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MAURA REILLY

FOREWORD BY LUCY R. LIPPARD

CURATORIAL ACTIVISM

TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF CURATING

WITH 107 ILLUSTRATIONS

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1. WHAT IS CURATORIAL ACTIVISM?

WESTERN ART: IT'S A WHITE MALE THING[2]

"In the West, greatness has been defined since antiquity as white, Western, privileged, and, above all, male." [1]

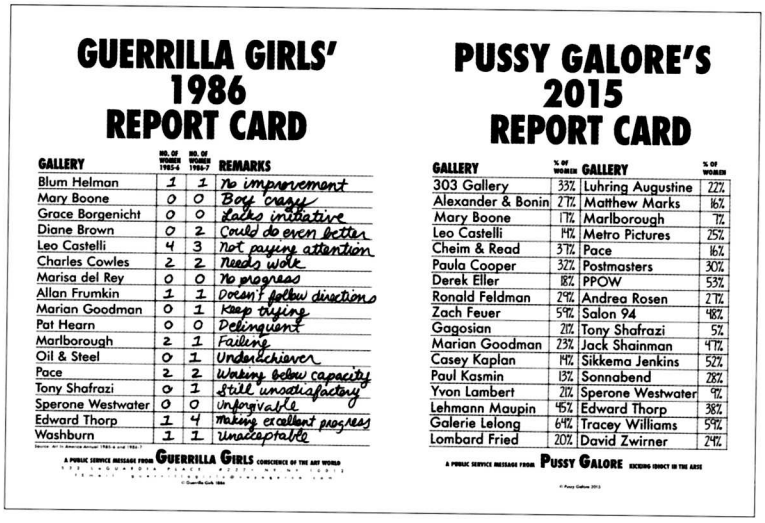
Linda Nochlin

Statistics demonstrate that the fight for gender and race equality in the art world is far from over. Despite decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the art world continues to exclude "Other" artists—those who are women, of color, and LGBTQ. Discrimination against these artists invades every aspect of the art world, from gallery representation, auction-price differentials, and press coverage to inclusion in permanent collections and solo exhibition programs. In most mainstream museums, visitors are still required to actively search out work by them. There was, for example, dismal representation of women and non-white artists in the re-opening of the Tate Modern, London, in 2016—of the three hundred artists represented in the re-hang of the permanent collection, less than a third were women and fewer still were non-white.[3] Similar statistics were recorded the previous year, when the Whitney Museum of American Art opened its new location in New York with an inaugural exhibition entitled *America Is Hard to See*, showcasing works in its permanent collection and spanning a period from the 20th century to the present.[4]

While these facts are dismaying, it is the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, that gets the worst grade for gender and race discrimination. In 2004, it re-opened its greatly expanded exhibition spaces and unveiled the reinstallation of its prestigious permanent collection, featuring art from 1880 to 1970. Of the 410 works in the fourth- and fifth-floor galleries, only a paltry 16 were by women. There were even fewer works by non-white artists, and those who were given exhibition space were segregated in a single room dedicated to Diego Rivera and Mexican muralism. A dash through the same exhibition galleries in 2015 and 2016 revealed improvements, but continuing problems.[5] In 2014, as testament to the museum's lack of inclusiveness, the editors at ArtSlant started a rumor—an April Fools' joke, in fact—that MoMA would devote the year 2015 entirely to women.[6]

Blockbuster exhibitions are also subject to appalling levels of discrimination. The gender and race breakdowns of the Venice Biennale are a case in point. In the 2017 edition, entitled "Viva Arte Viva," curated by Christine Macel, women artists comprised only 35% of the participants. (By comparison, the tally was 37% in 2015, 26% in 2013, and 43% in 2009.) European and North American artists dominated the 2017 edition, with 61% of participants coming from the two continents. The racial demographics of the show were particularly disheartening, especially given the widespread vocal activism of groups such as Black Lives Matter: a mere 5 of the 120 artists were black—just one of whom (Senga Nengudi) was a woman. To my knowledge, not one critic has yet noted these gross disparities.[7]

In 2014, however, critics slammed the Whitney Biennial for its blatant racism and sexism, with protests in the galleries—by a group of artists calling themselves the "cliterati"—about the lack of women artists on display: of the 103 artists, just 37 were women. The Yams art collective withdrew their work from the Biennial in disgust at the show's lack of black and female artists. And within a month of the Biennial's opening, a protest show was organized, with the humorous title *Whitney Houston Biennial: I'm Every Woman*: it featured 22 artists, 10 of whom were women. Despite this public criticism of their 2014 Biennial, the Whitney's *America Is Hard to See* show the very next year was an astonishing 69% male and 77% white. The 2017 Biennial no doubt sought to redress the gross disparities: 25 of the 63 artists in the exhibition were women, several participants were gender fluid, and there was an almost equal percentage of white and non-white artists.[8]



