano's] delayed posterity and so-called rediscovery by historians, curators, and the market. [451]

This proposition betrays that a certain level of prescience can be found in Lozano's extreme actions. Lehrer-Graiwer also argued that there is a 'strategic savvy' apparent in the artist's notebooks that prompt questions of how much an artist can control after they are gone. Lehrer-Graiwer provides a compelling argument and, to some extent, she is correct – there has been longevity attached to intrigue as Lozano's extremes continue to confound the art historians, writers, curators, and the audiences who engage with her work. And yet, no matter how much Lozano might have thought she could control the narrative even in the future, the conditions of her re(dis)covery are still contingent on a system which remains tethered to capital and patriarchy (sexism) – two things she seemed so intent on disrupting.

[451] Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Lee Lozano. Dropout Piece*, 59.

CHAPTER 4

BETYE SAAR: THE MARGIN AS A SPACE OF RADICAL POSSIBILITY

> The plot of her undoing begins with the man, the sovereign, the subject, the self-possessed, the able-bodied, the reasonable, the gendered, the neurotypical, it begins with the vertical hierarchy of life…[452]
> – Saidiya Hartman

In 2019, American artist Betye Saar (1926–) had concurrent stateside exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA, 21 October 2019–4 January 2020) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, 22 September 2019–5 April 2020). Saar's exhibition at MoMA was part of their grand reopening programme in October 2019 which sought to re-evaluate the museum's collections and programming and embrace greater diversity. Saar's MoMA show was well-received but, as is the pattern with other previously overlooked artist-women, many reviews highlighted the artist's late recognition: *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter previewed the show under the headline, ''It's About Time!' Betye Saar's Long Climb to the Summit.'[453] The phrase 'it's about time!' had come from the artist herself when asked how she felt about finally having an exhibition at MoMA; and Doreen St Félix in *The New Yorker* similarly asserted that Saar's exhibition came 'astonishingly late' in her career.[454] At LACMA the exhibition's introductory text stated that Saar 'is not as well-known as her talents deserve, however, no doubt largely because she is a black woman who came of age in the 1960s outside of New York City.'[455] This neglects to mention LACMA's own culpability by not giving her a platform sooner. As these texts intimate, however, Saar has been an active artist producing a vast and diverse body of work since the 1960s and yet she has been overlooked by 'big-ticket'[456] museums until recently.

Following these exhibitions, Saar was awarded the 2020 Wolfgang Hahn Prize by Museum Ludwig, Cologne. In the catalogue foreword Director Yilmaz Dziewior wrote, 'Saar's work stands for an American

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[452] Saidiya Hartman, 'Notes on Feminism: The Plot of Her Undoing,' Feminist Art Coalition, 26 September 2019, https://feministartcoalition.org/essays-list/saidiya-hartman.
[453] Holland Cotter, '"It's About Time!" Betye Saar's Long Climb to the Summit (Published 2019)', *The New York Times*, 13 September 2019, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/arts/design/betye-saar.html.
[454] Doreen St Félix, 'MOMA's Heady Introduction to Betye Saar, "The Conscience of the Art World"', The New Yorker, accessed 9 October 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/momas-heady-introduction-to-betye-saar-the-conscience-of-the-art-world.
[455] 'Betye Saar: Call and Response | LACMA', accessed 9 October 2020, https://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/betye-saar-call-and-response.
[456] A phrase used by Cotter to describe MoMA and LACMA in '"It's About Time!" Betye Saar's Long Climb to the Summit'.

avant-garde that until now has had little attention here in Europe and is almost unknown in Germany.'[457] The specific American avant-garde Dziewior refers to here is that of African American artists – a history that has historically been largely sidelined from art history both inside and outside of the United States. Dziewior also remarked that Saar's artworks dealt with issues such as inequality, spirituality, and history – subjects that had been part of African American communities for decades stating that, 'Saar's art has become an equal, innovative part of the canon of American art history since the field expanded its perspective to include art by African American and female artists over the past thirty-years…'[458]

Curator Charlotte Barat and art historian Darby English took a less optimistic assessment of a recent history of canon expansion – in their essay for *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (2019) they looked specifically at the 'Legacy of Deficit' in MoMA's history of engagement with African American artists determining that:

> It has been said that while major black artists have always existed, for a long time they were less visible to museums than they should have been. […] museums' side-lining of black artists and of complex portrayals of racial themes, the side-lining of race-effects in general histories of representation has a great many, traceable causes. One is a formalist bias, often unconscious, that turns a blind eye to the social effects and functions of art, which are of course entirely unavoidable whenever art engages race—a socially constructed and experienced phenomenon. Another is "issuism": one minute race is a hot issue, the next it is exchanged for another. Progress accordingly depends on what gets done while the subject has people's attention.[459]

That Saar's MoMA and LACMA exhibitions coincided with a growing interest in the history and practice of black artists and artists of colour who have been previously discounted would seem to indicate that the reason for Saar's most recent 'climb to the summit' falls under the auspices of the current 'hot issue' of race that Barat and English refer to. As a woman, however, it also means that Saar is part of the concurrent curatorial trend upon which this thesis is focused – the rediscovery of older and dead artist-women.

This chapter uses the premise of "issuism," attention, and progress put forward by Barat and English to interrogate what this recent wave of attention on Saar has meant for both the artist's practice and legacy but also the wider sector. Does the recuperation of Saar's practice into mainstream museums and their histories (namely their collections) attend to both the issues of sexism and racism that have been

[457] Yilmaz Dziewior, 'Without a Doubt', in *Betye Saar. Wolfgang-Hahn-Preis 2020* (Cologne: Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst am Museum Ludwig Köln e.V., Museum Ludwig and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2020), 9.
[458] Yilmaz Dziewior, 'Without a Doubt', 9.
[459] Darby English, Charlotte Barat, and Mabel O. Wilson, *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 16.

written about and discussed in wider feminist discourse and, more pointedly, in black feminist thought since the 1970s onwards? Furthermore, this chapter seeks to critically examine if the progress that has ostensibly been made during this most recent wave of focus on artist-women has managed to create long-term effects within the mainstream art world and their structures. What has been done while Saar held our attention?

Betye Saar's Prolific Career and Enduring Thematics

Saar is an artist who lives and works in her native Los Angeles. She is a figure who has been referred to by her peers as a 'conjure woman' of the arts,[460] a high priestess,[461] known for her artworks steeped in ritual and transformation, at once personal and political. She has provided a critical history of racial politics in America spanning from the 1960s to now through assemblages and sculptures that are typically modest in scale, yet elaborate constructions, which combine found objects, prints and photography. Saar was in her forties when she embarked on a career as an artist 'proper' transitioning from a career in arts and crafts (working with enamel and designing greetings cards) via graduate school where she discovered printmaking. Deciding to pursue an artistic career at this point her life is described by art historian Jane H. Carpenter as 'a result of dogged determination to carve out personal and social power by making art.'[462]

Saar's work belongs to the strong tradition of assemblage that emerged from Southern California in the 1960s with artists such as Edward Kienholz (1927-1994), Bruce Conner (1933-2008), Wallace Berman (1926–1976), and Noah Purifoy (1917-2004). Her works have consistently examined themes of race and gender, memory and nostalgia, and references to spirituality and the occult. While her works can be broadly categorised under these themes it is difficult to provide a linear chronological development to Saar's thematics as they cycle around one another, intersecting, and are consistently developing through her numerous series. Her themes cut across several works and time-periods and she has consistently returned to ideas several times over. This way of working has endured for the artist and she still continues to make work today that aesthetically and thematically circles back to some of her earliest pieces in the late 1960s

[460] Cited in Jane H. Carpenter, 'Conjure Woman: Betye Saar and Rituals of Transformation, 1960–1990' (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Michigan, MI, 2002), https://search.proquest.com/docview/276296540?pq-origsite=summon, 1.
[461] Houston Conwill, 'Interview with Betye Saar', *Black Art* 3, no. 1 (1978), 4.
[462] Jane H. Carpenter, 'Conjure Woman: Betye Saar and Rituals of Transformation, 1960–1990', PhD dissertation, (University of Michigan, MI, 2002), 1.

and early 1970s. Her long career is grounded in a number of formative encounters that made important and lasting impressions upon her including: her early studies and career in craft and design followed by her graduate studies in printmaking; the construction of the Watts Towers by Simon Rodia in South Central Los Angeles; the work of Joseph Cornell, first seen at an exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1967; a visit to the African art on display at the Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History in 1970; and the political backdrop of the growing second-wave feminist movement and the civil rights era.

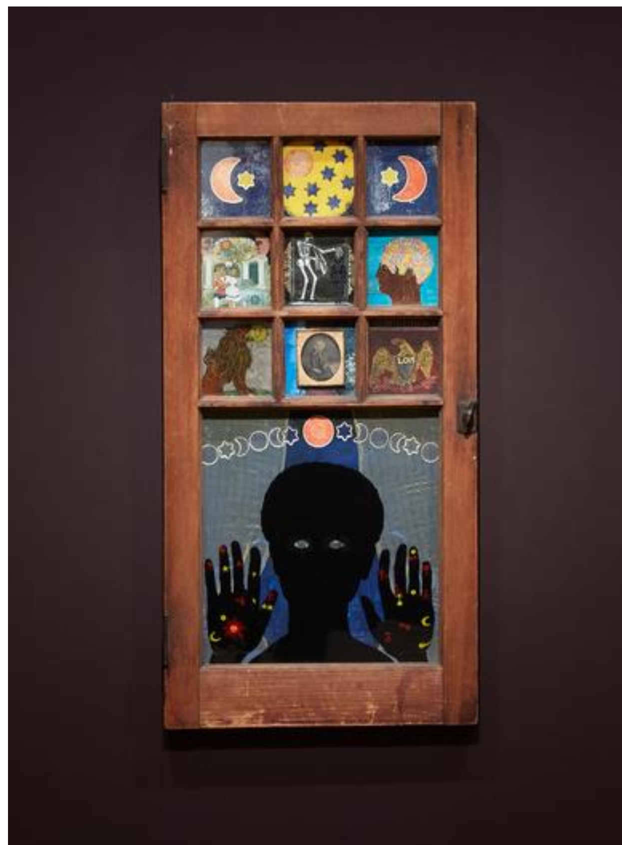

Fig. 21. Installation view: Betye Saar *Black Girl's Window* 1969 at MoMA, New York (2019-20).

Saar's first artworks were small etchings and prints. She began to expand into three-dimensional space through assemblage after her aforementioned introduction to the work of Cornell in 1967. She began to collect used objects and incorporated them with her prints. These early pieces were steeped in occult imagery adopting symbolism from astrology, phrenology, Tarot, palmistry, and other such systems for interpreting the unknown. In 1969 she made an important breakthrough producing *Black Girl's Window* (Fig. 21) – an assemblage that is now considered one of Saar's most renowned works. It also exemplifies many of the themes that would later come to characterise her practice. Here an old, discarded window

frame has been transformed into a space of autobiography, spiritual awakening, and political exploration. It is rich in meaning with a complex array of references to be decoded, many of which were used in the smaller pieces created by Saar in the proceeding years. In the window's lower half – which is the largest pane – there is a black figure who stares out at the viewer with piercing blue eyes and her palms face outwards. The palms of her hands – covered with mystical symbols painted in red and yellow – are pressed against the glass. Above the girl's head are moons and stars. Saar has claimed this as a self-portrait – '[the] two hands represent my own fate'[463] – she is the eponymous black girl. Art historian Richard J. Powell has written of the girl's blue eyes: 'in black folklore they often represent a spiritual, or supernatural vision that, in the face of oppression (and, in the case of *Black Girl's Window*, racial segregation and gendered constraints), are "fantastic, chromatically clashing irises that symbolically, see beyond societies indignities."'[464] Saar's representation of blue eyes also foreshadowed African American writer and academic Toni Morrison's 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye,* which tells the story of a young African American girl (Pecola) growing up in Ohio during the Great Depression. Pecola desires blue eyes as they are equated with "whiteness" and beauty – the opposite of her "ugly" dark (black) skin for which is she constantly picked on and ridiculed in school and in her neighbourhood.

The top of the window frame is broken into nine smaller panes where different prints are placed: a phrenologist's map; a lion holding a sun in its mouth; an eagle that bears a shield that says 'LOVE'; and various stars and moon symbols. The centre pane of the upper section portrays a white skeleton that is menacingly reaching towards a smaller black skeleton with painted red eyes. Curator Esther Adler relates this particular symbolic image to Saar's own familial history citing it as a reference to Saar's father who died when she was five years old: on becoming unwell, as a black man he had been unable to be admitted to the nearest hospital and had to travel further for treatment – this delay proved fatal. This ominous image, therefore, 'explicitly links racism and death, the earliest such reference in her work to racial violence.'[465]

Black Girl's Window was created in the shadow of the political unrest that spread across the United States between 1964 and 1972 as African Americans protested against racial injustice. In Saar's own backyard of Los Angeles the Watts Riots/Rebellion in August 1965 was one of the largest riots of the era.

[463] Cited in Richard J Powell, 'Betye Saar's Mojo Hands', in *Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2016), 241.
[464] Richard J Powell, 236.
[465] Adler: 40.

'Because of their size and scope,' explains art historian Kellie Jones, 'the Watts rebellion seemed cataclysmic; they took on symbolic, and almost mythic status. The rebellions announced in no uncertain terms African American anger and disgust at abuse, discrimination, and inequality that had lasted for centuries. They became a touchstone of change, the sign of shifting and radical approach to subjectivity and to art.'[466] In addition to the Watts riots Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in 1968 – an event that Saar cites as being the moment that her 'work started to become politicized.'[467] While *Black Girl's Window* might have been the first work to touch upon racial themes by Saar's own admission her first explicitly political work was *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972); an assemblage that would become her most iconic artwork.

Describing how *Aunt Jemima* came into being, Saar explains:

> …I decided to make a black heroine… I found a little Aunt Jemima mammy figure, a caricature of a black slave, like those later used to advertise pancakes. She had a broom in one hand, and on the other side, I gave her a rifle. In front of her, I placed a little postcard, of a mammy with a mulatto child, which is another way black women were exploited during slavery. I used the derogatory image to empower the black woman by making her revolutionary, like she was rebelling against her past enslavement.[468]

The work pointedly also contains the raised fist of the Black Power salute which is placed in the lower centre of the work in front of the postcard described above by Saar. *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (Fig. 22) was one of a series of works that Saar made using derogatory images at this time. Works such as *Sambo's Banjo* (1971-2), *Let Me Entertain You* (1972), or *I've Got Rhythm* (1972) also used so-called 'black memorabilia' (stereotypical depictions of African Americans, characterised as "Uncle Tom", "Darkie", "Little African" etc, enacting servitude) and subverted their overtly mocking and negative connotations. These works were made at the height of the Black Arts Movement[469] and have a clear connection to the political undercurrents of the time. 'Liberation' is the theme under which Jane H Carpenter assigned these works as Saar sought to radically transform their original meanings into something triumphantly redemptive.[470] While these works seem to be emblematic of a specific period of American history the artist would continue to make work about the continuing racial subjugation in America for her entire career.

[466] 'To/From Los Angeles with Betye Saar', in *Eye Minded*, by Kellie Jones (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 167.
[467] 'Influences: Betye Saar | Frieze', accessed 2 February 2021, https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar.
[468] 'Influences: Betye Saar | Frieze'.
[469] The Black Arts Movement (BAM) was an African-American arts led movement that promoted and presented black experience, which was active during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States.
[470] Cited in Elvira Dyangani Ose, 10.

