TROUBLING CANONS

Curating and exhibiting women's and feminist art, a roundtable discussion

Helena Reckitt

The participants

Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, Artists, Berlin

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Introduction

In an online discussion that took place between December 2015 and February 2016, artists, curators, and scholars consider how female artists are incorporated into dominant as well as feminist canons and under what terms. Women artists have been and continue to be excluded from or marginalized within almost all artistic canons to date. The situation is even more extreme for female artists who work in non-Western locations, who are frequently treated as exotic outsiders if not ignored altogether. Meanwhile, resistance to and backlash against feminist ideas and values are underway throughout the

world, at the same time as many archives devoted to women's and feminist work face closure. There is therefore a pronounced need for scholars, curators, and institutions to contest the absence of women artists from and devaluation within dominant narratives by researching and foregrounding artists who were close to existing canons but marginalized because of their gender, as well as artists who contested mainstream movements and developed their own collective as well as personal paths. This effort also calls for the development of institutions that support this art and guard against its future erasure.

Yet while it is clear that existing canons have not served female artists well, the question of how to expand canons is not easily answered. It is not a simple matter of inserting forgotten women artists into existing traditions, especially when those traditions were predicated upon excluding them in the first place. Incorporating artists into histories that they were never part of has violent connotations. Such tactics can end up validating dominant canons, refreshing them with material from the "margins," which is removed from its original context and leaves prevailing values and dominance intact. These practices also risk tokenism, especially when the appearance of one or two "exceptional" women in dominant narratives is seen as evidence that sexism no longer exists in the art world and feminist struggle is no longer needed.

Challenging the idea that canons can be straightforwardly expanded, artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz propose the concept of "troubling canons." Tactics of troubling canons draw attention to the ideologies, inclusions, and exclusions that underpin canon formation, including canons of feminist art. To trouble canons means to pinpoint the logic of competition (between artists and mediums, genres and regions) that canons both symptomize and perform. Artworks from the past cannot be easily recuperated, the practice of troubling canons reminds us, as all acts of translation entail processes of misunderstanding and incorporation, identification and desire. Based in intersectional politics, this approach does not separate critiques of masculinity from those of whiteness, heteronormativity, cis-gender superiority, and other dominant value and classification systems.

To understand why women artists have been systemically denigrated and ignored, we also need to look beyond canon formation to the historical circumstances in which male artists and masculinist values came to dominate. Women, after all, have historically been designated secondary roles in the art world: as lovers and wives, models and muses, and, more recently, gallery owners, collectors, curators, and critics. That women still carry the responsibility for childcare, as well as the socially reproductive labor that maintains life, profoundly impacts how their work is recognized and valued. If we are to reverse the endemic 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.

Helena: Let's start with a broad question. Why – or do – we need artistic canons, including regional, national, and international canons, and those of art made by women and feminists?

Angela: It's not a matter of needing canons, since we can't rid them from our political will alone. The "canon" is, principally, the outcome of the art world as an extremely competitive working environment and market – one so extreme that it makes the dead compete with the living. This "market context" (which extends beyond sales rooms and museums' acquisitions) is defined by a cycle of flows between symbolic, cultural and economic capital, as Pierre Bourdieu argued (1986), and now this is the case even more than ever. Art history contributes to the competition in various ways, even if not out of choice. It is great that feminist history has devised methodologies to question the criteria for inclusion, and we can keep going further, attacking the very idea of the canon. But we must be pragmatic and understand the material conditions in which we practice and in which women artists work, so that our critique does not hurt the latter. Why? Because we are a minority. If most art historians were feminists who negated the canon, the situation would be completely different.

Pauline/Renate: Connecting to Angela's point, we would add that in addition to the canon, identity categories such as "woman" are not self-chosen but have been imposed on us. The "we" of women and even of "feminism" have been heavily opposed in the history of feminisms (in the plural) for being excluding. From our perspective, feminist politics – and this is also true for the format of the "feminist exhibition" – can only be useful again if they allow for difference without categorizing and fi xing. To call us "women" or "female artists" is too much and too little information at the same time. We would rather opt for troubling canons! Troubling canons through exhibitions, through writing, through artistic
practices!

Mirjam: I really like the term "troubling canons," since it conjures up feminist tactics of infiltrating and subverting existing power relations and domains. To get back to the question, "does feminist art history need a canon?" My answer is bluntly "YES." I am convinced that, we, as feminist art historians, researchers, curators, and artists, need to and should continue to canonize. I know that canonizing books on art and feminism can be dismissed as fixed entities or as incomplete since there will always be names, domains, and theoretical viewpoints that are not included; but let's treat them as bodies that grow through time. Canonizing helps us systematically to turn information into knowledge. And knowledge grows and deepens only when there are certain frames of reference that are shared. With all the possibilities and information that the Internet provides, especially in this era of self-canonization, I recognize the need for research/publications on feminist art in gender studies and art history, not to mention curatorial and museum practice. 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, analyze, and criticize, 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 fi eld for new generations.