GUERRILLA GIRLS' 1986 REPORT CARD

GALLERY	NO. OF WOMEN 1985-6	NO. OF WOMEN 1986-7	REMARKS
Blum Helman	1	1	No improvement
Mary Boone	0	0	Boy crazy
Grace Borgenicht	0	0	Lacks initiative
Diane Brown	0	2	Could do even better
Leo Castelli	4	3	Not paying attention
Charles Cowles	2	2	Needs work
Marisa del Rey	0	0	No progress
Allan Frumkin	1	1	Doesn't follow directions
Marian Goodman	0	1	Keep trying
Pat Hearn	0	0	Delinquent
Marlborough	2	1	Failing
Oil & Steel	0	1	Underachiever
Pace	2	2	Working below capacity
Tony Shafrazi	0	1	Still unsatisfactory
Sperone Westwater	0	0	Unforgivable
Edward Thorp	1	4	Making excellent progress
Washburn	1	1	Unacceptable

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

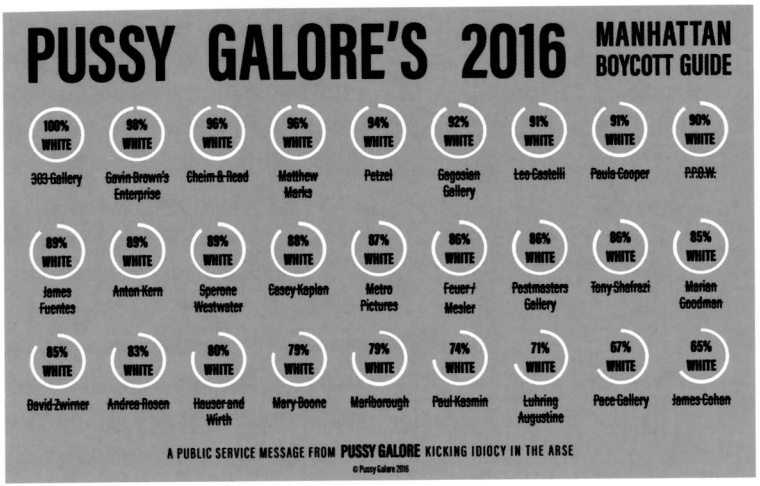
PUSSY GALORE'S 2015 REPORT CARD

GALLERY	% OF WOMEN	GALLERY	% OF WOMEN
303 Gallery	33%	Luhring Augustine	22%
Alexander & Bonin	27%	Matthew Marks	16%
Mary Boone	17%	Marlborough	7%
Leo Castelli	14%	Metro Pictures	25%
Cheim & Read	37%	Pace	16%
Paula Cooper	32%	Postmasters	30%
Derek Eller	18%	PPOW	53%
Ronald Feldman	29%	Andrea Rosen	27%
Zach Feuer	59%	Salon 94	48%
Gagosian	21%	Tony Shafrazi	5%
Marian Goodman	23%	Jack Shainman	47%
Casey Kaplan	19%	Sikkema Jenkins	52%
Paul Kasmin	13%	Sonnabend	28%
Yvon Lambert	21%	Sperone Westwater	9%
Lehmann Maupin	45%	Edward Thorp	38%
Galerie Lelong	64%	Tracey Williams	59%
Lombard Fried	20%	David Zwirner	24%

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM PUSSY GALORE KICKING IDIOCY IN THE ARTS

The Guerrilla Girls' 1986 Report Card alongside Pussy Galore's 2015 Report Card

Pussy Galore
Manhattan Boycott Guide
2016



Feminist art activists such as the Guerrilla Girls have been protesting gender and race disparities for decades, calling out specific galleries and holding them accountable—most spectacularly in their Guerrilla Girls' 1986 Report Card, which displayed the number of women artists in New York gallery rosters, offering comments when and if there was improvement or deterioration.[9] More recently, art activists Pussy Galore updated the Guerilla Girls' statistics for those New York galleries that were still open, and added others to the mix. Of the galleries that were open in 2015, and comparing the statistics from 1986, the worst offenders were Sperone Westwater and Tony Shafrazi galleries. On a more positive note, some New York galleries were representing women half the time or more, including PPOW, Sikkema Jenkins, Zach Feuer, Tracey Williams, and Galerie Lelong.[10]

In 2013, the artist Micol Hebron, propelled by the predominance of male artists in gallery advertisements in *Artforum* magazine and in galleries themselves, launched the project Gallery Tally, which collects data on the ratios of male and female artists in contemporary galleries. Hebron estimated that less than a third of the artists represented by commercial galleries in the USA are women. According to her, there remains a "real problem" with who is being assisted, exhibited, collected, promoted, and written about.[11] An audit of the galleries in London by East London Fawcett (ELF) produced similar figures.[12]

The statistics highlighted by Gallery Tally, the Guerrilla Girls, Pussy Galore, ELF, and others are all the more shocking in view of the fact that in 2016 women made up between 65% and 80% of the students enrolled in studio art and art history programs.[13] (Statistics on non-white students are not available.) There is, then, an immense

discrepancy between the number of female art students and the number of men represented by the galleries.