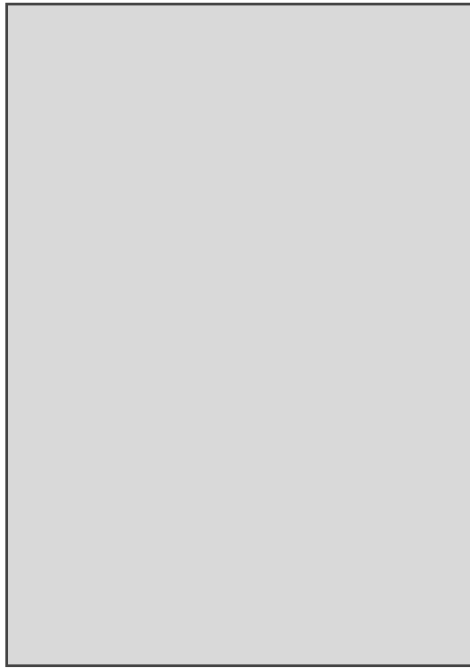

Fig. 22. Betye Saar, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

In the late 1990s Saar began a series of assemblages that brought back the Aunt Jemima figure. Her exhibition, *Workers and Warriors; The Return of Aunt Jemima*, at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York (1998) indicated that Aunt Jemima's work as a revolutionary figure remained unfinished. In this series, which included *A Call to Arms* (1997), *National Racism: We Was Mostly 'Bout Survival* (1997) and *Gonna Lay Down My Burden* (1998), amongst several others, Saar created a succession of assemblages using washboards that she would overlay with imagery and objects depicting black women in domestic service roles – thus connecting female and slave labour. In *I'll Bend but I Will Not Break* (1998) Saar placed an ironing board in front of a white sheet hanging on a washing line with the letters KKK (Ku Klux Klan[471]) embroidered upon it. The ironing board has the well-known diagram of the British slave ship *Brookes* impressed on its surface which showed an eighteenth-century slave ship tightly packed with Africans travelling across the Atlantic.[472] An extremely powerful image, coupled with the words 'I'll bend but I will not break', Saar speaks to a life of survival. Furthermore, she once more highlights the domestic service role of black women, laying bare the fact that they would often be required to iron the white sheets worn by members of the KKK.

[471] The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) is a well-known white supremacist terrorist group in the United States that primarily targets African Americans.

[472] Carol Eliel, curator LACMA, writes of this print: 'Saar's diagram is borrowed directly from a well-known 18th-century engraving that became a signature image for abolitionists and has been described as "perhaps the most politically influential picture ever made."' For further details see: https://unframed.lacma.org/2018/04/23/new-acquisition-betye-saars-ill-bend-i-will-not-break

Such potent and haunting works have been interspersed with assemblages and installations that evoke the spirituality and esoteric themes which led artist Houston Conwill to describe Saar as a high priestess.[473] Saar's fascination with occult symbolism and mystical cosmologies was briefly touched upon earlier in regard to her first etchings and window pieces of the 1960s. By the 1970s she was making altars and small boxes (a further recognition of Cornell's influence) that explored traditional African American belief systems that included Animism, as well as African American ritual and conjuring practices such as voodoo or hoodoo. In addition, as curator Elvira Dyangani Ose has pointed out, Saar also draws from several cultures and belief systems such as Judaism, Catholicism, Unitarian, and Syncretic faiths.[474] *Spirit Catcher* (1977) is emblematic of Saar's multi-positional spiritual works from this time and was made by Saar following her return from her first trip to Africa in 1977. This mixed-media assemblage combines bamboo, bones, feathers, teeth, a bird skull, shells, a mirror, and wicker and is evocative of a Tibetan spirit trap. Saar painted some of bamboo elements with coloured dots. The work also references African imagery and sculpture but its form most resembles Rodia's Watts Towers. Art historian Richard Cándida Smith has argued that the connection to Rodia 'underscored Saar's conviction that an artist combines images and ideas experienced throughout a lifetime to create something new and synthetic, in effect catching the spirits of those we have encountered and keeping them alive in new form.'[475] This echoes Saar's own description of her artistic process as the result of 'accumulative consciousness,' which she defines as being 'part of my accumulative memory from way back to the beginning of time. It includes all the things that have touched my existence even before my birth… It has to do with personal fragments of things from the lives that are connected to my life now.'[476] The combination of African spiritual traditions and the ritualistic process by which Saar used in making her work was also heavily influenced by Arnold Rubin's *Accumulation: Power and Display in African Art,* published in *Artforum* in 1975, Saar explains: 'I translated this information into contemporary art-making. I interpreted "power" as intuition, as mystery, as ancestral memory, as personal

[473] Houston Conwill, 'Interview with Betye Saar', *Black Art* 3, no. 1 (1978), 4.
[474] Elvira Dyangani Ose, 'Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer', in *Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer*, Exhibition Catalogue (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2016), 17.
[475] Richard Cándida Smith, 'Reverencing the Mortal: Assemblage Art as Prophetic Protest in Post-World War II California', in *Betye Saar: Extending the Frozen Moment*, Exhibition Catalogue (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Michigan Museum of Art and University of California Press, 2005), 41.
[476] Houston Conwill, 'Interview with Betye Saar', 14.

experiences, dreams, feelings, and energy. The "display" became decoration, colour, pattern, design – the attraction and the seduction.'[477]

Saar would create several pieces that explored metaphysical ideas including a series of altars that she would call *Mojos* or *Gris-Gris* – charms with talismanic powers. These works, however, were not purely explorations on spiritual and cultural belief systems but still carried similar political messages to earlier works, albeit through subtler means. Speaking specifically about *Spirit Catcher* curator Mark Godfrey speculates: 'was the glinting mirror embedded in its crown meant to deflect bad spirits of racist oppression, and its secret chamber created to harness powerful spirits that could be released to combat them?'[478] These small ritual-infused assemblages were emblematic of not only Saar's artistic outputs at this time but a range of Californian artists with whom she was associated including John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, and Judson Powell. Art historian Ellen Y. Tani argues that this group of artists were addressing the politics of the time explicitly 'through the everyday materials and found objects whose geographic origins spoke to the intersection of racism, visuality, and space. They explored a blackness that was not represented physically but metaphysically, conjured through symbolic or conceptual strategies. For them, assemblage was an articulation of Black power and more…'[479] This adoption of black folklore and beliefs by Saar and her peers is considered by scholar Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown to be about the construction of 'alternative epistemologies.' They were critical as a political action because they are 'forms of subjugated knowledge' that,

> challenge the very process by which certain other epistemologies, those of dominant groups, are constructed and legitimated. As an alternative, dynamic, and open-ended process for constructing knowledge and truth, the African American folk idiom, along with the literature and art expropriated from it, historically has offered ways to question the content of what was claimed to be truth and to challenge, at the same time, the process of arriving at truth.[480]

Saar's ritualistic and spiritual epistemology would influence a younger generation of artists including David Hammons, Houston Conwill, Meren Hassinger, and Senga Nengudi, amongst others. They were not only inspired by her use of material and how her found objects would embody a sense of deep time and collective memory but, as Kellie Jones highlights, they saw Saar's investigations 'as a way to

[477] Betye Saar, 'Influences: Betye Saar', *Frieze*, accessed 2 February 2021, https://www.frieze.com/article/influences-betye-saar.
[478] Mark Godfrey, 'Notes on Black Abstraction', in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Exhibition Catalogue (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 184.
[479] Ellen Y. Tani, 'Keeping Time in the Hands of Betye Saar: Betye Saar', *American Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (2016.): 1090.
[480] Cited in Elvira Dyangani Ose, 'Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer',18.

understand the spiritually encoded practice, ancestry, and memory in art… Perhaps the most important aspect of Saar's approach to metaphysical traditions was the idea recognised by Hammons, that, "Ritual" was an "action word."'[481]

Notions of ancestral history, memory and nostalgia would be more explicitly explored by Saar in a series of works in the mid-1970s that directly related to familial themes: *Record for Hattie* (1974), *Letter from Home… Homesick, and Keep for Old Memories* (1976), and *Veil of Tears* (1975). In a series of assemblages that celebrated her female relatives she used objects that had belonged to her beloved Aunt Hattie rather than the objects of strangers collected in flea markets that she typically recycled. Incorporating Hattie's gloves, handkerchiefs, and letters into assemblages Saar explored not only her own family history but a wider history of African Americans and stories of migration. Kellie Jones emphasises that these box works 'open onto stories of aunts, grandmothers whose journeys in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries cast them as unacknowledged heroines in the making of the United States.'[482] Later, Saar would place vintage photographs of African Americans in her assemblages – both from her personal collection and found images. Through these photographs Saar could 'portray a nuanced reflection of black Americans.'[483] More specifically, she would once again reveal the histories of black women. In doing so she created a collective history or perhaps, more specifically, a collective autobiography (to borrow a term from the French author Annie Ernaux) which reflects the poignancy of the lost histories and genealogies due to the technologies of slavery. Saar's explorations here can be placed in the context of recent writing and scholarship by black writers and academics such as Saidiya Hartman and Christina Sharpe, who are exploring the use of memory in the production of knowledge, which as academic Patricia J. Saunders argues, is explicitly more difficult when the task is to produce 'knowledge about black people who have been disappeared, nowhere to be identified or localized, except (of course) in the archives of history.'[484]

While the works cited in this overview have mainly been from the first decades of Saar's artistic career, they set forth a trajectory that would witness the artist continue to use these themes and techniques

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481 'To/From Los Angeles with Betye Saar', 173-4.
482 Kellie Jones, 'Rock Goddess: In Celebration of Betye Saar's 90th Trip Around the Sun', in *Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2016), 264.
483 Deborah Willis, '"Every Picture Tells a Story": Out of the Album, into the Art', in *Betye Saar: An Uneasy Dancer* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2016), 251.
484 Patricia J. Saunders, 'Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman', *Anthurium A Caribbean Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (1 January 2008): 7.

for her entire practice. They demonstrate her resolute commitment to art as a conduit for social change as well as an artist who holds up a mirror on the United States, forcing it to look at its racial history and the embedded trauma it carries.

A Quiet Presence

Saar's exhibition history is as prolific as her artistic output; her CV is thirty-seven pages long traversing 1960 to the present day. In her early career Saar had solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1975) (Fig. 23), San Francisco Museum of Art (1977), the Studio Museum in Harlem (1980), and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1984). In 2005, aged 79, she had her first major retrospective at University of Michigan Museum of Art which produced one of the first extensive scholarly catalogues on her work. A second American retrospective – *Still Tickin'* – travelled to the Scottdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Ann Arbor in 2016 from the Museum De Domijnen / Het Domein, Sittard, the Netherlands (2015). That was Saar's first ever European solo exhibition which was quickly followed by *Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer* in 2016 at Fondazione Prada, Milan. A small show of Saar's washboard assemblages opened at the Craft & Folk Art Museum Los Angeles in mid-2017 and toured to New-York Historical Society Museum and Library in late 2018.

The gap between Saar's early solo shows from the 1970s-80s and the retrospectives in the 2000s may appear wide, however, those intervening years were filled with numerous exhibitions in smaller regional or university galleries across America such as Savannah College of Art and Design, the University of New Mexico, and the California African American Museum, Los Angeles. In the late 1980s she also had number of small international exhibitions in the Philippines, New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia, and Taiwan. In terms of mainstream group presentations Saar was included in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007), though that exhibition has been criticised for its many blind-spots which included its largely white artist-women demographic.[485]

[485] See Wendy Vogel, "'WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution'", E-Flux – Criticism, 8 February 2021, https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/375476/wack-art-and-the-feminist-revolution.

Fig. 23. Image of the cover for the exhibition pamphlet for *Betye Saar* at The Whitney Museum of American Art (1975).

Prior to Saar's Prada Foundation and De Domijnen Museum exhibitions, and the aforementioned Wolfgang Hahn Prize, Saar had very little exposure in Europe. In 1995 she was included in Maud Sulter's curated group exhibition *Photogenetic: Reviewing the Lens of History* that began at Street Level Photoworks, Glasgow and toured venues across the UK,[486] which as mentioned in Chapter 1 was a deliberate strategy of Sulter's to create discourse around the work of the African diaspora. In addition to her exhibitions, Saar's work belongs to a large number of museum collections across the United States – the majority of which are smaller museums or university collections. Until very recently she no work in any major museum outside of the U.S. All of this activity suggests a long career yet one that seems to have happened quietly and consistently in the margins.

With regard to art historical survey publications Saar is included in *The Power of Feminist Art* (1994), which highlights her as a significant feminist artist working in Southern California. In Whitney Chadwick's *Women, Art and Society* (1990) she is featured in relation to her connection to the dissent against racism and sexism in the art world more generally in the 1960s and 70s. Saar was also included in *Art Since 1900* (2004) in the section '1993c.', that uses the 1993 Whitney Biennial – which 'focused on identity amid the emergence

[486] Cited in Deborah Cherry, 'With Her Fingers on the Political Pulse: The Transnational Curating of Maud Sulter', in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 221.

of politicized art by African American artists'[487] – as its catalyst to discuss identity politics. Saar, who was not included in that Biennial, is mentioned here alongside David Hammons and Faith Ringgold as artists who in the early 1970s resisted and redrew racial stereotypes. She is, however, only cited once and with a lack of any critical depth in the entire publication. While Saar's inclusion in *The Power of Feminist Art* was more nuanced, it is interesting to note that in both other publications she is referenced in relation to *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* which is used to demonstrate her explorations of 'white culture's stereotypical images of blacks.'[488] This only covers one facet of her practice which (as outlined earlier) was much more intricate and complex. As expansive publications covering a lot of ground this is understandable given they only have limited to space to discuss artists at length but it does point to an issue that can affect certain artists where they become known for one work – in Saar's case *Aunt Jemima* – which becomes to imprecisely represent their entire output. As Ellen Tani has stated, 'Saar's work has not necessarily been neglected by art history, though one can argue that she has been pigeonholed in her association with the civil rights movement.'[489]

The length and detail of Saar's CV could misrepresent how well-known an artist she actually is. While her exhibitions in the 1970s could arguably be considered as markers of early career mainstream success as noted above she has had very few exhibitions in Europe and her others since then (both in the U.S and internationally) have tended to be small-scale and outside of what the mainstream understand as the artistic centres (New York, London, Berlin, Paris). As a white European curator who studied modern and contemporary art history, and who has worked at Tate Modern, I have a solid base knowledge of mainstream twentieth century American art history but have to admit that I had never heard of Saar until her Prada Foundation exhibition in 2016. This speaks to my own ignorance but also the wider issue of what we are taught at universities and what histories are being recounted by our institutions. As Phillys J. Jackson has reasoned:

> …the normalization of whiteness and Europeanness ends up working like a subliminal message, encoded below conscious awareness. These patterns are largely maintained by the public or private institutions that support the arts. For example, mainstream art networks and institutions traditionally privilege the art and aesthetics of European and

[487] Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2016), 741-743.
[488] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1990), 342.
[489] Tani, 'Keeping Time in the Hands of Betye Saar', 1101.

> Euro-American males, positioning their work as the objective and disinterested norm, the standard of quality, and the guideline for content by which others are measured.[490]

Saar's 2019 parallel stateside exhibitions at MoMA and LACMA appeared to be important steps in correcting Saar's lack of wider recognition as they gained her broader international attention. The visibility that is able to be garnered through a MoMA exhibition is demonstrated by the very fact that a mere few months before it opened Saar had had an exhibition in New York, albeit at a smaller and more specialised space (the Historical Society Museum and Library), which did not attract nearly as much press attention. Just preceding these crucial mainstream solo shows two important survey exhibitions took place – *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* at Tate Modern (12 July–22 October 2017) and *We wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965–1985* at the Brooklyn Museum (21 April–17 September 2017). In addition, in 2018 the Getty Research Institute launched 'The African American Art History Initiative' in order to establish a major centre for the study of African American art history. It began with the acquisition of *The Betye Saar Papers* (Saar's archive).[491] Since these events more exhibitions of Saar's work have occurred – *Serious Moonlight* opened at ICA Miami in late 2021 (delayed by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic), touring to 49 Nord 6 Est – Frac Lorraine, France (2022) and Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland (2023).