Angela: Because of the way the art world works at present (extreme competition often

being its hidden or apparent principle), we cannot have feminism as a naive 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" or "rejections." So, we don't need just celebratory feminist curating but revelatory feminist curating. And the moment is right and ripe for the latter, because austerity has hit women so hard that the gender divide has grown and is even more visible.

Camille: I have to start by saying that "canon" doesn't translate well in French, although it appears to be inherited from French structuralist thought. Somehow it got lost in the process of being developed abroad. The term is now seldom used in France because literally it evokes something very aggressive and warlike; so that "attacking the canon" means something like "bombing a bomb." The closest I can get to answering your question would be saying that this "canon" needs to be restructured; and this position is not only about vocabulary but also a personal strategy that I have been using, quite efficiently, in France. To build something strong, you have to find a strong base. This base for me, today, comprises information and archives: to build a new canon, we need to structure and enhance the historical narrative with precise information on women artists. Being feminist ("être féministe ") today means, for me, " être historienne ." I am looping the loop with Linda Nochlin there. That's why I created AWARE (Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions), a website devoted to academic research and archives.

Mirjam: One of the ironies of building a strong canon of feminist art is that it makes the struggles experienced by earlier generations of women less visible. In 1975, Carolee Schneemann painted an idealistic vision of the future in her contribution to the catalogue accompanying the *Magna* exhibition, organized by Valie Export. Schneemann had no doubt that by 2000, young female artists would not be thwarted as she had been or suffer the restrictions she had encountered. They would be taught by mainly female teachers; they would learn about pioneering female artists and the ways in which female creativity had developed over centuries; as women, they would no longer be exceptions in the art world; and besides reading merely about "man and his symbols," they would read books

on “the matriarchal origins of art.” She concluded: “The only negative thing about all this is that these future young women who will have acquired all this knowledge, will never believe that our pioneering work immobilized and isolated us; that the belief in the importance of a female art history was despised and dismissed as heretical and false” (1975: 12). More than forty years after Schneemann’s imagined future, her prophetic words are still not far off the mark. And, heaven, no, feminist canonizing is not simply about adding names to existing histories.

Helena: Of course Nochlin highlighted the limitations of art-historical strategies that incorporate female artists into existing canons in her germinal essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971). Picking up Nochlin’s thread several decades later, Helen Molesworth explored the implications of curatorial conventions that insert works by women and feminists into museum galleries that were “structured by their very absence” (Molesworth 2010: 504). The alternative, for Molesworth, is not to cordon off women’s and feminist art into separate rooms but to curate galleries that include artworks from different eras, genres, and media, so that they “touch” and affect a form of mutual contagion (2010: 510). Drawing on Molesworth, I am interested in how we can undertake tactics of curatorial transparency and experimentation that “trouble” canonical conventions and make exclusions and omissions visible. Catherine de Zegher attemptedsomething along these lines with *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, 1996. That exhibition excavated the work of under-recognized women artists while questioning the terms under which such art becomes visible. Given that work by women often reaches its public belatedly, Pauline and Renate, can you speak about how you evoke
artworks’ latent potential in your work?

Pauline/Renate: We use Elizabeth Freeman’s term “temporal drag” (2010) to describe not just the – trans-temporal – type of performance that we include in our fi lm installations but also, more generally, the way in which we connect to the past. Temporal drag, or “transtemporal drag,” as we prefer to say, can be seen as an embodiment in which different times cross. Thus, it is important for us not to invoke the idea that we

recreate the past or reenact figures from the past. We like to complicate the notion of the past as fi nished and accessible. Sharon Hayes, in our last fi lm installation, *I WANT* , introduces herself both as punk-poet Kathy Acker and as whistle-blower Chelsea Manning. She also still acts in the film as artist Sharon Hayes with references to her own practice of performance and historiography. We like to create and visualize lines of desire between present-time performers with their contemporary practices and elements or materials from the past. Desire, here, is nothing we own but something which draws lines between the performers, the material, and the beholders/visitors of the exhibition. This includes anachronism, which might be uncanny. Very often we not only choose the past but we are haunted by it: not just in relation to violent traumatic events but, for example, by artworks that leave their imprints on us. While we don't choose what affects us, we might still be able to work on our responses. For our discussion here, it seems to be important to not produce the illusion that we have unmediated access to the past but rather to complicate the relations between past, present-time, and future.

Helena: To what extent do the lineages that form today's international canon include female and feminist artists? Are there dangers when this work is incorporated into dominant artistic narratives?

Mirjam: It's about time that feminist legacies infiltrate dominant artistic narratives. However, where it has happened, the process has been very slow and not very systematic. In the Netherlands, a gendered art history at universities is suffering from a backlash.