In 2016, the ever-vigilant Pussy Galore collective compiled statistics on racial discrimination in New York galleries. Tallying 34 galleries, they discovered that only 21% of the artists represented were non-white; the worst offenders were 303 Gallery, which was 100% white, and Gavin Brown Enterprise, which was 98% white.[14]

The availability of works by non-white and female artists at galleries obviously has a powerful impact on the amount of press coverage they receive and the degree of interest they generate from collectors, museums, and so on; this, in turn, directly affects their market and monetary values. There are now several publications and online rankings that collectors can turn to for insights into the market viability of an artist who may be of interest to them. For example, *Kunstkompass*, an annual publication (which for many years was published by the German business magazine *Capital* and is now published by *Manager Magazin*), reported what it claimed to be "The World's 100 Greatest Artists," basing its statistics on the frequency and prestige of exhibitions, publications, and press coverage, and the median price of one work of art. In the 2014 edition of *Kunstkompass*, three of the twenty "great artists" were women; all the artists were white.

Artnet.com also compiles rankings, which are based on art-market sales: in 2016, it presented a list of the "Top 100 Lots by Living Artists, 2011–16"—one woman (Cady Noland) and six non-white artists were listed. A second list unveiled the "Top 100 Living Artists," based on the total value of secondary market sales from January 2011 through mid-May 2016, ranking artists by the total value of works sold, along with the number of artworks at auction. In addition to Yayoi Kusama and Cindy Sherman, female artists on this 2016 list included Vija Celmins, Marlene Dumas, Bridget Riley, Tauba Auerbach, Julie Mehretu, and Cady Noland—giving a grand total of eight out of a hundred artists. Forty-five out of a hundred were non-white artists, the majority of whom lived in China.[15] These "Best of" listings of course do not equate with the aesthetic worth of the artist. They are, however, symptomatic of widespread discrimination.

While some ratios have improved for women and non-white artists, the statistics remain quite grim. It is important not to be seduced by what appear to be signs of equality—women and non-whites have never been, nor are they yet, treated on a par with white men. The existence of a few superstars or token achievers does not mean that Other artists have attained equality. The art world has not yet fully incorporated diverse or Other voices into the larger

discourse—except, of course, as "special" (read separatist) exhibitions such as Latin American Art, Women Artists, Islamic Art, African Art, and so on. The master narratives of art—those that exclude large constituencies of people and present constructed boundaries and hierarchies as *natural* ones—continue to be discriminatory discourses that are rarely challenged. Sexism and racism have become so insidiously woven into the institutional fabric, language, and logic of the mainstream art world that they go almost entirely undetected. Once ferreted out, however, their prevalence cannot be denied. The statistics speak for themselves.

My aim as a scholar and curator is precisely *to ferret out*—to tally, to count, and to throw inequities into high relief, laying bare the powerful ideological mechanisms that ensure some artists are celebrated while others are marginalized. I have dedicated the past twenty-five years of my career to attempting to ensure that the under- or un-represented, the silenced, and the "doubly colonized" —those subjected by both empire and patriarchy, for example—are no longer ignored. I take as my operative assumption the fact that the art "system"—its history, institutions, market, press, and so on—is hegemonic, that it privileges white male creativity to the exclusion of all Others. My driving force as a curator is therefore wholly activist; my aim is to be consistently counter-hegemonic.

These imperatives have led me to examine global art history, to query the canon's Euro-US-centrism, and explore ways of rethinking it. Scholars who are focusing on race and postcolonial studies have had a particular impact on my critical thinking, as have those who are working on issues surrounding the canon and curricula. I have attempted to put into curatorial practice some of the strategies outlined in their approaches, with the *Global Feminisms* exhibition (2007) being my most ambitious attempt at a combined feminist/comparative-studies model, as originally envisioned by scholars such as Ella Shohat, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, among others.

The pursuits outlined above have led to this book, which ultimately asks: how can we get people in the art world *to think about* gender, race, and sexuality, to understand that these are persistent concerns that require action?; how can we all contribute to ensuring that the art world becomes more inclusive?