Triple Negation

In examining why Saar's MoMA exhibition came so late in her career critic Holland Cotter identified that the reasons were 'the obvious factors' of race (she is black) and gender (she is a woman), and that she remained based outside of New York – the oft-named centre of the art world.[492] These reasons were repeated to me by LACMA curator Carol Eliel.[493] Race and gender, and where they intersect have, therefore, not only been at the forefront of Saar's artistic practice since the 1960s but they have also affected her reception and wider visibility. As outlined in the overall introduction to this thesis this is the result of the prevalent systemic racism and sexism in the mainstream art world. Art historian Huey Copeland has written, 'blindness in the face of racially and sexually marked subjects is arguably endemic to Western culture.'[494] As

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[490] Phyllis J. Jackson, 'Liberating Blackness and Interrogating Whiteness', in *Art/Women/California 1950–2000: Parallels and Intersections* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 71.
[491] See 'Getty Launches African American Art History Initiative', accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.getty.edu/news/getty-launches-african-american-art-history-initiative-acquire-archive-artist-betye-saar/.
[492] Cotter, '"It's About Time!" Betye Saar's Long Climb to the Summit' (2019).
[493] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[494] Huey Copeland, 'In the Wake of the Negress', in *MODERN WOMEN: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Department of Publications, MoMA, 2010), 481.

such the marginalisation of black artist-women and artist-women of colour, including Saar, has been persistently discussed and debated. There are arguably some exceptions to this – artists such as Kara Walker and Lorna Simpson have received a lot of mainstream recognition but are notably both based in New York. Copeland (2010), artist Lorraine O'Grady (1994) and others, however, have argued that regardless of these 'contemporary' artists' success their inclusion in museums such as MoMA remains problematic because of how museums have historically dealt with the black woman, both in terms of the representation of the female figure in art works on display and the lack of representation of black artist-women among its collections.[495]

In 1975 (which is markedly during the time of the civil rights movement and second-wave feminism) Cindy Nemser interviewed Saar for the *Feminist Art Journal*. In the final printed version Nemser and Saar conclude their conversation on the topic of whether black artists had made 'gains' in the mainstream art world:

> **Nemser:** There was a great furore about black arts a few years ago with lots of black shows. It was a fashionable issue and now the interest seems to have died down. Do you think real gains have been made or was it just tokenism?
> **Saar:** Well I think a lot of institutions are turning their backs on blacks. They feel they are not going to blow up the museum so they can relax. The old bigotry is still there and nothing is really solved. I don't know where the outcome will be except that the good artist will try to keep it together and keep putting up a fight, but you can only do a little bit at a time. It's a process of re-education. The women have to do the same thing.
> **Nemser:** I think if there is to be a change in the entire social and cultural structure blacks and women must work together. Change must come about through the leadership of the minority groups and those who have been disenfranchised. We have nothing to lose and much that is new and vital to add. After all, if you haven't had much in the first place you don't have to worry about holding up the *status quo*. That's our strength as artists. We are not afraid to make an art that makes a strong social statement. So, in the end things are opening up for both blacks and women.
> **Saar:** Yes I think so. As we get more exposure and recognition our work gets stronger and better.[496]

While this conversation speaks of the widespread discrimination in the American art world at that time Saar and Nemser ultimately remain optimistic. The article was published, for example, shortly after Saar's first museum solo exhibition the Whitney Museum, curated by Marcia Tucker, which could be read as a marker of so-called 'mainstream' success in Saar's early career.

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[495] See, for example, Huey Copeland, 'In the Wake of the Negress' and Lorraine O'Grady, 'Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity (1992/1994)', in *Writing in Space, 1973-2019* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).
[496] Nemser, Cindy, 'Conversation with Betye Saar', *The Feminist Art Journal* 4, no. 4 (Winter -1976 1975): 19–24.

In 1990, Tucker (who was by then director of the New Museum, New York) gave a lecture entitled *"Who's on First?" How Race and Gender Affect American Museums* in which she focussed on the lack of equality across art institutions in terms of race and gender. Tucker implored it to be the last decade of the twentieth century where the need for radical revision within institutions – namely 'ethnocentric ideas of art, culture, history, politics, and social relations' – would be necessary and she called out the homogenous nature of museum collections and exhibition programmes.[497] She demonstrated that while some women have entered the museum or public consciousness it is rare that women artists of colour make the top ten or twenty lists in arts magazines. Among the names she cites as missing is Betye Saar who at that point was entering her fourth decade as a professional artist.

Tucker's lecture was given only a few years after the curator and artist Howardena Pindell had compiled and published *Art World Racism: A Documentation* (1987) which exposed hard statistics demonstrating the exclusion of African Americans from mainstream arts organisations. Pindell's document was intended to expose the blatant racism amongst the mainstream art world but also to encourage artists of colour not to give up, ending her introduction with: 'The visual arts are not a "white neighborhood!"'[498] Similarly, artist Adrian Piper wrote an essay titled *The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists* (1990) which set forth her reading of the mainstream art world – what she terms as Euroethnic – as racist and exclusionary. Incidentally one of the examples given as "documentation" by Pindell was an incident including Piper demonstrating that she too was a victim of the very exclusion she writes about. Piper's essay – as its title suggests – was not only about racism but about the intersection of three forms of discrimination: race, gender, and profession. She set out her intentions to provide:

> a systematic analysis of the Euroethnic art world's negation of CWAs [colored woman artists] along three dimensions: as colored, as women, and as artists. I want to offer a systematic analysis that can explain why, for example, no one feels the need to defend or even justify *Betye Saar's* exclusion from the "Magiciens de la Terre" exhibit; why the exhibition "Autobiography: In Her Own Image" went virtually unremarked by the Euroethnic press; why the repression and artistic censorship of PWAs [People with AIDS] is seen as so much more urgent and threatening than that of CWAs' and why, in general, I am not yet convinced that the repression and artistic censorship of CWAs is a thing of the past.[499]

[497] Marcia Tucker, '"Who's on First?": How Race and Gender Affect American Art Museums' (1990), in Tucker and Phillips, *Out of Bounds,* 195-199.
[498] Howardena Pindell, 'Art (World) & Racism', *Third Text* 2, no. 3–4 (1 March 1988): 162.
[499] Adrian Piper, 'The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists', in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 166, *emphasis my own.*

In September 2018, Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin produced a special issue of the online magazine *In Other Words*, titled 'The Long Road for African American Artists,' where they surveyed thirty museums across the United States regarding their engagement with African American artists. Burns and Halperin used Saar as a case study, alongside Norman Lewis and Kerry James Marshall, to examine 'three artists from different generations' in their research. Written prior to Saar's MoMA and LACMA exhibitions Burns and Halperin explained that 'most major museums, and the art market at large, have been slow to acknowledge Saar's enormous influence.'[500] They lament that institutions in LA and New York failed to pick up her Prada exhibition and lay out some 'depressing' auction sales figures, noting that her prices are extremely low for an artist of her prolific output. They name those same three familiar reasons: she is a woman; she is black; and she is in Los Angeles. But they also explain that further complicating those reasons is the fact that 'Saar's work is consistently representational, an approach that has gone in and out of style; modest in scale, which makes it less likely to attract big prices than big paintings might; and often includes appalling icons of America's racist history, which she collects from flea markets.'[501] I would argue, however, that these additional reasons stem directly from racial and gender discrimination. They speak to notions of value and 'quality.'

The notion of value is, of course, a well-used art historical term. The chapter on 'Value' in *Critical Terms in Art History* describes it as such: 'Value would seem to be the most critical of terms. It is that which criticism, as an act of judgement or evaluation, decides about its object: whether, or to what degree, the object is true or right or beautiful.'[502] However, in this context when used against African American artists, and an artist-woman, it becomes highly contested, problematic, and ultimately an exclusionary term. In their texts Pindell and Piper each criticised the use of quality as a value judgement. Pindell wrote that mainstream institutions often claim their exclusion of artists of colour is not a 'reflection of racism.' However, as she strongly points out, 'the lie or denial is cloaked in phrases such as "artistic choice" or "artistic quality" when the pattern reveals the intent.'[503] Piper cites several reviews of African American artists' exhibition where the critics use the excuse of 'quality' as the reason the work is not good and states:

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[500] Charlotte Burns; Julie Halperin, 'Special Issue: The Long Road for African American Artists', *In Other Words*, September 2018, https://www.artagencypartners.com/in-other-words-issue/20-september-2018/.
[501] Charlotte Burns and Julie Halperin.
[502] Joseph L. Koerner and Lisbet Rausing, 'Value', in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 419.
[503] Pindell, 'Art (World) & Racism', 158.

'Euroethnic preoccupation with these issues in the art world forces a level of social and political self-criticism and scrutiny of entrenched conventions of aesthetic evaluation that is altogether salutary and needed. But the object of preoccupation defined by these issues is not the artifact but rather its producer as "other."'[504] This point is particularly interesting in relation to Burns and Halperin who you could argue in discussing Saar's work as being 'in and out of style' does precisely what Piper speaks of. Furthermore, as Marica Tucker has argued:

> The point is that what we think is "quality," that disputatious word, is conditioned by who we are—our backgrounds, our educations, our interests, our positions—in the society we live in. And the so-called consensus of educated opinion that forms such a canon, that dictates who's in and out, who's "good" and who's not, has a great deal at stake in protecting its own kind.[505]

Burns and Halperin's report also included some damning statistics that demonstrated that while in 2017 the number of exhibitions (solo and thematic) dedicated to African American artists had increased by 66%, from 2008 to 2018 American museums had only dedicated 7.6% of all their exhibitions and 2.4% of acquisitions to work by African American artists. When Burns and Halperin updated these figures in 2022 they were even worse with American black-artists representing 2.2% and American black artist-women representing only 0.5% of museum acquisitions. These figures established that very little has changed since Pindell's study in 1987, Piper's essay in the 1990s, or even, Nemser and Saar's conversation in the mid-1970s. It demonstrates the familiar cyclical pattern of progress, loss and return that is has been prevalent in feminist art history where the focus on artist-women, or more specifically in this case black artist-women, seems to fall in and out of favour over time. Of this tendency Charlotte Barat and Darby English have written that 'both historically and today, in neither art nor political culture can black subjects assume fair representation. We have had to pursue it, insist on it, insert it, stand witness to its withholding or diminishment or withdrawal—then *again* pursue it, insist on it, insert it.'[506] It is a statement that mimics Saar's own words in 1975 to Nemser about putting up a fight and keeping going. As witnessed by Saar's exhibition history and her dedication to making art (which continues to the present day even though she is currently in her mid-90s), this insistence of working, of being present runs throughout her career despite the resistance she, and her peers, have continually faced.

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[504] Adrian Piper, 'The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists', 164.
[505] Tucker, '"Who's on First?": How Race and Gender Affect American Art Museums', 196.
[506] Darby English, Charlotte Barat, and Mabel O. Wilson, *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 17.

The activities that Saar has been a part of since 2010, however, do suggest an upward trajectory of mainstream visibility and acknowledgement that is not only the conclusion of Saar's hard work but a wider sector engagement with correcting their prior racial and gendered exclusions. It is also a response to an expansion of sensibilities; in recent years the art world has been more open to exploring different types of work, especially from the 1960s and 1970s. This has included work with other material languages beyond the ones typically associated with Conceptual, Minimal and Pop art, as well as an increased interest in practices that are dealing with spiritual subject matter (discussed in more depth in Chapter 2 in relation to Hilma af Klint). In terms of the younger generation of artists I named earlier, Kara Walker and Lorna Simpson, who emerged in the 1990s curator Mark Godfrey explained that 'because their work was quite rigorous in its conceptual language' people found it easier to place and understand their work within the art historical narratives the mainstream were used to upholding. Nowadays, he continued, 'people are much more open to thinking about different types of art being equally worthy of one's attention… in terms of contemporary artists, more artists are putting up front their interest in spirituality and religion… and Saar is a brilliant precursor to this.'[507] To what extent this new engagement has been committed to embedding feminist discourse in its work will be examined in the following sections. They will critically examine the exhibitions – group and solo – from 2011 onwards that have showcased Saar's work, ascertaining what these corrective exhibitions have achieved for the artist, and the wider sector – what, if anything, is being done to cement change and actualise real progress?

Throughout this analysis it is important to note that Saar is a living artist and as such she has agreed to and been involved in each of these exhibitions, including discussions around the choice of artworks, thematics, exhibition architecture, interpretation, and the catalogue. This differentiates her from my other case studies (Hilma af Klint and Lee Lozano) who are represented by their estates. While those estates undoubtedly have a will to represent the artist's best intentions they can certainly not claim to know what they would or would not have done in these contemporary circumstances.

[507] In conversation with the author, March 2021

Counter-Canons

As cited in the thesis introduction, in 2016 feminist art historian Ruth Iskin wrote on re-envisioning the canon in art history – a topic that has been a vital discussion in feminist art history for decades. Iskin states that despite the mainstream Euro-American white male dominated canon staying largely intact, change has been visible through the emergence of counter-canons. Iskin argued that 'establishing, researching, publishing and exhibiting art that lies outside *the* authoritative canon and in this way establishing multiple counter-canons is vital for the empowerment of traditionally excluded groups.'[508] An example of this curatorial and scholarly tendency can arguably be witnessed in a select number of key survey exhibitions in mainstream museums since 2011 that have foregrounded the work of African American artists.

In 2011 *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980*[509] took place at several venues across Los Angeles. It was, according to Burns and Halperin's above-mentioned article, a crucial initiative in bringing Saar (and other African American artists) wider attention. Saar's work was included in eight simultaneous exhibitions as part of this project. Arguably the most important was *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980* at the Hammer Museum (2 October 2011–8 January 2012), curated by Kellie Jones. This exhibition surveyed the legacy of African American artists in LA and Saar was included in the section 'Forerunners' – cementing her significance and influence. Since that ground-breaking exhibition, Saar has been included in two key survey exhibitions: Tate Modern's *Soul of a Nation* (abbreviated throughout to *SaoN*) which celebrated the work of black American artists across the United States from 1963 to 1983; and *We Wanted a Revolution* at the Brooklyn Museum that focused on the dual-oppression faced by black artist-women, bringing to light the radical approaches used by black feminists and black artist-women during the period 1965-1985. All these exhibitions examined the importance of black artists on the history of American art, each taking place inside major international art museums with global reach and subsequently touring to multiple venues.[510] Their intention was to bring the previously overlooked canon of African American art history after 1960 front and centre, integrating it into the mainstream.

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[508] Iskin, 13.

[509] *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A. 1945–1980* was a Getty Foundation initiative, which was held across sixty cultural organisations in California with the intention of demonstrating greater awareness of Los Angeles as a cultural centre.

[510] *Now Dig This!* toured to MoMA P.S.1, New York (21 October 2012 – 11 March 2013); and The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA), Williamstown (20 July – 1 December 2013). *Soul of a Nation* toured to: Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas (3 February – 23 April 2018); Brooklyn Museum, New York (7 September – 3 February 2019); The Broad, Los Angeles (23 March - 1 September 2019); De Young Museum, San Francisco (9 November 2019 – 15 March 2020); and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (26 April – 30 August 2020). *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-1985* toured to:

The time period that these exhibitions cover is widely considered a crucial time in the history of the American avant-garde but one that has consistently been told from the perspective of white artists (and predominantly white artist-men). Mark Godfrey (co-curator of *SoaN*) explained to me why it was important to do *SoaN* at Tate: 'there is no country and period that is better represented in the Tate Modern program than America in the 1960s and 1970s…'[511] And yet that representation has been predominantly white and there had never been an exhibition that focused on black artists from this period. In her book Iskin claims that counter-canons are 'an effective strategic tool: they undermine the exclusivity of the traditional canon by acting as "supplements" to it. Their aim, of course, despite their specialized focus, is not to promote segregation but on the contrary to provide an alternative, even if ad-hoc, to blatant exclusions and to build knowledge base that will enable teachers, curators and future authors of survey books to broaden their interests and practices.'[512] I would argue that the exhibitions cited above have been effective in their use of such a strategy to bring these overlooked histories to light. For the purpose of this thesis, however, and as Griselda Pollock contended in response to her own prior omissions in terms of race, 'no feminist interrogation of canonicity can claim historical pertinence unless it confronts 'gender *and* the colour of art history."[513] What follows will be an examination of these exhibitions and their attendance to both of these key issues in their work, using Saar's positioning within these exhibition acts as its main focus.