Several curators throughout the world are addressing, or have addressed, this issue of discrimination head-on. For example, Lucy R. Lippard, Jean-Hubert Martin, Okwui Enwezor, Rosa Martínez, Jonathan Katz, Camille Morineau, Michiko Kasahara, Juan Vicente Aliaga, Cornelia Butler, Simon Njami, Linda Nochlin, Amelia Jones,

and others, are working for equal representation. While their strategies vary enormously, each is a "curatorial activist"—a term I use to describe people who have dedicated their curatorial endeavors almost exclusively to visual culture in, of, and from the margins: that is, to artists who are non-white, non-Euro-US, as well as women-, feminist-, and queer-identified. These curators, and others in similar fields, have committed themselves to initiatives that are leveling hierarchies, challenging assumptions, countering erasure, promoting the margins over the center, the minority over the majority, inspiring intelligent debate, disseminating *new* knowledge, and encouraging strategies of resistance—all of which offers hope and affirmation.

These curators—and others like them interested in art world injustices—have curated everything from biennales and retrospectives to large-scale thematic exhibitions, focusing on both historical and contemporary material. Some have tackled the historical canon, inserting artists into a narrative that had hitherto omitted them because of their sex and/or sexuality. Others have organized large monographic exhibitions of artists who have been historically overlooked, while others still have curated thematic exhibitions of modern and contemporary art that account for a wider range of voices. All these projects are widening the scope of artists on display and thereby expanding the historical canon and/or the contemporary art discourse in general.

THE CANON

The realization that Western art historical canons are problematic is not new. As early as 1971, in her pioneering essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," Nochlin cautioned against women attempting to name female Michelangelos or Picassos. "There are no women equivalents for Rembrandt, Delacroix or Cézanne, Picasso or Matisse," she argued, "any more than there are black American equivalents for the same."[16] The problem, she insisted, is systemic: it lies not in our hormones, if we are women, or in the color of our skin, if we are people of color—but in our institutions and our education. The question of equality centers on the very nature of institutional structures themselves, on patriarchy, and on the white, masculine prerogative that is assumed as "natural." It is precisely this ideological stronghold over women and non-white people that has prevented them from succeeding historically.

If the canon of art history is a hegemony—which I think we can all agree that it is—then, in the words of Griselda Pollock, how can we

"difference it"?[17] Which counter-hegemonic strategies can we employ to ensure that more voices are included, rather than the chosen, elite few? What can we do as arts professionals to offer a more just and fair representation of global artistic production? Should we be working towards a global art history, an art without borders? Should we aim to abolish canons altogether, arguing that all cultural artifacts have significance—in other words, should our goal be a totalizing critique of canonicity itself? Should we be creating new, alternative canons?

In the pages that follow—and drawing on research from the last five decades of postcolonial, race, feminist, and queer theory—I discuss what I believe to be the most successful tactics for addressing inequality. Rather than pursuing unproductive critiques of the existing canon, I have attempted to pry it apart, and in the process uncover strategies for eroding, destabilizing, and dismantling it.

STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE

REVISIONISM

The most frequently cited counter-hegemonic strategy addressing exclusion in the canon is a "revisionist" one, whereby individuals are reclaimed from history and the canon itself is re-written, the principal aim being to include those who had hitherto been refused, forgotten, or hidden. A revisionist approach to the canon typically asks questions such as: who were the women artists from the Renaissance-Baroque period?; who were the main African American painters in Abstract Expressionism?

In the 1970s, when many revisionist projects began—around the same time as the women's and civil-rights movements—it was argued that the resurrection of Others from history should be undertaken before analysis and deconstruction of the canon could begin. As Adrienne Rich argued in 1972, "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women far more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival."[18] A revisionist approach, then, rediscovers what the canon conceals and suppresses; it questions the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures, and looks for the "sins and errors of the past."[19]

Revisionist strategies enable curators to present a more inclusive and integrated selection of works and artists in relation to a particular subject—as was the case, for example, with Norman Kleeblatt's exhibition, *Action/Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940–1976* at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2008,

which revised the timeworn narrative of Abstract Expressionism to include Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Bontecou, Joan Mitchell, Ann Truitt, Lee Krasner, and Norman Lewis—five women and an artist of color who had previously been excluded.

Similarly, feminism can be used as a methodological strategy for exhibitions related to historical periods. For example, at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007, I co-curated with Edward Bleiberg *Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses: Feminism's Impact on Egyptology*, which was dedicated to powerful female figures from Egyptian history. In this exhibition of thirty-five objects, the central object was an important granite head from the Brooklyn Museum's collection of Hatshepsut, the fifth pharaoh of the Eighteenth dynasty (1539–1292 BCE). She was shown alongside the queens Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and Tiye and the goddesses Sakhmet, Mut, Neith, Wadjet, Bastet, Satis, and Nephthys, among others. The exhibition demonstrated how the discipline of Egyptology has been transformed by feminism and the women's movement: conditions in the academic world have improved greatly, with many more women Egyptologists than there were at the beginning of the 20th century; as they observe changes in modern society, both male and female Egyptologists are now more willing to accept that women wielded political power in the ancient world. For example, the older interpretations of Hatshepsut's reign as a violation of Egyptian protocol have fallen out of favor. Today, Egyptologists recognize that Hatshepsut preserved her family's claims to the throne while the male heir was still a child—in recent years, she has metamorphosed from the villain to the heroine of her own story. In much the same way, Egyptologists now recognize Tiye and Nefertiti as their husbands' equal partners in ruling Egypt, rather than as women who attempted to claim more power than was appropriate for a queen. Even Cleopatra—whose reputation among the ancient Romans, and countless historians, was essentially negative—is today recognized primarily as the legitimate guardian of her country's political interests. These fundamental reassessments of historical figures stem from a viewpoint that has been hugely influenced by modern feminism.

While revisionism is an important curatorial strategy, it nevertheless assumes the white, masculinist, Western canon as its center and accepts its hierarchy as a natural given. So, within a revisionist strategy, a fundamental binary opposition is retained, which means that the Other will always necessarily remain subordinated. And as feminist literary theorist Elaine Showalter cautions, "the feminist obsession with correcting, modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing, or even attacking male critical

theory keeps us dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems." [20] We must also be wary of a revisionism that becomes a kind of homage.[21] As Susan Hardy Aiken warns, "One might, by attacking, reify the power one opposes." [22]

Revising the canon to address the neglect of women and/or so-called minority artists, then, is fundamentally an impossible project because, as Pollock argues, "such revision does not grapple with the terms that created that neglect." [23] So, after decades of feminist and postcolonial work that attempts to rectify gaps in the archive, we still face the question posed by her: "How can we make the cultural work of women [and minorities] an effective presence in cultural discourse which changes both the order of discourse and the hierarchy of gender [and race] in one and the same deconstructive move?" [24] (The canon is "politically 'in the masculine' as well as culturally 'of the masculine'" [25]—just as it is politically and culturally "in/of the white".)

Despite these shortfalls, the benefits of the revisionist strategy are many. For example, not only do they 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 visual culture from a wholly different perspective.[26] In revising the art historical canon to include Other artists such as Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Berthe Morisot, and Norman Lewis on an equal footing with their white and/or male counterparts, curators have succeeded in integrating them into the Western canon, thereby offering a broader, more comprehensive view of art history.

AREA STUDIES

While revisionism involves an integrative approach, "area studies" produces new canons and supplements the traditional discourse by focusing on work that is based on either racial, geographical, gendered, or sexual orientation. This type of approach may encourage exhibitions that spotlight Women Artists, African American Art, LGBTQ Art, Middle-Eastern Art, and so on. Again, anything outside the (white, male, Western) center requires "special" attention, and is designated a separate "area."

Since the 1970s, numerous exhibitions in Europe and the USA have adopted this strategy, including *Old Mistresses* (1972), *Women Artists: 1550–1950* (1976), *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* (1994), *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation* (1998), *Africa Remix* (2005), *Hide & Seek* (2010–12), *Women of Abstract Expressionism* (2016), *Queer British Art,*

1861–1967 (2017). Each of these shows added Others to the dominant narrative, but as separate categories of either gender, race, or sexuality. Again, while such projects are inherently revisionist, an area-studies focus is often seen as the most effective way to diversify the historical canon and/or contemporary discourse. These exhibitions are sophisticated and complex studies, but they are viewed as entirely separate from the canon. This is why many postcolonial and feminist theorists have argued against them, claiming that they are ghettoizing, segregating, and culturally and/or biologically essentialist insofar as they isolate artists on the basis of their gender, nationality, and sexuality—or indeed, any other difference—and create specialized, separatist museums and exhibition spaces (for example, the Jewish Museum, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, the Leslie Lohman Gay and Lesbian Museum).

Specialist exhibitions are not always looked upon favorably in the art world itself. In 2004, for example, Christian Rattemeyer, then a curator at Artists Space (an avant-garde institution in New York that has traditionally supported work from the margins), rejected shows on African and LGBTQ art (the latter entitled *Living Legacy: Queer Art Now*) because, according to him, "it is no longer the time to make such limiting judgments for selection," and "we should shy away from exhibitions of works by Women artists, Black artists, or, as in the most recent example, African artists, selected solely on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or nationality."[27] He also argued that there is no longer a need for exhibitions on so-called marginalized groups because they have now been included in contemporary art shows.

On hearing of Rattemeyer's response, the Guerrilla Girls sent him the following letter:

> Dear Sir
>
> We were privileged recently to see a letter that you sent to Harmony Hammond and Ernesto Pujol declining an exhibition proposal they had submitted to your institution.
>
> We are writing to say that we couldn't agree more with the views you expressed in your letter!!!!! You are right that in this post-ethnic era there should no longer be exhibitions of works by "Women artists," "Black artists," "African artists," or, as in the co-curator's proposal, "Queer Artists," or any shows selected solely on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or nationality.