In 1991 feminist art historian Mira Schor wrote on the problem of patrilineage, arguing that 'the degree to which, despite the historical, critical, and creative practice of women artists, art historians, and cultural critics, current canon formation is still based on male forebears… Works by women whose paternity can be established and whose work can safely be assimilated into art discourse are privileged, and every effort is made to assure this patrilineage.'[514] *Now Dig This!* and *SoaN* seem to successfully oppose this tendency in their curatorial impetus as in both exhibitions Saar is established as an influential and authoritative figure in the histories they articulate. In *Now Dig This!* she is awarded the accolade of being a 'frontrunner' – which, according to Jones, is a group of black artists that included Saar, Charles White, Melvin Edwards William Pajaud, and Samella Lewis, all working in Los Angeles in the early 1960s who not

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California African American Museum, Los Angeles (October 13, 2017 - January 14, 2018); and ICA Boston (27 June – 30 September 2018).

[511] In conversation with the author, March 2021

[512] Iskin, 'Re-Envisioning the Canon: Are Pluriversal Canons Possible?': 13.

[513] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999), 172.

[514] Mira Schor, 'Patrilineage', *Art Journal* 50, no. 2 (1991): 58.

only helped 'thrust Los Angeles into the forefront of the national arts scene,' but they also 'constituted a central group whose artworks and activism led to changes in the reception of black artists and influenced a subsequent generation.'[515] Furthermore in Jones' introductory essay she uses Saar's 1960 print *To Catch a Unicorn* as emblematic of not only the artist's professional emergence but as an 'allegory and assertion of a changing cultural landscape.'[516] Saar also appeared in the subsequent section of the exhibition 'Assembling,' that explored assemblage as an artistic technique associated with the West Coast, and specifically how several black artists were experimenting with it in their work; in *SoaN* they also foregrounded 'Los Angeles Assemblage' as one of the important artistic communities in the history they told, and Saar was again shown in this context. Further to this, Saar had a solo presentation which re-created an aspect of her 1973 exhibition at California State University, with some additional works from the late 1970s.[517] (Fig. 24) She was the only artist to have their own room dedicated to their work, which signalled her significance.

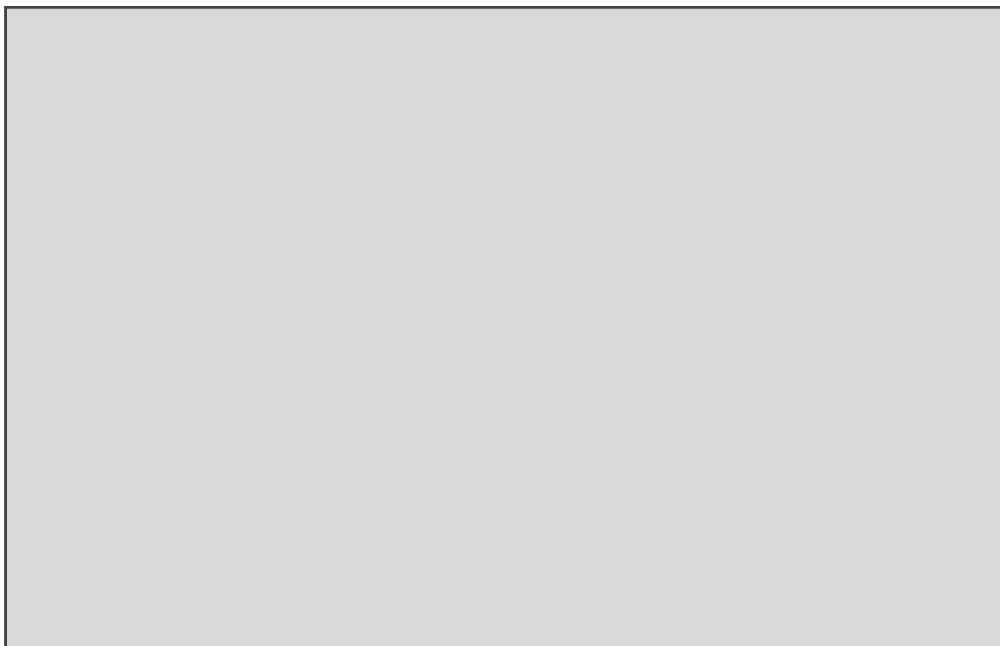

Fig. 24. Installation view: Saar's solo room in *Soul of a Nation* at Tate Modern (2017). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

Saar's solo room within *SoaN* provided a counterpoint to the more well-known Los Angeles assemblage narrative by demonstrating Saar's artistic depth and her range of spiritual interests. It included examples of her *Mojo* and *Gris-gris* works, including the shrine-like *Mti* (1973) and the emblematic *Spirit*

[515] 'Frontrunners | Hammer Museum', accessed 9 May 2023, https://hammer.ucla.edu/now-dig-this/art/themes/frontrunners.
[516] Kellie Jones, 'Now Dig This! An Introduction', 2011, https://hammer.ucla.edu/now-dig-this/essays/now-dig-this.
[517] As with many touring exhibitions the presentation of works can vary at each venue. Saar's solo room was only presented at Tate Modern and at the Broad in LA.

Catcher (1977), the importance of which is discussed earlier in this chapter. In 2002 Jane Carpenter strongly advocated for Saar's work as multi-positional, stating that previous scholarship had failed to 'fully account for the complex matrix of social, cultural, regional and historical contexts from which she and her art emerged.'[518] This presentation, and Saar's inclusion in multiple spaces in both exhibitions, supports Carpenter's multi-positional reading, avoiding the universalizing tendency noted earlier in certain art historical texts to pigeonhole Saar's work to a presentation of a critique of racial stereotyping through *Aunt Jemima*. In addition, the catalogue texts that accompany the exhibitions, and an earlier essay by Jones' on Saar[519], all work productively at showcasing the importance of Saar's work to her own community and subsequent generations. Zoé Whitley (co-curator of *SoaN*) explained to me that through Saar's solo presentation 'from a purely art historical point of view, [they were able] to create a different context in which to understand what was truly vanguard in Saar's practice.'[520]

The explicit feminist nature of this curatorial gesture in *SoaN* was further expanded upon by Whitley in our conversation, who clearly felt that Saar has deserved a better platform than she had received to date. Whitley spoke to me of how the 'many different levels on which Saar's work proceeds' had consistently been neglected – ranging from: the relegation of her work to a craft or folk-practice because of her use of macramé, for example, which missed the manner in which Saar was able to be receptive to and then distil a whole range of ideas, cultures and artistic techniques in her modestly-scaled works; to the importance of her curating exhibitions that thought about race, politics and motherhood and thus providing agency to others. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis artworks associated with craft practices have been historically feminized and therefore derided. The most powerful of Whitley's comments, however, was her discussion around explicit gender bias. She used the example of Saar and David Hammons who each began using hair in their work following the same revelation on a field trip together to the Field Museum, Chicago in 1970, stating 'the difference in language that's used between how the descriptions of how that material is being deployed and how often gender can reduce the experimental possibility in one case and amplify the other', or in art historical terms 'where the feminism and folk art chapter would end, and the experimental and avant-garde would start.'[521] Saar used hair in her mojo sculptures, while Hammons used

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[518] Carpenter, 'Conjure Woman', 2.
[519] See Jones 'To/From Los Angeles with Betye Saar'.
[520] In conversation with the author, March 2021
[521] In conversation with the author, March 2021

it in installations and sculptures like *Hair and Wire, Venice Beach* (1977) where he placed thin pieces of wire with hair attached into the sand on Venice Beach. Carpenter had a similar issue with the readings of Saar's ritual inflected works, arguing that prior to her research there had been too much emphasis on Saar's spiritual and ritualistic practices which had 'dehistoricized' the artist, which one can understand as it being relegated under the category of 'folk-art.'[522] Hammons was included in *SoaN* as a critical artist in this history, but by providing a larger visible platform for Saar a markedly feminist curatorial revision of any prior gendered hierarchy is suspended.

Despite the foregrounding of Saar's importance in these exhibitions, overall they each included a majority of artist-men: *Now Dig This!* only had 30% artist-women' and in *SoaN* only 25% were artist-women, revealing that overall there still remains work to be done on the 'gender issue' within these counter-canonical shows. *We Wanted a Revolution* (abbreviated to *WWaR* throughout) provided a timely corrective to that by showcasing only black artist-women, with the explicit intention of telling the complex and problematic history of second-wave mainstream feminism's racial exclusions. It included the work of over forty artist-women and as the catalogue introduction stated, it was an exhibition 'born of necessity and an imperative: to illuminate black women's contributions to American art and feminism in the latter half of the twentieth century.'[523] While the exhibition's focus was on the many achievements of black women, its centring on the same time period as *SoaN* meant that the exhibition's included many of the same historical groups, albeit told from a black feminist perspective. Like *SoaN*, *WWaR* was organised primarily around artistic communities – it was not strictly chronological and they both included a solo room on the work of Lynda Goode Bryant's Just Above Midtown Gallery (JAM) in New York. JAM's mission was to provide a much-needed platform for black artists equal to the venues available to white artists and was hugely influential and integral to the history of black artists. It has since become the subject of its own retrospective at MoMA.[524] In *SoaN* the room dedicated to JAM directly followed Saar's, which was designed to demonstrate the way in which Saar had influenced many of the artists (including Hammons and Senga Nengudi) who had moved from Los Angeles to New York and showed with JAM.

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[522] Carpenter, 'Conjure Woman', 1.
[523] Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockey, 'Introduction', in *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85. New Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 18.
[524] *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* 9 October 2022 – 18 February 2023 at MoMA. For further details see: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5078

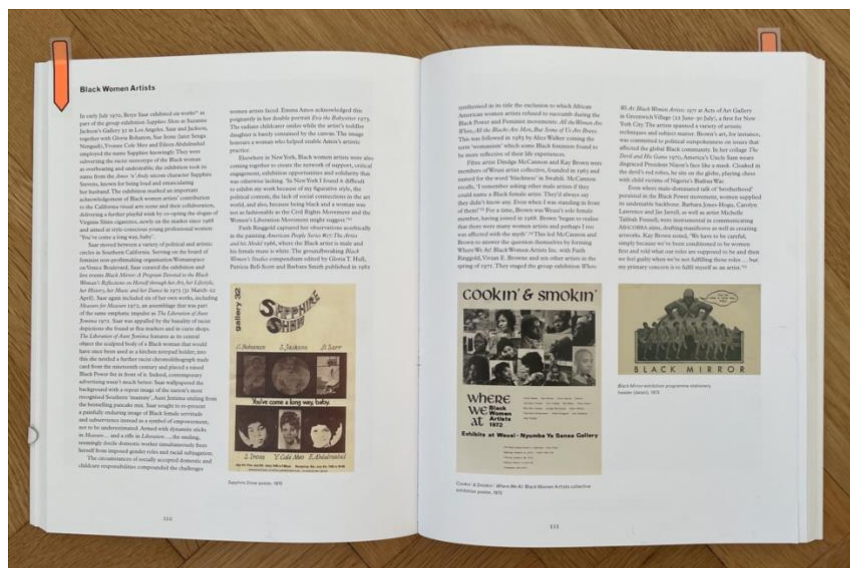
In *WWaR* Saar was presented as an important artistic voice of black feminism (Fig. 25). Morris explained that the community from California 'showed up in multiple places, rather than as a discrete movement because it held such distinctive operators – Betye Saar (and her daughter Alison Saar) being one.'[525] Saar's work was in the section titled 'Black Feminism' which highlighted how black artist-women developed their own ways to fight gender and racial inequality. They showed a number of her small assemblages but also included her film-work *Colored Spade* (1971) that had only ever been shown publicly once before this exhibition. Saar's relationship to black feminism was (as Whitley intimated earlier) not limited to her artwork. She had been a member of Womanspace in LA and curated the exhibition *Black Mirror: A Program Devoted to the Black Woman's Reflections on Herself through her Art, her Lifestyle, her History, her Music, and her Dance* (1973), which included Saar, Gloria Bohanan, Marie Johnson, Suzanne Jackson, and Samella Lewis. Saar would eventually leave Womanspace due to the racism she had felt – her show was barely attended by any white women of which she remarked, 'it was like we [black women] were invisible again. The white women did not support it. I felt the separatism…'[526]

Fig. 25. Installation view: Saar (centre three works) in *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85* at The Brooklyn Museum (2017). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

As previously mentioned, the cross overs between *SoaN* and *WWaR* were numerous. On face value it could be argued that *SoaN* avoided the ghettoization of placing artist-women in a separate category, which

[525] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[526] Cited in Jessica Dallow, 'Reclaiming Histories: Betye and Alison Saar, Feminism, and the Representation of Black Womanhood', *Feminist Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 83.

would potentially lessen those artist-women's overall influence on American art history (albeit one that was already being told from the specifics of African American art). However, it became clear during my research that this was not by design. Mark Godfrey explained that *SoaN* originally intended to include a section on black artist-women but when they found themselves in conflict with *WWaR* over loan requests for work by the same black artist-women they decided to dedicate a solo room to Betye Saar.[527] In *SoaN*'s catalogue they included writings on more communities and groups than were in the exhibition itself into order to flesh out this rich history. Here they included their 'Black Women Artists' section (Fig. 26), which covered some of the material that is in *WWaR*, yet in *SoaN* it becomes a silo without the necessary space needed to tell the complexity of that history, as well as its lasting impact on subsequent generations of black artists of all genders. This, along with the unequal inclusion of artist-women in the exhibition, unfortunately diminishes some of *SoaN*'s many other achievements for artist-women and Saar in particular. As it appears to enact the very thing that a lot of these black artist-women were actively working against – namely perpetuating their negation by race *and* gender. As bell hooks has written, 'since all forms of oppression are linked in our society because they are supported by similar institutions and social structures, one system cannot be eradicated while the other remains intact.'[528] When I spoke to Catherine Morris about this issue within *SoaN* she similarly responded with: 'the presence of feminism in the context of the project of *Soul of a Nation* should be everywhere.'[529]



[527] In conversation with the author, March 2021
[528] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 3rd ed. (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2015): 37.
[529] In conversation with the author, April 2021

Fig. 26. Image of the section 'Black Women Artists' in the exhibition catalogue for *Soul of a Nation*.

That *WWaR* was organised within the spaces of the Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum means that one can assume that the exhibition was curated using feminist practices at its core. This assumption is upheld through the curator's (Morris and her co-curator Rujeko Hockley) catalogue texts, and my conversation with Morris, which come from knowing feminist perspectives and they utilise many of the feminist curatorial methods outlined in Chapter 1. The show was a corrective attempt to tell a history that had 'neither been effectively told or adequately documented,' and as such it wished to add 'a vital narrative to the history of the twentieth century, offering chapters that parallel, intersect and enrich the more mainstream histories that many of us were taught.'[530] This project is very much in line with using counter-canons as the strategic tool that Iskin highlighted. This exhibition's organising principle follows the example of Catherine de Zegher's trans-historical cyclical curating – not sticking rigidly to chronology but allowing relationships and critical political and artistic moments to intersect, meaning that artists appeared in multiple rooms. Arguably *SoaN* also employed this curatorial method. One of the key statements that the curators of *WWaR* made was in honouring the artist's desire to not have them, or anyone else, speak for them. As such the exhibition 'privileged the voices of their subjects over any preconceived curatorial theme.'[531] The curator's essay in *New Perspectives* (the second volume of the exhibition's catalogue) provided a space for Morris and Hockley to reflect on the exhibition – in which they state its achievements, but also its oversights, apologising for not including other artists in the show which evidences the acknowledgement of their failings. This admission of failure follows the key feminist curatorial strategy of self-reflection that was discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to Lucy Lippard and Marcia Tucker that came out of Feminist Standpoint theory. It also relates directly to the definition of feminism given by Helen Molesworth in the introduction to this thesis: 'that feminism privileges self-criticality (as opposed to self-expression, per se) in political aesthetic, and intellectual practice.'[532]

The curators of *WWaR* stated that they do not think their exhibition is the definitive history but a project that provides a jumping off point for further scholarship and museum programming, which was something that *SoaN* also advocated. Whitley and Godfrey in their introductory essay acknowledged the

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[530] Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockey, 'Introduction', 18.
[531] Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockey, 19.
[532] Helen Molesworth, 'Painting with Ambivalence', in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, Mass: Museum of Contemporary Art; MIT Press, 2007), footnote 1, 429.

curatorial forebearers of their show, including *Now Dig This!* but also exhibitions by leading black curators in the field – Mary Schmidt Campbell, Lowery Stoke Sims, Naomi Beckwith and others. But like *WWaR* they write, 'in time span and geography, *Soul of a Nation* takes a wider view than some of these exhibitions, but we hope it contributes to the impetus for yet more focused exhibitions in the future – for example on Kamoinge, or Just Above Midtown.'[533] As mentioned above an exhibition dedicated to JAM opened at MoMA in October 2022 realising Godfrey and Whitley's hopes. Similarly, Whitley explained that Faith Ringgold's solo exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries, London in 2019, which was Ringgold's first European solo exhibition, was a result of the curator seeing her work in *SoaN*.[534] Morris told me that *WWaR* enabled the development of solo exhibitions of Lorraine O'Grady and Elizabeth Catlett at the Brooklyn Museum. Furthermore, these projects impacted museum's collections. In conversation with Morris and Esther Adler (curator of Saar's solo exhibition at MoMA) I discovered the number of acquisitions that were made by American museums following exhibitions such as *Now Dig This!, SoaN* and *WWaR*. Saar's *Black Girl's Window*, for example, was acquired following its presentation in *Now Dig This!* when curators saw the work in the MoMA P.S.1 presentation, as well as acquiring works by Charles White and Melvin Edwards. Another example is MoMA's acquisition of Meren Hassinger's *Leaning* (1980) – a work that had not been shown since it was first made – following its display in *WWaR*. Morris observed that one of the important impacts their exhibition had 'was the number of works that were purchased out of it by other institutions… There were a number of objects that when people first agreed to loan them were still in the artist's collection. Over the course of the exhibition tour they were owned by other people.'[535] Tate also made a number of acquisitions after *SoaN*, including Saar's *Mti* (1973). Further exhibitions and acquisitions were not the only positive outcomes for the artists, Whitley pointed out that a number of works they showed or borrowed had been in museum storage for decades. She cited that Frank Bowling's *Middle Passage* (1970) from the Menil Collection, Houston had never been shown publicly by them before and following *SoaN* it is now on regular display.[536] These legacies are clearly crucial to supporting the significant effect that these exhibitions have had on mainstream institutions, upholding Iskin's view on the strategic value that

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[533] Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, 'Introduction', in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (London: Tate Publishing, 2017), 18.
[534] In conversation with the author, March 2021
[535] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[536] In conversation with the author, March 2021

championing counter-canons can provide. As Zoë Lescaze has written, 'we are, of course, a long way from that Elysian level playing field where an artist's identity does not affect access and opportunity. Expanding the canon is a powerful means of getting us closer.'[537]

Curatorial Fabulation

In 2018 Saar was included in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* at the National Gallery of Washington (28 January–13 May 2018)[538]. This exhibition recounted a previously overlooked history of the American avant-garde's engagement with art by 'outliers' – a term adopted by the curator Lynne Cooke instead of the more well-known terms 'outsider' or self-taught artists – through several key moments in the history of American modernism. Cooke positioned the show within the recent wave of revisionism taking place across the mainstream artworld writing, 'revisionist histories of the kind undertaken here serve multiple purposes: in recuperating neglected and forgotten artists and artworks, they shine a light on repressed discourses and institutional practices relevant to the work of contemporary curators and critics.'[539] A statement that could easily apply to each exhibition discussed in the previous paragraphs.

Cooke's revisionism, however, is of a different typology claiming:

> Today, reparative strategies are in ascendant in the museum, as in the academy. Their aim is to repair by correcting and making amends for past injustices and inequalities. *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* favors a different interpretative methodology on the grounds that reparative practices rarely contest the foundational structural hierarchies on which relations between the margins and mainstream are built. It deploys curatorial fabulations as a means to effect reconciliation.[540]

Outliers… was an examination of difference. In critiquing strategies that Cooke names "selective enfranchising" or tokenism of the mainstream's reparative attempts to insert one or two outliers into their existing historical narratives in either exhibition or collection displays, she explores well-mined territory in feminist art historical and curatorial discourse on the insertion of women in a similar way. Furthermore, like Catherine de Zegher, she understands the importance of recognising the context of an artwork's mainstream reception not just its moment of creation. Cooke's curatorial and critical fabulations, meaning

[537] Lescaze, 'The Door Policy'.
[538] This exhibition toured to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 24 June –30 September 2018 and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 18 November 2018–18 March 2019.
[539] Lynne Cooke, 'Boundary Trouble: Navigating Margin and Mainstream', in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (Washington and Chicago: National Gallery of Art and The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 24.
[540] Lynne Cooke, 24.

the 'construct[ion] of narratives that resituate artworks on the basis of alignments—material, process-based, thematic, and so on,' help to disrupt exclusion, stereotyping and marginalisation. While they could be considered 'short-lived, contingent on the character of the exhibition-as-medium, curatorial fabulations eschew classificatory norms and contest fixed subject positions, recognising more nuanced constructions of identity.'[541] The importance of this exhibition to this research, however, is for how it incorporates the dichotomy of the insider/outsider from various positions to engage with the issue of difference. While her point of departure is difference between the outlier and the vanguard her thesis, as critic Wendy Vogel summarises, encompassed 'the historical bias concerning racial and sexual difference, neurodivergence and disability, and geographic isolation, among other conditions that have prevented certain artists from gaining access to the mainstream.'[542]

In *Outliers…* Saar falls under the category of 'vanguard' – being an educated, professional artist. Her work is shown alongside her fellow Californian assemblage artists such as John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, and Senga Nengudi, as well as the white Northern Californian assemblage artists such as Bruce Conner and Roy De Forest. Situated in the section *Commensurables and Incommensurables* that examined the period 1968–1992 it considered, among other things, *Black Folk Art in America, 1930–1980* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington (1982), which showcased untaught African American artists such as Sister Gertrude Morgan, James "Son Ford" Thomas, and Sam Doyle. It focused on the debate over the categorisation of "folk art" that ensued in its wake; the curators of *Black Folk Art* had used the term to mean 'self-taught artists who were deeply rooted in localized, particularized cultures,'[543] but it was deeply criticised as either being incorrectly applied to the type of work on display (by anthropology and folkloric scholars), or that 'the white art world was asserting a kind of hegemony, distributing the works in the exhibition into a subordinate category of art that contained its power.'[544] The latter debate infiltrated the reception of the practices of the African American vanguard artists who (as outlined earlier) following the Watts rebellion of 1965 had adopted the traditions of black folklore and beliefs into their assemblage sculptures as a means of addressing racial subjugation. As noted above by Whitley (2021) and Carpenter

[541] Lynne Cooke, 21.
[542] Wendy Vogel, 'Outliers and American Vanguard Art', *Art in America* 106, no. 6 (6 July 2018): 111.
[543] Lynne Cooke et al., 'Black Folk Art Redux: A Curatorial Roundtable' in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, (Washington and Chicago: National Gallery of Art and The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 66.
[544] Lynne Cooke et al, 67.

(2002), Saar's work has often been termed as 'folk art' as a means to undermine its authority and push her practice to that of an outsider. Furthermore, as was shown in earlier sections of *Outliers…* and evidenced in other writings about MoMA's history, MoMA was historically more inclined to show work of outsider and self-taught African American artists than it was to show the work of professional African American artists.[545] What *Outliers…* achieved was to both navigate and expose the fine line between who has been considered an insider and outsider, or mainstream and marginal, in different contexts and periods of time throughout American art history, and the ways in which race has been a central part of this ongoing issue. As Julia Bryan-Wilson highlighted, in her *Artforum* review of the exhibition, the inclusion of several vanguard and outlier African American artists in the exhibition 'emphasizes the centrality of black aesthetics to American art across the inside/outside debate.'[546] As a result, I would argue that Cooke's exhibition is an important example of how (recalling her words cited earlier) 'to contest the foundational structural hierarchies on which relations between the margins and mainstream are built.'[547]

On the notion of marginality bell hooks wrote,

> We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.[548]

Cooke's exhibition allowed for us to witness Saar's work from both positions, and thus observes hooks' feminist position.

Museums as Contested Sites

In her essay commissioned for Saar's 2016 Prada exhibition, art historian Kellie Jones asked whether that would be 'the real start of lasting recognition' for Saar, while simultaneously using this platform to prove the artists unwavering presence and importance to the history of American art.[549] On writing about the notion of the 'other' in modernism art historian Darby English stated in response to the incremental expansion of 'taste' that has occurred in his lifetime:

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[545] See both Barat and English, *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* and Cooke, *Boundary Trouble: Navigating Margin and Mainstream*.
[546] Julia Bryan-Wilson, '"Outliers and American Vanguard Art": NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, DC', *Artforum* (New York, United States: Artforum Inc., 1 May 2018), 226.
[547] Lynne Cooke, 'Boundary Trouble: Navigating Margin and Mainstream', 21.
[548] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*.
[549] Kellie Jones, 'Rock Goddess: In Celebration of Betye Saar's 90th Trip Around the Sun', 254-55.

> let's be real: inclusion effects are always inspiring at their advent. Seldom, though, have they proven powerful enough to significantly diminish the effective realities of marginalization and exclusion. We are talking about difference, not just about what happens when difference occurs within a system trying to perpetuate itself in a society with an increasingly dim view of its own heterodox character. This is a phenomenon whose presence addles the human capacity to embrace what is actually different. A definitive ambivalence for the age of inclusion: desire for difference is not equivalent to desire to become different. To embrace enthusiastically what one considers "weird-good" is not necessarily to revise in the slightest what one means by "good-good." It is a question not of standards but of *attachment* to standards, of reluctance to undertake the colossal work needed to reorganise the mass mind.[550]

English was writing here about the outliers explored in Lynne Cooke's exhibition but his words also speak to the issues of difference (race and gender) that have caused the belated recognition of Saar's extensive artistic output by the mainstream. While the proceeding sections focused on Saar's inclusion in group exhibitions as a means to interrogate the use of the counter-canon, this section is dedicated to solo exhibitions and their effectiveness in securing Saar's significance within the broader art historical field. Huey Copeland has argued that he conceives of 'the museum and other cultural spaces, broadly construed, as contested sites in black women's struggles to represent themselves and to articulate critical practices that describe themselves and to articulate critical practices that describe modernity's terrain with an alternative set of aesthetic imperatives and political cartographies.'[551] The following paragraphs therefore seek to examine these exhibitions' contributions in providing space for Saar's representation along these lines, and in turn interrogate whether or not the institutions have begun the work to reorganise their minds in order to diminish themselves as contested sites.

The four exhibitions in focus are: *Still Tickin'* at Museum De Domiknen and the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (2015 and 2016), a retrospective overview of Saar's work and the largest of all exhibitions discussed here. It was organised thematically across three sections mining all Saar's key subject matters – mysticism and ritual, nostalgia, and memory and the political and racial – and displayed over 130 works from her entire oeuvre; *Uneasy Dancer* at the Prada Foundation[552] (2016) similarly showed work spanning from the 1960s to 2016 but was a smaller retrospective presentation including around 80 works.

[550] Darby English, 'Modernism's War on Terror', in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (Washington and Chicago: National Gallery of Art and The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 37.
[551] Huey Copeland, 'In the Wake of the Negress', 481.
[552] It is important to note that the Prada Foundation is a private foundation inaugurated in 1993, which now has three permanent venues across Milan and Venice that showcase their collection and host temporary artistic projects and exhibitions. It is a privately funded organisation that is not beholden to a board of trustees and therefore arguably has a different accountability structure to the other museums and cultural venues in discussion here. It is, however, an established and well-respected organisation among the art world and as such attracts mainstream press attention.

It also presented the work across three sections covering similar thematics to *Still Tickin'*; *The Legend of 'Black Girl's Window'* at MoMA (2019) was a focused, scholarly collection exhibition which centred on the significance of *Black Girl's Window* (1969) to Saar's life's work alongside a selection of Saar's early prints (newly acquired by the museum) and other window pieces on loan to the museum; and *Call and Response* at LACMA (2019) was also a smaller more concentrated thematic exhibition that only displayed 18 artworks, which were complemented by Saar's previously unseen sketchbooks and travel sketchbooks. It is worth noting that Saar was closely involved in the organisation of most of these exhibitions, however, for *Call and Response* Eliel said that Saar was consulted but her main concern was overseeing the installation of a new work.[553]

Artistic Power: The Undoing of the Plot

In several writings on Saar and her related exhibitions curators and art historians have remarked at how her work resists analysis and linear arrangement due to her cyclical approach to ideas and themes. In an in-depth review of *Still Tickin'* (2016) (Fig. 27) Ellen Y. Tani observed how Saar's work almost 'resists historicization because its span of production has transcended the troubled disciplinary divide between American art and contemporary art. Its subject matter seems both dated—we want to associate those racist kitsch objects with the past—and disturbingly timeless, in its reminder that racism continues to be a structuring force in social relations.'[554] Furthermore, Tani cites Peter Clothier, who wrote on Saar on the occasion of her Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles exhibition (1984), 'it can be difficult to date a work of Saar's by reference to its form, materials, or theme. The oeuvre exists itself like a huge assemblage, all of those parts are independent, intrareferential, and, in a strange way, timeless. There are no periods to mark progress along a line.'[555] Relatedly, Esther Adler (co-curator of Saar's MoMA exhibition) spoke to me about Saar's cyclic practice, of how her work does not fit the typical chronological trajectory of an artist's career – early to mid to late – that museums like to both historicise and understand artist's practices. 'We are obsessed with dates: when did she make this? is this the earliest? And so forth. Saar will cut something up that she made in 1968 and put it in a work she is making now. And it is because it doesn't matter, her

[553] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[554] Tani, 'Keeping Time in the Hands of Betye Saar', 1101.
[555] Cited in Tani, 1085.

whole career is a work, a piece.'[556] Such readings offer reasons why presenting a large-scale retrospective of Saar's work is curatorially difficult in the traditional sense of demonstrating chronological development which is why perhaps all of the exhibitions in discussion, with the exception of MoMA's, presented Saar's work thematically, showing work that was made decades apart next to each other in one larger assemblage of ideas and subjects.