But we feel you didn't go far enough. Let's get real, here! In this post-studio era, how can you justify shows of "video artists," "painters," "sculptors" or "photographers?"

In fact, since, any curatorial intervention limits the reading of artists' work, by pushing it into some thesis or other, we propose there should be no more exhibitions at all!

Sincerely,
Käthe Kollwitz for the Guerrilla Girls

This letter poses important questions, such as: is there no longer a need for exhibitions of work by queer artists, African artists, women artists, or any other groups?; and are we really living in a post-black, post-feminist, post-queer world? In thinking about these issues, it should be noted that some curatorial positions universalize artistic production—for example, we should not assume that the few freedoms LGBTQ individuals have achieved in the USA are replicated in other countries. We cannot claim to live in a post-queer world when in some countries being queer, gay, bisexual, or transgender is punishable by death and in many more it is a criminal offence. It is a grave mistake to assume that the social climate of apparently liberal cities such as Manhattan, Los Angeles, and London is also the social climate of the world, just as we cannot assume that the issues "queers" face in New York are the equivalent to the issues they face in Nebraska. There is, then, a real need for shows that examine what it means to be "queer" on a global scale.

We should perhaps be thinking less about the potentially ghettoizing effects of these types of specialist exhibitions, and more about their positive aspects—for example, as curatorial frameworks that allow us to present outstanding works of art to the public, often for the first time. As Lippard pointed out when she was asked why she had curated the women-only exhibition *26 Contemporary Women Artists* in 1971: "The show itself, of course, is about art. The restriction to women's art has its obvious polemic source, but as a framework within which to exhibit good art it is no more restrictive than, say, exhibitions on German, Cubist, Black and white, soft, young, or new art."[28]

Another key aspect of specialist exhibitions is that they function as curatorial correctives. While many of us long for a time when there will no longer be a need for shows focused exclusively on race, gender, or sexuality, we have not yet reached that point. Without "area studies" exhibitions, Other artists will continue to

be marginalized and made invisible. The key concept here is *visibility*, which is crucial in terms of prominence in the marketplace and in art history. In the 1976 exhibition *Women Artists: 1550–1950*, for example, the curators Linda Nochlin and Sutherland Harris literally resurrected works by women artists, such as Italian painters Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) and Sofonisba Anguissola (1532–1625), from museum storage in the USA and Western Europe. Previously obliterated from history, these artists are now highly visible—they are taught in schools, colleges, and universities, and feature in academic dissertations as well in the major textbooks of art history. In short, women-only exhibitions have had a transformative impact on the art world.

This is also true of exhibitions that have focused exclusively on sexuality—as in *Queer British Art, 1861–1967*, curated by Clare Barlow at Tate Britain in 2017. The blockbuster show sought to present art and (some) ephemera from Britain that reflects, celebrates, and reveals the nuances of non-binary, non-heterosexual, and gender-fluid identities, with a timeframe spanning the abolition of the death penalty for sodomy in 1861 to the de-criminalization of male homosexuality in 1967. From Duncan Grant's homoerotic sketches, Simeon Solomon's veiled lesbo-erotic work, and Man Ray's portrait of Virginia Woolf to Gluck's mannish self-portrait, Joe Orton's library-book collages, and Noël Coward's dressing gown—and ending with explicit works by Francis Bacon and David Hockney—the exhibition was brimming with extraordinary stories and vibrant perspectives. Presenting more than one hundred objects (the majority of which were produced by white males), the show was designed not only to adjust the fact that art history has ignored and glossed over queer artists and artworks but also to showcase works that give voice to oppressed identities. In other words, as Adrian Searle explained in his review in *The Guardian*, the exhibition—which he considered "strange, sexy, heart-wrenching"—was "about stories and lives, and conflicting social mores, as much as of images and objects."[29] Importantly, it included never-before- or rarely-seen objects that the curator had unearthed from the art world's less-travelled paths, including, among many others surprises, tiny lockets designed by Charles Ricketts for Edith Cooper and her life partner Katherine Bradley, and a full-length portrait of Oscar Wilde by Robert Harper Pennington, which was hung beside the actual door to Wilde's cell in Reading jail, where Wilde was imprisoned in the late 19th century for "gross indecency" with other men.

Writing in *The Independent* in 2016, Janet Street-Porter accused Tate Britain of "lumping together" LGBTQ artists, criticizing the view of "queer art" as a movement, and the exhibition's premise as "highly

questionable."[30] However, Barlow was by no means presenting "queer art" as a movement, but rather presenting, in one exhibition, works and objects produced by non-heteronormative artists. Her choice of the word "queer" was intended to designate a fluid term for people of different sexualities and gender identities, and using it in this way allowed her to recount a complicated story of sexuality and desire through works that are often as coded and veiled as they are explicit. As Barlow explained, "We [were] absolutely not presenting it as a closed canon. It [was] the start of a conversation."[31] And it is a conversation that must continue.