Fig. 27. Installation view: *Betye Saar: Still Tickin'* at Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, (2016). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

In 2021, academic Jade French analysed *Still Tickin'*. She followed the above readings of Saar's work arguing that typically 'the art retrospective similarly maps the work of an artist into early, middle, and late periods and assigns a journey of quality and creativity based on chronological age. This is how we might ascertain during which period an artist has 'peaked'.'[557] French suggests that because Saar is categorized as an artist who has found success in old age – she compares her to Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) whose career similarly began later in age and who was making work until her death aged 99 and as such her older artist-woman status has become almost mythic – that 'to view an older artist's work only as an exception

[556] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[557] Jade Elizabeth French, 'Still Tickin': Betye Saar, Ageing and Assemblage', *Women: A Cultural Review* 32, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 80.

negates a holistic approach to their *oeuvre.*'[558] She quotes Griselda Pollock writing, 'Saar might claim to be part of the 'unexplained phenomenon of allowing a woman to be seen as a significant artist only in old age."[559] French's comparison asserts that these two artist's practices prove that ageing does not necessarily mean inevitable decline, rather that they 'radically defied the notion that creation wanes as one gets older.'[560] These arguments are valid and follow much feminist discourse about the ways women's work have been read and often devalued, even in its late discovery.[561] French's overall article thesis, however, is based on how Saar has continually created temporal and spatial collapse through her use of assemblage, her unwavering commitment to continue creating even as she ages, but also her application of assemblage in exhibition making through the example of *Still Tickin'.* By being organised thematically French claims that the exhibition rejected 'the impulse to narrativize the life and work into early, middle, and late periods by rejecting 'the end' in favour of a continuing story.'[562] As cited above, the thematic display was not only used in *Still Tickin'* but also in *Uneasy Dancer* and *Call and Response.* As discussed in several places in this thesis the non-linear presentation is favoured by feminist curators such as Catherine de Zegher and Helen Molesworth. A quick reading of these exhibitions along those lines would imply that this method was intentional and feminist in its action. However, as Carol Eliel pointed out it does not make sense to install Saar's work chronologically precisely because of its cyclical nature. Saar, it seems, has designed it this way. *Uneasy Dancer*, curated by Elvira Dyangani Ose, for example, even used a statement by Saar – 'my work moves in a creative spiral with the concepts of passage, crossroads, death and rebirth, along with the underlying elements of race and gender'[563] – as inspiration for how the exhibition was arranged (Fig. 28). In a video introducing the exhibition on Fondazione Prada's website, Dyangani Ose explained that the spiral was their organising principle and the architecture of the gallery also followed this logic by using curved walls in certain areas.

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[558] French, 80.
[559] French, 80.
[560] French, 70.
[561] For example, see: Griselda Pollock *Killing Men & Dying Women: Imagining Difference in 1950s New York Painting*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2022; Patricia Allmer, 'Feminist Interventions: Revising the Canon', in David Hopkins (ed.), *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); and Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*: *towards an ethics of curating*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018).
[562] French, 80-81.
[563] Cited on 'Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer – Fondazione Prada', accessed 18 May 2023, https://www.fondazioneprada.org/project/betye-saar-uneasy-dancer/?lang=en.

In *Still Tickin'* there was little interpretative material. Tani stated that Sara Cochran (the curator) had explained that this was Saar's choice as she had wished the visitor to experience the works on their own terms, rather than through didactic explanations. The experiential is something that has been part of Saar's art practice for several decades and is particularly related to her installations. For her 1980 exhibition at the Studio Museum, Harlem, *Rituals*, Saar outlined how all her art making was a form of ritual and this process took place over a set of acts: the imprint of ideas or memories; the search; the collecting and accumulating of objects and material; the recycling or transformation; the imparting of energy; and finally the release. The release being that it was shared (i.e. exhibited) and therefore experienced. By limiting interpretative material in the space, including labels, and using coloured walls to create a uniform sense of space each individual section of both *Still Tickin'* and *Uneasy Dancer* almost became installations in their own right, while belonging to a larger whole. Furthermore, while Saar's works can be broken down and categorised under certain themes arguably there are traces of each of them in all her works. By employing temporal and spatial collapse these exhibitions only highlight that Saar has continually engaged in a practice, as Dyangani Ose writes, 'which in addition to opposing male chauvinist and Euro-centric thinking, supports a humanistic perspective that reconsiders notions of the individual, family, community and society.'[564] Furthermore, in bringing together work spanning several decades one begins to witness how Saar has developed 'a powerful social critique that challenges racial and sexist stereotypes deeply rooted in American culture.'[565] The cyclical nature of her work and how it has been installed makes these issues – despite being prevalent in her work from the 1960s onwards – both contemporary and very urgent.

Saar's collapsing of time through her use of assemblage to interrupt the chronological tendencies within mainstream museums follows Gilane Tawadros's exploration on the aesthetics of resistance in the work of other artists of colour such as Lubaina Himid, Sutupa Biswas and Sonia Boyce.[566] Curator Nick Aikens summarises: 'Tawadros connects Himid's use of 'gathering and reusing' to what she sees as a historiographic approach that interrupts Modernist notions of linear history… Tawadros argues that by appropriating and bringing together different elements to create something new, a relationship is forged

[564] 'Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer – Fondazione Prada'.
[565] 'Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer – Fondazione Prada'.
[566] See Gilane Tawadros, 'Beyond the Boundary: The Work of Three Women Artists in Britain', *Third Text* 3, no. 8–9 (1989): 121–50.

both with the past and the future.'[567] As stated above, Saar's approach in these exhibitions places the idea of her as a contemporary artist at the forefront, as well as the issues she explores in her work. This recalls art historian Catherine Grant's proposition on anachronizing feminism: 'to anachronize is to bring out what is needed from the past while altering the historical material in its re-presentation.'[568] Grant called for 'an art history that takes place within a constellation of artworks, artists, and archives; an art history that pays close attention to feelings, places, and moments in time both in the gallery and in everyday life—in short, an art history that pays attention to the question "what is contemporary?" from a feminist perspective.'[569]

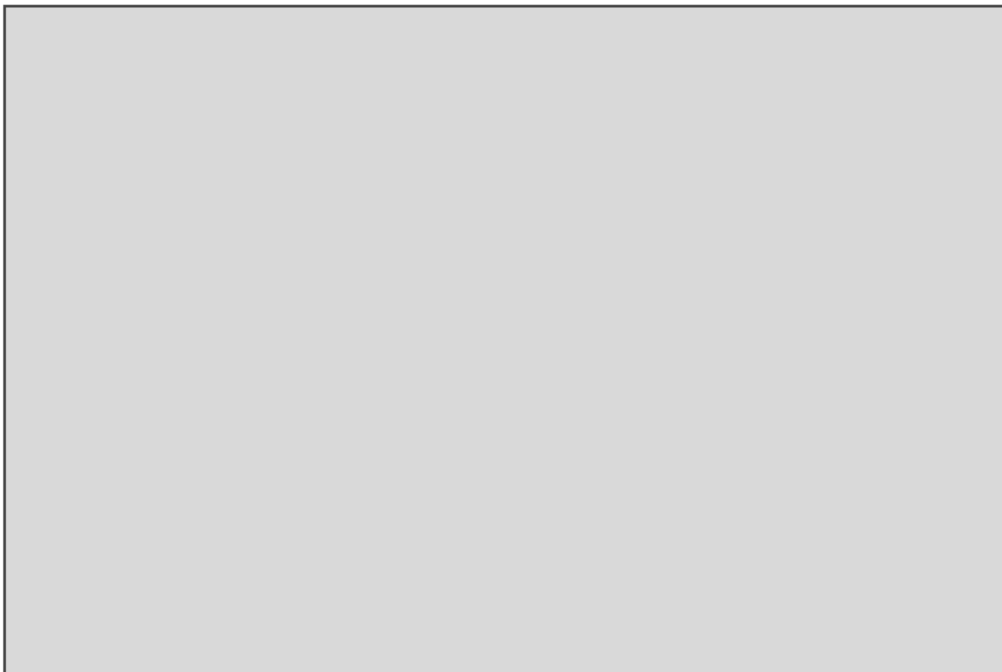

Fig. 28. Installation view: *Betye Saar: Uneasy Dancer* at The Prada Foundation (2016). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

I propose that it is difficult to analyse the institutional curatorial methodologies employed in each of these exhibitions – in terms of their installation and the interpretative material used in the space – and how they may or may not attend to feminist discourse precisely because of the input the artist has had in them and how her practice has unfolded over several decades. On writing about the work of Lubaina Himid, Griselda Pollock proposed that, '*differencing* is produced as a disturbance to the dominant tendencies of available semiotic systems... How does this work make difference signify differently? Perhaps by taking

[567] Nick Aikens, 'A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1980s', in *The Place Is Here: The Work of Black Artist in 1980s Britain* (Berlin and Eindhoven: Sternberg Press and Van Abbemuseum, 2019), 27.
[568] Catherine Grant, *A Time of One's Own: Histories of Feminism in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 16.
[569] Catherine Grant, 16.

revenge on the cultural canon in which the colonial relations have been aesthetically inscribed.'[570] I contend that Saar's work performs a similar tendency; it speaks directly to the issues of feminism and racism that she has witnessed as a black woman throughout her long life and which were also embedded in the histories of her ancestors. As feminist and black studies scholar Katherine McKittrick has written, 'black women's histories, lives, and spaces must be understood as enmeshing with traditional geographic arrangements in order to identify a different way of knowing and writing the social world and to expand how the production of space is achieved across terrains of domination.'[571] The space Saar has occupied while creating is one where she has actively had to counter these oppressive conditions to find her own voice. This impulse to push against the mainstream is embedded within her consciousness as a matter of survival. In this sense Saar is consistently trying to 'undo the plot' against black women – to borrow the term and its meaning from Saidiya Hartman's essay 'The Plot of her Undoing'[572] – in both her individual works and how they come to work together in larger exhibitions.

Institutional Power or The Plot of Her Undoing

The previous section did not include an examination of MoMA's exhibition, nor how Saar has been presented in the collection displays of museums such as Tate or MoMA which warrants further scrutiny. As Lynne Cooke has remarked, 'shows come and go… it's in the museum collection hang that we see their impact, as curators narrate their institution's version of art history.'[573] *Betye Saar: Legends of Black Girl's Window* at MoMA (as noted earlier) (Fig. 29) was a collection-based exhibition that focused on a series of prints by Saar and a number of window pieces from the 1960s and 70s, including *Black Girl's Window* (1969). The prints (all dated between 1960 and 1968) had recently been acquired by the museum following Roberts Projects, LA (Saar's gallery) estate planning, where they were strategizing where certain aspects of Saar's extensive artistic output should be placed in order to ensure her legacy. This planning also included the acquisition of Saar's archive by the Getty.[574] Saar's exhibition at MoMA was part of their major 2019 collection rehang that sought to radically change how they displayed artworks – removing medium-specific

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[570] Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 171.
[571] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiv.
[572] Saidiya Hartman.
[573] Cited in Jonathan Griffin, 'Outliers and American Vanguard Art at LACMA — Cultural Inclusivity', *FT.Com*, 30 November 2018.
[574] Julie Roberts, Saar's gallerist, explained their strategy in conversation with me in July 2021.

galleries and increasing diversity. As part of this investment MoMA held two exhibitions focussed on African American artists – one being Saar and the other a larger survey on William Pope. L. Esther Adler (co-curator of MoMA's exhibition) explained that the recent acquisition of Saar's work fell under the auspices of their diversity drive and as such it made sense for them to make a solo artist project.[575]

Saar's exhibition was intimate and it centred around the importance of *Black Girl's Window* (which as noted earlier is one of Saar's most renowned works), demonstrating how her use of certain techniques and ideas within her printmaking had led her to assemblage – first through the use of the window and then into other more expansive works. It established the significance of *Black Girl's Window* to Saar's overall practice but equally highlighted MoMA's commitment to the artist (and by extension diversity) by leveraging the cultural capital gained by owning that particular work in the first place – leaving aside the fact that this work only entered the collection in 2013. For Adler, the show was making a statement about Saar's career and process – that the techniques employed in these prints and early assemblages carried forward in all subsequent work.[576] Mark Godfrey described it as very scholarly, a 'deep dive show' where the museum took one very important object in their collection and used it as a launching point to discuss other works of hers in their collection (namely the prints).[577]

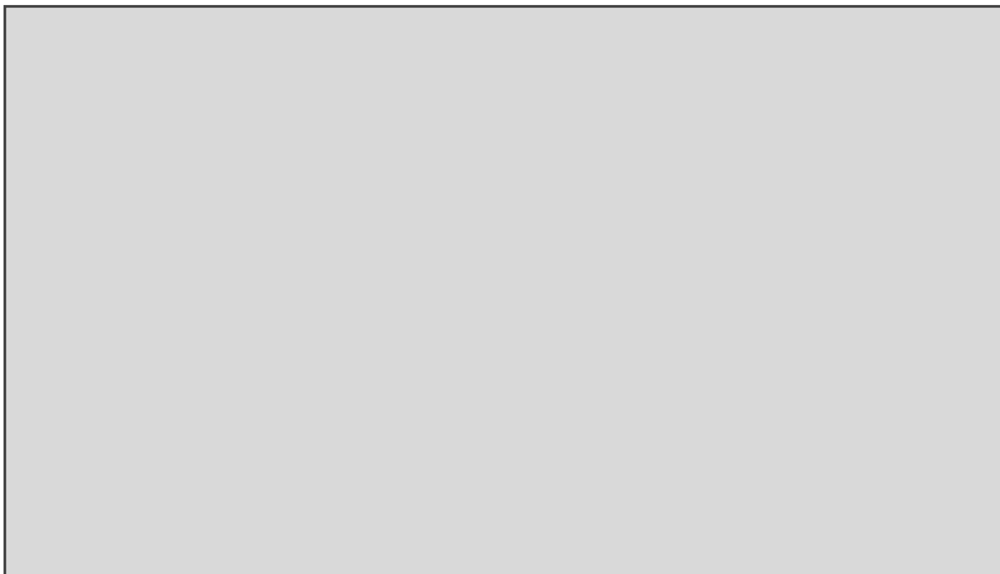

Fig. 29. Installation view: *Betye Saar: Black Girl's Window* at MoMA (2019-20). [Image redacted due to copyright restrictions]

[575] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[576] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[577] In conversation with the author, March 2021

In the previous section I discussed Ellen Tani's argument that Saar's work resisted historicization and concluded that over a long career of a practice that has moved in a 'creative spiral,' Saar had designed it as such. The other exhibitions in discussion – as they were not collection-focused – were able to work with Saar to create shows where work from several decades of production were shown together thematically, undoing the tendency to show a linear progression of an artist's career. MoMA's show is at odds with this premise as their exhibition was positioned as a focus on the artist's 'early work,' one piece of which is among her most significant works. The premise of MoMA's exhibition almost implies that this small exhibition could be the beginning of a larger chronological retrospective, thereby holding fast to a traditional method of historicizing artists and their artworks. This exhibition was beholden to the works in MoMA's collection and perhaps if they were different, they would have had to think about another type of installation more in line with the exhibitions described above. Adler, however, spoke to me about how despite the efforts made in the recent collection displays at MoMA that the museum had not 'found a good way to push beyond the chronological narratives that we put artist's into.'[578] This was also apparent in how they positioned Hilma af Klint chronologically in line with when the work was made and not its critical reception as discussed in Chapter 2. This all evidences very little advancement in the adoption of feminist curatorial methodologies in their overall exhibition and collection display planning and implementation.

In researching how Saar's work, using the example of *Black Girl's Window*, has been displayed by MoMA prior to 2019, and beyond, it has been positioned within collection displays that seem to ignore the wider racial and gendered contexts of the work, but also the many nuanced layers present in each piece. In 2016, writing for the *Uneasy Dancer* catalogue, Richard J. Powell criticised MoMA's placement of this work in the collection display titled 'Take an Object', where Saar's work was located among a group of artists – including Jasper Johns, Niki de Saint Phalle, Robert Rauschenberg etc. – who deployed everyday objects in their work. Powell argued that 'a more germane referent for Saar's work than, say, Rauschenberg's combines would be the materially amassed spirit-imbued "power" objects that have long existed in many locales throughout the African diaspora.'[579] In more recent collection displays this work has been shown in the room 'Domestic Disruption' which is devoted to an expansive look at Pop art, including works by Andy

[578] In conversation with the author, April 2021
[579] Richard J Powell, 'Betye Saar's Mojo Hands', 238.

Warhol, Jim Dine, Evelyne Axel and Marisol. Most of the works displayed are from the 1960s and the wall text implies the link between these artist's works is once again the use of the everyday object. It could be argued that these displays position Saar's work in a discussion of aesthetic concerns, which answer criticisms made by Jean Fisher (1997), Kobena Mercer (1991) and others, for example, that the practices of black artists have historically been ignored for their formal and aesthetic means in favour of an over-determined focus on their socio-political contexts.[580] As referenced in the introduction to this chapter, Charlotte Barat and Darby English argued that the social effects and functions of art are unavoidable when art engages race. This assertion was taken from *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA* (2019)*,* which explores MoMA's history of showing and collecting the work of black artists (discussed earlier). Here Barat and English also explain that: 'MoMA's own attitudes regarding the representation of race relations are to be distinguished from those evoked by the artworks shown at or acquired by the museum. In the former case, we must speak of a reluctance, even a refusal, to face the racial tension developing in the United States.'[581] They were writing here about MoMA in its early years but as their essay continues, and as evidenced in the way Saar's work is being currently presented, these same issues are still apparent. Furthermore, the overtones of this display, which provides an expansive interpretation of Pop art, demonstrates MoMA's reluctance to give up the artistic movement categories and the notion of teleological progression that they have been using for decades.

By comparison, Tate Modern is currently displaying Saar's *Mti* (1973) alongside the work *Untitled (A Map of the British Empire in America)* (2021) by the Dominican-born contemporary artist Firelei Báez (1981–). This inter-generational display of work that touches the critical and timely subjects of migration, race, and colonization seems a far more fruitful curatorial choice and is aligned to feminist curatorial ideas about cross-generational and transnational dialogues. This strong artistic pairing does signals greater consideration by Tate but they are not without their own shortcomings; when discussing why Saar has been ignored by the mainstream and Tate until the last five years Mark Godfrey acknowledged it was unequivocally due to racism. He remarked: 'if you looked at the relative representation of someone like Louise Bourgeois in a collection like the Tate, and Betye Saar, it's obviously hugely different.'[582] What he

[580] See Nick Aikens, 'A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1980s', 23.
[581] Darby English, Charlotte Barat, and Mabel O. Wilson, *Among Others: Blackness at MoMA,* 29.
[582] In conversation with the author, March 2021

meant is that Tate owns a considerable number of Bourgeois works and yet only one work by Saar. In addition, Bourgeois has had a major solo retrospective, a Turbine Hall commission, and several solo room collection displays devoted to her. As discussed in Chapter 1 Maud Sulter had highlighted the exclusion of black artists in the Tate collection when she curated *Echo* in 1991 – thirty years later the same issues remain evident.

Fig. 30. Image of the accompanying publications for exhibitions at The Prada Foundation (2016), Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (2016), LACMA (2019-20) and MoMA (2019-20).

While I earlier commended LACMA's thematic exhibition it was still a very small presentation of Saar's work. Mark Godfrey described it as 'more generous' than MoMA's but these exhibitions seem to have fallen considerably short on delivering Saar a more expansive presentation. Doreen St. Felix wrote of MoMA's exhibition that it had 'restricted breadth' and was 'indispensable yet apprehensive.'[583] The publications produced on these occasions were also small-scale. LACMA produced a catalogue that mimicked the size and style of a small sketchbook, which conceptually matched their exhibition contents where Saar's travel sketchbooks had been shown for the first time. It contained only one essay by the

[583] Félix, 'MOMA's Heady Introduction to Betye Saar, "The Conscience of the Art World"'.

curator Carol Eliel. MoMA's publication was not explicitly tied to the exhibition per se but was part of their existing 'One on One' series which is an extended essay on one work from their collection – in this case *Black Girl's Window*. For LACMA Eliel explained that Saar had not wanted a larger book, that she had wanted it to be affordable. This is understandable and demonstrates the artist's awareness of diverse audience demographics and economic difference, undoubtedly coming from her own standpoint as a black woman which should be hugely important factors in institutional inclusion initiatives. It does not, however, negate the fact that it feels like a missed opportunity to produce something more substantial on the artist, as does the publication that MoMA produced.

In contrast, the catalogue that accompanied *Uneasy Dancer* is the most comprehensive publication produced on Saar in recent years including four scholarly essays, and an in-depth timeline stretching from Saar's birthyear 1926 to 2016, including personal, socio-political, and artwork information. It is a key resource for understanding and contextualising Saar's practice. The scale of this, however, is also small and it is printed on thin uncoated paper stock meaning that a lot of the images are saturated. Moreover, due to the size of the book and its design, the images are often thumbnails and you cannot see the details of the works. These details might seem incidental but they do not demonstrate the same level of commitment to other artist-men showing at these same institutions. The most obvious example would be William Pope L who received a large academic catalogue to accompany his exhibition at MoMA. One could argue that his exhibition was more expansive and not based on the museum's collection holdings but that would only further accentuate the disparity. On the struggle of black women Katherine McKittrick wrote, 'if *who* we see is tied up with *where* we see through truthful commonsensical narratives, then the placement of subaltern bodies deceptively hardens spatial binaries, in turn suggesting that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some are out of place.'[584]

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the mainstream attention given to Betye Saar since 2011 paying particular consideration to the ways in which feminist methodologies may or may not have been utilised in key exhibitions of her work. It observed how the counter-canon was adopted strategically as a means of telling

[584] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* xv.

alternative and lesser-known histories of art. Despite valid criticism that can be leveraged about counter-canonical exhibitions in that they perpetuate exclusionary structures because the counter signals 'other,' these exhibitions (*Now Dig This!, SoAN and WWaR*) can be read as important first steps at establishing the importance of these neglected histories to mainstream art history. For this research, their success has been in the legacies they have been able to establish – acquisitions into major museum collections, more exhibitions of previously overlooked artist's work and therefore expanded presentations, and even deeper research into these histories through other exhibitions and publications. I would argue that their implementation of some feminist methodologies – non-linear presentations, non-patrilineal legacies, and championing work that has previously been feminized and devalued – have been integral to that success and reveal that institutions are attempting to move away from 'issuism' into more sustained engagement with these previously marginalised artists and histories. In relation to Saar, these approaches succeeded at disseminating wider knowledge of the communities and discourses that were foundational to her, as well as cementing her significance as an artist among those groups and therefore wider art history.

Outliers and American Vanguard Art is an important exhibition for this thesis as a whole for it directly addresses the reparative moment that institutions and art history currently finds itself. Lynne Cooke used curatorial fabulation to dissolve hierarchies of difference and her careful consideration of the multiple subjectivities of artists was critical to this dissolution. The exhibition revealed how 'no [artist] is an outlier in every dimension of their work and thought.' [585] Her approach should be considered an important exemplar in how institutions could examine difference meaningfully, not only in exhibitions but through their collections.

Cooke's well-considered approach, and the use of the counter-canon, may identify that there are positive incremental changes afoot among mainstream institutions in addressing their prior omissions, however, as the last section of this chapter evidenced – and if we take MoMA's approach to Saar as a key example – there is still work to be done. The museum seems to be unable to fully untether itself from its traditional way of historicising art which only succeeds in presenting the work of previously marginalised figures either tokenistically, in a way that diminishes their complexity, or by still making them appear out of place. It proves that simply owning these works is not enough.

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[585] Cited in Griffin, 'Outliers and American Vanguard Art at LACMA — Cultural Inclusivity'.

With regard to recent solo presentations of Saar, the artist's cyclical approach to art and exhibition-making have shown her determined resistance to the biases that are a foundational part of mainstream institutions (and society at large). As such, through these exhibitions she has attempted to actively challenge and undo some of the ways in which institutions typically inscribe their bias particularly in relation to modernism – the linear narrative or steadfast adherence to the key movements of twentieth century art history, which as noted throughout this thesis are fundamental issues in feminist discourse. In 1977 Saar wrote, 'I never had a stroke for 'mainstream,' it went against my flow.'[586] In bell hooks's essay 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,' (1990) she advocated that the margin was 'more than a site of deprivation; in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counterhegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives.'[587] If we read Saar's statement in line with this, or indeed how she has approached her lifetime of work and accompanying exhibitions, I would argue that she has used her marginality to both demonstrate her resistance and establish radical possibilities for a feminist future. That this chapter has identified that the centre's mass mind remains largely unaltered proves that Saar's resistance remains as urgent as ever.

[586] Cited in Houston Conwill, 'Interview with Betye Saar', *Black Art* 3, no. 1 (1978), 4.
[587] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 149.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on curatorial practices in the mainstream art world that have been occupied with the rediscovery of older and dead women artists from the mid-2000s to the present day. I have argued that this trend initially began in 2007 following the major feminist exhibitions such as *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* and *Global Feminisms,* as in their wake the rise of visibility and knowledge of artist-women began to take hold across the mainstream art world. This phenomenon outwardly signalled the use of strategies such as revision and recovery that had been developed by feminist scholarship. As such, the aim of this research was to explore to what extent this evolving trend in the mainstream had followed an engagement with feminist discourse and feminist art history. Specifically, I sought to establish what feminist curatorial strategies were used in the production of the exhibitions that were rediscovering these artist-women, and what the impact on the artists being rediscovered has been and what legacies were created for them in the process. Finally, I endeavoured to determine if this trend signified a paradigm shift where feminism had entered the mainstream art world in a meaningful ways, gesturing toward wider infrastructural change.

In 2013, feminist art historians Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry asked:

> What if feminist research turned from women or feminist artists to women or feminist curators, from women's or feminist art making to women or feminist curating? Could such a turn (imagined rather than actual at present) discover a different route into feminism's art histories? Would this displacement of the artist in favour of the curator permit greater insight into why feminism has not in fact succeeded at transforming a capitalist art institution which has, arguably and paradoxically, managed to both include women artists and exclude feminist politics?[588]

This project has followed their premise, as well as Renée Baert's assertion that the site of exhibition and feminist curatorial practice should be an object of feminist study.[589] It is one such attempt at shifting focus towards treating curatorial practice as a form for feminist historiography. In Chapter 1 I sought to establish a foundational understanding of feminisms potential to challenge the hegemonic power of patriarchy present in the art world through a selective survey of four feminist curators from the 1970s to the mid-

[588] Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki, 'How to Be Seen: An Introduction to Feminist Politics, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions', in Perry and Dimitrakaki, eds., *Politics in a Glass: Case Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 17.
[589] Renée Baert, 'Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies', *n.paradoxa Online*, Issue 12 (March 2000): 6.

1990s. Here, feminism had explicitly driven the methodologies these curators used in their practice, and as such their work largely remained outside of the mainstream institutions. In brief the strategies outlined included the use of self-reflection; the eschewing of hierarchies, classificatory norms, linear narratives, and fixed subject positions; to think without borders that are not only connected to geography but race, gender, and class; to think about the work's influence at the time of its reception, rather than just its conception; and to be open to collaboration and experimentation in one's practice.

Primarily, however, the goal of this thesis was to examine what had been happening inside institutions from 2007 to the present. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were informed by Baert's assertion that across mainstream institutions 'feminist practices today are often "folded-in" with other issues and positions,'[590] and as such they are less visible or unnamed as feminist. Drawing on a range of feminist art historical scholarship, including the selective history of feminist curatorial practice that I presented in Chapter 1, I critically examined several major exhibitions, collections displays, and commercial gallery engagement with artist-women who gained wider recognition either late in their career or posthumously. I focused on three case studies – Hilma af Klint, Lee Lozano, and Betye Saar – and traced the curatorial work engaged with these artists across several exhibitions and institutions from the mid-2000s to the present day. This has produced a rich body of research that enabled the recognition of when feminist strategies were successfully applied or if they remained either absent or lacking in effect across each case study.

Through this research it has been overwhelmingly clear that mainstream institutions remain contested sites for artist-women as they struggle to truly integrate difference in their collections and exhibitions. In this regard, this thesis follows Griselda Pollock's proclamation that 'the capacity of feminism to transform us and our world is yet unrealised.'[591] Here, I take 'our world' to mean the study and display of art at the centre. Throughout, I have been demonstrating that there has been only a partial translation of the feminist curatorial strategies and principles discussed in Chapter 1 into mainstream institutions and many of the methodologies that I outlined remain unrealised at the centre. This is not to say that some excellent feminist work is not happening among the mainstream – there are several positive findings among this research that demonstrate feminist interventions and attempts to disrupt the status

[590] Baert (2000), 6.
[591] Spoken at "Feminism and art theory now" at Haus der Kunst in Munich in May 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5Ett_UsxZo, accessed October 2018.

quo. I speak here of the work carried out by curators such as Iris Müller-Westermann and her steadfast commitment to Hilma af Klint's work; Helen Molesworth and her outwardly feminist stance witnessed in both her writing referenced throughout this thesis and her exhibition-making – *Solitaire* with Lee Lozano, for example, was an experiment to think-through a different and more feminist way of curating exhibitions; Lynne Cooke's *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (which will be discussed in more depth further on in this conclusion) is an excellent example of how to curate an exhibition dedicated to truly showing and repairing the exclusions of the past. Overall, however, this thesis has illuminated how there remain foundational obstacles to the possibility of truly embedded feminist practice among the centre. It would suggest that while a "folded-in" approach has merits in terms of incremental change it is limited in its capacity to truly transform.

Through the illustration and evaluation of the individual conditions under which my case studies' practices have been recovered, this research aimed to reveal the wider implications that these cases present for the mainstream art world as a whole. For Hilma af Klint this meant unpicking the repetitive narratives with which her work has been persistently framed – secrecy, abstraction, spiritualism – to demonstrate how they have prevented more exacting interpretations of her incredibly involved oeuvre. Since 2013, af Klint's work has become increasingly well-known. So compelling is her legend that, in the space of a decade, it has yielded several major solo retrospectives and two person shows, a biography, a documentary, a biopic, and a seven-volume catalogue raisonné, among many other beautifully illustrated books. As such, she has become a poster-woman for successful historical revisionism. The main narrative hook, despite any initial doubts about her ties to occultism, is that she was a practitioner of abstraction who predated the modernist pioneers – an isolated genius. Her 2018 exhibition at the Guggenheim in New York smashed the museum's attendance record and paved the way for her acceptance into the history of art, notably marked by the inclusion of one of her paintings in the collection rehang at MoMA in 2019. While this might look triumphal for feminist art history, I have argued that this is not necessarily the case. As the philosopher Rosi Braidotti reminds us, 'feminism… is not about restoring another dominant memory, but rather about installing a counter-memory, or an embedded and embodied genealogy.'[592] The desire to cement af Klint as a solitary

[592] Rosi Braidotti, 'Feminist Philosophies', in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Malden, USA; Oxford, UK; Melbourne, Australia; and Berlin, Germany: Blackwall Publishing, 2003), 198.

trailblazer among the 'pioneers of abstraction' has not disrupted the canon but rather has inserted her into it. In so doing, her inclusion has minimized the fact that her work transcends abstraction, while perpetuating art history's dominant chronologies and its idea of solo geniuses – two things that feminist discourse has long contested (for example, Pollock (1999, 2003, 2007, 2010), Johnson (2013), Duncan (1995), Molesworth (2010), Reckitt (2017), among others).

In an examination of both institutional and market-led responses to Lee Lozano's work I have shown where the former was successful in contending with her complexity by disrupting her association to Conceptual art alone, the latter underplayed it thus diminishing the potential for new perspectives and more involved discussion. This chapter also dispelled any myth that being represented by one of the art world's most successful galleries automatically translates into the work being acquired by major museums and thus having the ability to truly transform the canon. The framing of Lozano's absence from the art world as her own responsibility – due to *Dropout Piece* (c.1970) – also problematically disavows the systemic sexism which has historically absented artist-women from art history. This is symptomatic of a lack of institutional self-reflection on their own complicity in artist-women's systemic marginalisation.