Until Other artists have a far stronger foothold in the system and have achieved equality in representation, it is important that we preserve these exhibitions, spaces, curatorial positions, and labels such as "black," "woman," or "queer," even though we may recognize that they are inherently essentialist, ghettoizing, exclusionary, and universalizing, and fail to account for important differences between and among artists' lived experiences. Gayatri Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism," as outlined in her book *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987), is particularly useful in this context. For Spivak, groups may act temporarily "as if" their identities are stable in an effort to create solidarity, a sense of belonging and identity to a group, race, or ethnicity, for the purposes of social or political action. For instance, strategic essentialism might involve the bringing together of diverse agendas of various women's groups to work for a common cause, such as abortion rights or domestic violence. The Women's March on Washington in 2017, initiated by the uproar concerning Donald Trump's election as president of the USA, was a particularly powerful example of strategic essentialism: a million people—of every gender, ethnicity, and religion—came together as "women" protesting. Their causes and concerns were not identical by any means, but they united under an "essentialist" identity, that of women. So, in strategic essentialism, the "essential attributes" are acknowledged to be a construct—that is, the (political) group, somewhat paradoxically, acknowledges that the attributes (black, queer, woman, for example) are not intrinsically essential, but are invoked if they are considered to be strategically and politically useful. Moreover, members of the group maintain the power to decide when the attributes are "essential" and when they are not. In this way, strategic essentialism can be a potent political tool.[32]

RELATIONAL STUDIES: EXHIBITION-AS-POLYLOGUE

In her postcolonial analysis of college curricula, cultural studies scholar Ella Shohat proposes a "relational approach" as the most efficient way

to address Euro-US-centrism and sexism in the classroom.[33] This approach begins with questions such as: what if history was re-conceived as dialogic instead of synchronic? So, instead of thinking, for example, of Modernism and postmodernism as a series of interlocking, related, "-isms," arranged along a linear historical line, they could perhaps be re-conceived as multivocal. Similarly, what if time itself was understood to be wide or kaleidoscopic as opposed to linear?[34] What if works of art and literature were presented ahistorically, ignoring national borders or periodic categories, or were arranged thematically or without a coherent thesis? Or if we were to abolish historic canons, arguing that all art has significance (including cultural artifacts), non-Western and Western alike? Or again, if oppositions and hierarchies (high/low, West/East, white/black) were dismantled? How would such radical redefinitions of the field and transformations in perception affect the contemporary global art world?

Aiken argues that by employing a relational approach we can present multiplicity in terms of an ongoing dialogue—or, more accurately, a polylogue (a term she borrows from philosopher, psychoanalyst, and literary critic Julia Kristeva): "an interplay of many voices, a kind of creative 'barbarism' that would disrupt the monological, colonizing, centristic drives of 'civilization.'"[35] Such an approach becomes not merely what Rich terms "an act of survival," but also a way to "perpetual regeneration."[36] A relational approach to curating, then, is interested not in a monologue of sameness, but in a multitude or cacophony of voices speaking simultaneously. The result, as Pollock explains, is that "the cultural field may be reimagined as a space for multiple occupancy where differencing creates a productive covenant opposing the phallic logic that offers us only the prospect of safety in sameness or danger in difference, of assimilation to or exclusion from the canonized norm."[37] In this type of exhibition, for example, contemporary "Aboriginal art" would not be considered as Aboriginal art but as contemporary art, and would be exhibited alongside art from Japan, the USA, Argentina, Africa, and so on—with no hierarchical implications. It should be emphasized that this strategy is concerned not with assimilation, but with a leveling of hierarchy. It is a fundamental redefining of art practice, transnationally.

A relational approach to curating presents art as if it were a polysemic site of contradictory positions and contested practices. This focus goes beyond a mere description of discrete regions and cultures; it transcends the "additive" approach, collapses the

destructive center-periphery binary, and is essentially postmodern in nature: it is textual, dialogic, and "writerly." According to French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes—whose work also addresses and has had an immense impact on how we perceive the visual world—a writerly text is characterized by heterogeneity and incoherence. It is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."[38] In a "writerly" exhibition, then, the reader, or viewer, can be seen as an active participant in the construction, or "writing" of meaning with respect to the works on view.

Examples of exhibitions that have used a relational approach to curating include *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), *Documenta 11* (2002), *Global Feminisms* (2007), and *Carambolages* (2016), among others. Curatorially, the relational approach pertains to group (versus monographic) exhibitions as it aims to ensure multiple voices. But a group exhibition alone does not always embody the approach, as it is a *deliberate* tactic, a conscious decision on the part of the curator(s) to look beyond Europe and the USA, beyond sex, gender, and race, to arrive at a more equitable representation of contemporary art. It is also an approach that is specific to contemporary art (only rarely is it adopted for exhibitions that focus on artists from the past). Such an exhibition may, for example, focus on 20th-century art that was global in scope, perhaps arranged thematically, and did not assume the "-isms" derived from Western discourse (Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, and so on) as defining moments globally, but rather as context-specific to one region of the world or another. One such example would be the exhibition *Century City* (see pp. 130–37).

Curators who adopt a relational approach highlight cultural differences by presenting a collection of voices that, as Mohanty suggests, "tell alternate stories of difference, culture, power, and agency."[39] Using a model of relational analysis, the curators can place diverse works in dialogic relation to one another in order to underscore what Mohanty refers to as "common differences"—that is, the significant similarities as well as the localized differences between artists across cultures.[40] With careful juxtaposition of works, then, curators are able to draw attention to important differences in the artists' treatment of similar themes. In so doing, they offer a fresh and expanded definition of artistic production for a transnational age, one that acknowledges important differences among artists globally. However, the issue with exhibitions that are thematic, ahistorical, and transnational is that they are rarely understood and often criticized, as with the permanent-collection installations at Tate Modern

(organized by Iwona Blazwick) in 2000 and at Reina Sofía, Madrid, in 2009. Ultimately, people are wary of shows with *unfamiliar* artists and without a strict chronology.

At other times, these exhibitions embody a visual culture paradigm. *Carambolages*—organized by Jean-Hubert Martin in 2016 for the Grand Palais in Paris—is one such example. In this show, Martin (who also curated the iconic *Magiciens de la terre* in 1989), presented an ahistorical, non-chronological, anti-categorical selection of 184 objects, ranging over thousands of years. They consisted of both artworks and artifacts and were chosen for their formal similarities or poetic affinities. For example, a sculpture of a cat by Giacometti was shown alongside a two-thousand-year-old sculpture of a mouse from Oceania; and an 18th-century self-portrait by Flemish artist Nicola van Houbraken—in which the artist peeps through a hole in the canvas—was juxtaposed with a "slash painting" by Lucio Fontana. Importantly, many of the works and artists included in the exhibition were relatively unknown—a feature that was derided by several critics, who longed for masterpieces by more famous artists.[41] Each group of works was arranged in a continuous sequence, with every work not only somehow dependent, either visually or conceptually, on the one that preceded it, but also "announcing" the one that followed it, rather like a game of billiards, where—as Martin points out—a single ball

Installation view, *Carambolages*
Réunion des Musées Nationaux – Grand Palais
March 2, 2016–July 4, 2016
curated by Jean-Hubert Martin

can impact two other balls.[42] Hence the title *Carambolages*, which translates from French as: "double whammy"; "ricochet shot in billiards"; "car crash" or "pile-up."

In the exhibition catalogue, Martin acknowledges Aby Warburg's influence on cross-cultural exhibitions, emphasizing that he (Martin) is not the first curator to organize works of art and artifacts in a personalized manner. Much like Warburg in his picture atlas, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–29), or Sir John Soane in his eccentric London museum, or Duc d'Aumale, in Château de Chantilly, or André Malraux's *The Museum without Walls* (1947), Martin's exhibition underlined the importance of individual interpretation on the part of the viewers, who were perceived as active participants in the construction of meaning. As in Barthes's concept of the writerly text, these "readers" are encouraged to perceive the exhibition as "multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives."[43] *Carambolages* demonstrated no overarching or coherent thesis: objects were presented context-free—that is, without wall labels (although visitors with smartphones could download captions at the entrance). In the exhibition, Martin invented what he called "an artistic game," with no captions, but with the eye as the medium for enjoying the exhibition. "Listen to your Eyes" by Maurizio Nannucci was used as a motto in neon letters in the first room. According to the curator, "You don't need cultural references to enjoy a work of art."[44] Instead, the viewers' senses were guided so that they could understand what they saw with reference to other works from different periods and styles. Martin's expressed aim was to break down the traditional approach to art so as to transcend the borders of genres, eras, and distinct cultures.

Carambolages was a postmodern cabinet of curiosities that swerved far from the strict periodic categories once typical of the museum and art history. As Martin explained, "The history of art is only one factor among others when it comes to understanding a work...It is imperfect because instead of there being a succession of big historical shifts, there is on the contrary an enormous continuity between those who painted the Chalet cave and today's artists. Artists have asked themselves the same questions across time."[45] In this heterogeneous, ahistorical show, unknown artists and artisans were presented as equals to the "celebrity" artists—and deliberately so. In arguing that all cultural artifacts have significance, Martin's show was a totalizing critique of canonicity itself.