In Chapter 4, focused on Betye Saar, I argued that the attention on black artists of all genders across the mainstream art world led to the proliferation of exhibitions using the counter-canon as an effective strategy to integrate overlooked histories into sites that have historically ignored these artist's contributions. We are in the nascent stages of witnessing the wider repercussions of these exhibitions – the new acquisitions and further more involved exhibitions that have happened in their wake certainly identify that deeper integration is intended. But as the case of Saar has shown some of these offerings have been 'apprehensive' in demonstrating the criticality of an artist like Saar to the history of American art. That Saar's deployment of spatial and temporal collapse in both her work and exhibitions of her work endures confirms that her continued resistance against the canon, as it has both been traditionally and currently inscribed, is still urgently required.

This study has established that alongside an increased focus on the recovery of artist-women there has been a widening of art world sensibilities that has in some sense paved a path for these artist-women's recovery by the mainstream beyond the notion of recovery itself. Darby English named this an incremental

expansion of 'taste.'[593] In Chapter 2, for example, I argued that the so-called 'esoteric turn' and the rise in the popularity of topics connected to spirituality, magic, and other esoteric subject matters across the art world had led in some way to the rise in popularity, or even acceptance, of Hilma af Klint's work by the mainstream art world. This has undoubtedly also affected the reinvigoration of interest in Betye Saar, whose work has been informed by such subjects since the early 1960s and yet was previously used to relegate it to 'folk art'. As discussed in Chapter 3, it could be argued that the 1960s and 1970s are also undergoing a moment of reassessment more broadly, as exhibitions seek to problematise the mainstream histories of art that have traditionally shaped this period's history, namely Conceptual art, Pop art, and Minimalism. For Lozano this has meant a reassessment of her early figurative and highly subversive paintings to provide different readings on her whole oeuvre, moving her away from the limited confines of Conceptual art. For Saar this meant presenting her as a critical and influential figure in a parallel history of African American art from this period. As the case of af Klint has established, however, the widening of sensibilities still fall remarkably short on accepting the artist's alterity, as respected art historians and curators (Briony Fer, Tessel M. Bauduin, and David Horowitz, for example) seek to place af Klint's spiritualism at arm's length.

This research has demonstrated that beyond an overall strategy of recovery itself the adoption of non-linear, trans-historical and cross-generational approaches by curators has been the most widely embraced feminist methodology. For af Klint this has meant placing her work in dialogue with younger, contemporary artists such as Rebecca Quaytman and Josiah McElheny. Or, as Catherine de Zegher attempted in the exhibition *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz and Agnes Martin* (Drawing Room, New York, 2005), bringing three artist-women from differing generations together in order to disrupt more traditional understandings of abstraction. For Lozano, the curators Sabine Folie, Isabelle Malz, Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, and Helen Molesworth did not create cross-generational dialogues but placed Lozano in conversation with other artists of the same generation to try and tease out connections between them beyond the typical prescribed art historical movements from the 1960s and 70s. Such approaches worked well at exposing how these artist-women had previously been marginalised by the art world. With Saar, aside from her own cyclical approach to art and exhibition-making, the survey exhibitions

[593] Darby English, 'Modernism's War on Terror', in *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (Washington and Chicago: National Gallery of Art and The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 37.

exploring counter-canonical histories of American art, while largely stuck to a specific time period (1960s–1980s), pushed against chronology as an organising principle to good effect. As discussed in both Chapters 3 and 4, with reference to art historians and curators such as Camille Morineau (2017), Aruna D'Souza (2010), and Lynne Cooke (2018), while temporary exhibitions are crucial tools for presenting previously marginalised artists and parallel art histories, museum collections remain the most effective way to transform the canon and create new art historical narratives.

One of feminist art history's – and by extension feminist curatorial practices' – enduring critical discussions has been with how to challenge and disrupt the chronological and teleological narratives that museums have traditionally used to narrate the history of art. This research has revealed that several museums have recognised this and as a result they have attempted to break away from this restrictive framework – I speak here of Tate Britain, Tate Modern and MoMA's recent re-hangs as examples I cited in the introduction. It remains, however, one of the biggest obstructions to feminism entering the institution. MoMA's presentation of both Saar and af Klint's work in its collection galleries underscored how beholden it still is to those organising systems. Furthermore, this study has found that there is evidently still a belief that a mere increase in the representation of artist-women in mainstream institutions exhibition programmes, gallery rosters, or collections remains enough to indicate that progress is being made. To that end, this research has shown that the arguments of feminist writers and scholars such as Audre Lorde (1979), Griselda Pollock (1999) Patricia Allmer (2016), Clare Hemmings (2017) and Maura Reilly (2018), among others, whose critiques of revision and recovery as ineffectual strategies to truly transform remain relevant to the present day.

In terms of potential solutions for a more productive implementation of feminist methods into the mainstream beyond recovery, what has emerged through this research is the importance of the group exhibition. It has been evident that they allow for more expansive ideas and modes of practice to be considered, as well as traditional means of forming exhibitions to be challenged. To that end, this research reiterates art historian and curator Helena Reckitt's argument that 'group exhibitions evoke the complex discursive environment with which artists work and move beyond the monographic focus on the sovereign

artist, which has been a key focus within feminist art history and criticism.'[594] Exhibitions such as *Joint Dialogue* (2010), *Solitaire* (2008) both featuring Lee Lozano, or *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (2020) which included Betye Saar, managed to disrupt the status quo in successful ways by moving away from traditional models of chronology, or eschewing the traditional hierarchy of artist-men over artist-women, and who is considered marginalised or not at various moments in history.

In *Outliers and American Vanguard Art,* discussed in Chapter 4, Lynne Cooke's deployment of curatorial fabulations to effect reconciliation over simple repair was established to avoid her recognition that reparative methodologies are limited in their ability to truly transform the foundational structures that have created, and continue to perpetuate, hierarchy and marginalisation across the mainstream. Her methodology created alignments between artists and art works based on themes, materials, and processes. That this exhibition was able to reconcile the marginalisation of several, often interconnected, groups – artist-women, black artists and artists of colour, and 'outlier' artists – was its strength and success. Of all the exhibitions examined in this study *Outliers…* comes the closest to accomplishing the successful translation of the methodologies outlined in Chapter 1 into an important mainstream institution – The National Gallery, Washington. As noted above, however, temporary exhibitions are by design temporary and therefore the use of the ideas and methodologies utilised by Cooke in her exhibition would have a greater and more transformative effect if they were applied to museum collections and the narratives they communicate.

In addition to this, in terms of recovering artists, as championed by Jean Fisher (1994), Catherine de Zegher (1996), and Helen Molesworth (2010 and 2020), the conditions for an artwork or an artist's reception are important, if not more so, than the conditions of the work's making. If museums began 'to stage the problem of reception,' as Molesworth has reasoned, they could truly begin to trouble art history's 'beloved' chronologies.[595] It would also provide a more honest method of historiography. As discussed in Chapter 1 and 4, institutions still lack transparency over their responsibility for the perpetuation of artist-women's prior marginalisation. To try and stage the problem of reception offers multiple ways for feminist

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[594] Helena Reckitt, 'Troubling Canons: Curating and Exhibiting Women's and Feminist Art, a Roundtable Discussion', in *Re-Envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives on a Global World, Routledge: London and New York,* ed. Ruth E. Iskin (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 264.

[595] Helen Molesworth, 'HELEN MOLESWORTH ON THE REINSTALLATION OF MOMA'S PERMANENT COLLECTION', *Artforum*, accessed 16 June 2023, https://www.artforum.com/print/202001/helen-molesworth-on-the-reinstallation-of-the-permanent-collection-81623.

strategies to enter the museum as such an approach not only problematises chronology, but it acknowledges and articulates institutional bias and prior errors. As such it can tell the audience more about why an artist might have been excluded in the past, and why they are important now and to who. This would also demonstrate that influence and artistic connections are not made through a continuous sequential line.

At the beginning of my research I planned to carry out extensive archival research into relevant exhibition files related to my chosen case studies, undertaking exhibition and collection visits, and meeting face-to-face with key stakeholders (curators, artists, for example). The direction that my research took and the methodologies used (mainly textual analysis and interviews) was steered by the particular circumstances that I faced – namely undertaking research during a worldwide pandemic that limited travel, archival research, and exhibition visits. Becoming pregnant during this period meant continued restriction to travel due to the associated health-risks even as borders, institutions and libraries began to reopen. This was frustrating and felt restrictive to my original intentions, however, I adapted my plan and made the interview my source of primary research, with the addition of some remote archive access where possible. In reflecting upon these circumstances I think that my research benefitted from such restriction, I was able to become more focussed in my methodology and not be overwhelmed with too much information. The candour with which many of my interviewees spoke was unexpected and yet it opened up a path to understand the subject's curatorial motivations, as well as institutional restrictions and difficulties they encountered in their work. Additionally, by carrying out interviews remotely meant I was able to ask more people to participate, meaning that the breadth of information obtained was incredibly wide and richer as a result. The insights gathered through this process could most likely not have been collected from exhibition files in institutional archives, where only the minimal information is retained and it is often impersonal and without the benefit of reflection. The interest that people took in the subject matter also bolstered my confidence in my chosen research topic. I am aware that I have the privilege of access to a number of these people through the network I have built up through my professional curatorial work. While I did not know several of these people in advance of this project, I knew some (mainly former colleagues) and was able to pull on professional connections to get introductions and contact details for the others. I do not take this privileged position for granted, and it has taught me the value and importance in giving one's time to researchers who may not have the same access or networks to pull from.

In 2010 Molesworth wrote 'I feel fairly confident that I know how to write an essay as a feminist, less sure I know how to install art as one.'[596] At the beginning of this project, I identified with her position and it contributed to the motivations behind this study. Through the course of this research I learned that this was not a singular problem, that many curators who are aware of and follow feminist art history and discourse struggle with how to translate its philosophies into the gallery. That the rich history of feminist curatorial practice outside and inside institutions had largely been undocumented, unwritten, and untaught had undoubtedly contributed to this impasse. The goal of this thesis was not to provide a comprehensive history of feminist curating or a catch-all methodology for the meaningful realisation of feminism at the centre, even though several productive strategies have emerged over the course of its writing. Its aim was to produce a critical and timely reflection on a key moment in the history of the art world's engagement with artist-women. In doing so, this research has provided an important feminist intervention into the current moment and provides a critical contribution to the burgeoning field of feminist curatorial historiography.

Additionally, this research has had a significant impact on my own curatorial thinking and has already influenced my work and will continue to do so in the future as I seek to fully embed the feminist curatorial methodologies explored here into my own practice. Out of this research I have already begun to undertake projects that try to think differently about how to give long-lasting and effective platforms to marginalised figures and overlooked subjects. For example, I have begun working collaboratively with a curatorial colleague to research the subject of spirituality in art through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It's intention is to not only shine a light on the feminist intent of the artist's spiritual positions, but it also engages with this vital area of art history through a feminist lens, considering the structures that 'othered' and marginalised these practices by artist-women. It has been conceived of as a cross-generational project and is non-chronological, allowing for affinities between subjects, materials, and politics to be drawn out. It includes the work of both af Klint and Saar. Furthermore, I have taken on several writing projects that utilise my research and disseminate my thinking more widely.

[596] Helen Molesworth, 'How to Install Art as a Feminist', in *MODERN WOMEN: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Department of Publications, MoMA, 2010), 499.

When this research began what might have seemed initially like a moment of temporary attention upon artist-women, is now gesturing towards something that shows no immediate signs of stopping. As witnessed by this study, this has been the result of the continued hard work of several individual curators whose commitment to artist-women and the underpinnings of feminist art history have inarguably bolstered its longevity. Elisabeth Grosz has written that she understands feminist politics at their best to be about 'the production of futures for women that are uncontained by any of the models provided in the present.'[597] This study agrees with this perspective as while individual exhibitions and incisive gestures have produced some glimmers of hope, it is overwhelmingly clear that more courageous and radical decisions need to be made before structural transformation across the centre is realised. That this research has sought to uncover both areas of potential regression, as well as the areas that show real possibility means that it offers an assessment of the present with the hope that it can lead to a more feminist future. As Grosz has written, 'the inventive historian is poised between a past that is not dead and a present as the place for the inauguration of new and unpredicted futures. We can call these futures modes of becoming, modes of becoming-other.'[598]

[597] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Histories of the Present and Future: Feminism, Power, Bodies', *Reč*, no. 59.5 (2000), 103.
[598] Grosz, 'Histories of the Present and Future: Feminism, Power, Bodies', 103.

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Interviews

General

Frances Morris, (former) Director: Tate Modern, March 2021
Gabrielle Schor, Director: Verbund Collection, April 2021
Jessica Morgan, Director: Dia Art Foundation, September 2020
Sarah Munro, Director: BALTIC, June 2021
Camille Morineau, Director: AWARE, March 2021

Hilma Af Klint

Tracey Bashkoff, Senior Director of Collections and Senior Curator: Guggenheim Museum, August 2020

Rebecca Quaytman, Artist, December 2020
Emma Enderby, Head of Research and Chief Curator: Haus der Kunst, July 2020
Iris Müller-Westermann, (former) Director: Moderna Museet Malmö (also interviewed in relation to Lee Lozano), May and July 2020
Julia Voss, Art historian, curator, and writer, April 2020
Hedwig Martin, PhD candidate, May 2020
Josiah McElheny, Artist, December 2020

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Barry Rosen, Head of Lee Lozano Estate, November 2020
Helen Molesworth, Curator and writer (also interviewed in relation to Hilma af Klint at the Guggenheim), July 2020
Fiona Bradley, Director: Fruitmarket Gallery, June 2020
Bob Nickas, Writer and critic, July 2021
Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, Writer, May 2020
Adam Syzmcyzk, (former) Director: Kunsthalle Basel, October 2020
Sabine Folie, Director: Art Collections of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, September 2020
Katrin Mayer, Artist, December 2020
Isabelle Malz, Curator: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, September 2020
Pernille Fonnesbech, (former) Curator: GL Strand, November 2022

Betye Saar

Julie Roberts, Director: Roberts Projects, Los Angeles, July 2021
Mark Godfrey, (former) Senior Curator: Tate Modern, March 2021
Zoe Whitley, Director: Chisenhale Gallery, March 2021
Catherine Morris, Sackler Center for Feminist Art Senior Curator: Brooklyn Museum, April 2021
Carol Eliel, Curator of Modern Art: LACMA, April 2021
Esther Adler, Curator, Department of Prints and Drawings: MoMA, April 2021
Stephanie Seidel, Curator: Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, May 2021

Archival Materials

Museum of Modern Art, New York

MoMA PS1 Archive:
II.A.1389: checklist, press release, installation photographs, news clippings, art and event photographs
[Folder relates to: *Lee Lozano, Drawn from Life: 1961–1971* Jan 22–Sept 13, 2004]

MoMA PS1 Archive:
I.A.1322: checklist, general exhibition documentation
I.A.1323: checklist, general exhibition documentation
I.A.1324: general exhibition documentation
I.A.1325: general exhibition documentation
I.A.1525: art and event photographs
I.B.27: general exhibition documentation
II.A.727: installation photographs, art and event photographs
II.A.732: news clippings, general exhibition documentation
VII.B.40: general exhibition documentation
[All folders relate to: *The Secret Pictures by Hilma af Klint*, Jan 15–Mar 12, 1989]

Lee Lozano Archive

Lee Lozano, *Private Books 1–11*, edited 25–31 January 1972
All digitized archival materials held by the The Estate of Lee Lozano and Hauser & Wirth, 1960–2006