Angela: The first question is alarmingly easy to answer: with the exception of postmodernism (in the visual arts, mid-1970s–mid-1990s), where for various reasons but, principally, due to the power of the feminist analysis of artworks, women artists entered the canon, most women were excluded. They continue to be. Regarding the second question: when a tiny number of women artists enter dominant narratives, especially if they repudiate or dis-identify with feminism, the danger should be obvious: their "success" would be, and has been, used to undermine: a. feminist politics, b. the potential visibility of most other women artists and c. any transformative politics in general (because

"making women who are worth it visible" is meant to suggest that the completion-based, profi t-oriented, pyramidal art world we have is ultimately not so bad). Typically, women artists' names are taken as proof that "there's nothing wrong with the system; and even if there was, it's been now fixed." This was what 1990s post-feminism argued. I think therefore that the question of how to avoid token visibility of a few "special" women while scripting women in the era's narrative poses a dilemma for feminist art historians.

Camille: In my (French) point of view, a feminist canon does indeed exist. It has been crucial and needs to be important but not over-empowering; otherwise it will turn itself into another aggressive and "theocratic" form of thinking. Other than specifically feminist "canons," we need to reincorporate women (and also men from the margins) into a "main" – to be reinvented – history. Carrying out this essential, retroactive history is a huge undertaking that has to be done collectively, by all historians and not only those informed by feminist thinking.

Koyo: I would add that when we look down the line of the generations and movements, women artists have always been under-represented, and black women artists have been a minority in this minority. Nor has this changed significantly today. The small minority of women artists who are acclaimed in different arenas of the art world should not blind us to the fact that patriarchy and sexism are still very much operative. Moreover, the cultural bias, combined with the lack of knowledge of and interest in cultural settings foreign to the Euro-American heritage, places the work of African women artists in a precarious corner of the global art scene. Consequently, a gendered and identitarian perspective remains a politicalnecessity in curatorial discourse and practice.

Camille: I agree with you both, but I want to add that not all women artists have been feminists, so we need to have three different, strongly interwoven approaches to this "incorporation" in the canon. First, re-incorporating women who were close to existing canons (movements, styles, groups) but forgotten by critics and historians because of their gender. Second, recognizing the importance of women who have questioned these canons (most of them feminists, but not only). Third, re-inventing canons for women (but

also, sometimes, men) who, as a group, and if reconsidered seriously, have proposed in their time new canons which have been neglected.

Koyo: Building on Camille's point about female artists' relationship to feminism, I would note that the early 1980s saw the rise of the concept of womanism as a concept that would be more inclusive than feminism and was championed by the African-American novelist Alice Walker. The preference of womanism over feminism among black women deserves mention: it stems from the marginalization of women of color in the most prevalent forms of feminism and from the fact that African women and women of African descent have been disappointed by white radical feminism, which they regard as often oblivious of their realities. This lack of cohesion – and the quest for it – is what can be found in the work of the fi ve African women artists whose work I bring together in the exhibition *Body Talk: Feminism, Sexuality and the Body in the Work of Six African Women Artists*.

Pauline/Renate: What would happen if we would have different exhibitions called "art and feminism" that showed mostly works by women from non-Euro-American contexts, or queer works which deal with migration and diaspora, or mostly works by trans and queer artists – without labeling them as such? This might help to subvert the notion of mainstream and margin, and thus trouble the canons, instead of adding the margin to the overall picture (which leaves the hierarchies in the realm of art intact).

Helena: What are the possibilities, and problems, in constructing alternative female or feminist artistic lineages?

Angela: I am not sure what is meant by "alternative." If this means a separate/ separatist women's lineage, it can be catastrophic. If it means a feminist lineage, it is necessary as a great aid for younger generations to avoid re-inventing the wheel and for putting into place a feminist continuum that demonstrates the long-term, unstoppable, and courageous struggles of feminists against immense obstacles.

Camille: Amazing possibilities, but problems if we forget to check that these new "canons" or groups have/might have included men. A contemporary example: if one adds women artists into the history of pop, one finds an international and political movement . . . which in turn includes interesting male artists who were not in the first "official" pop group.

Kerryn: That was the focus of the 2015 Tate Modern exhibition *The World Goes Pop*, which revealed many international artists in a story long dominated by a male Anglo-American cast. There is however the risk of throwingthe baby out with the bath water. In an attempt to tell a different story about pop art, Tate's exhibition excluded artists who many would consider the key proponents of pop. There is a delicate balance between simultaneously recognizing and challenging the canon.

Helena: That's interesting. I had a different critique of that exhibition. While it included a lot of terrific, under-known work from diverse geopolitical positions, I was not entirely convinced about the pop art framework. Instead of a productive context for artists who were concerned with populist and vernacular tropes, it seemed like a way of drawing audiences – pop sells! – in which lesser-known practices lined up under pop's dominant narrative.

Helena: What does the visibility or otherwise of female or feminist artists tell us about art-historical, curatorial, market-driven, and other processes of validation?

Kerryn: We have to recognize the impact of childbirth and childcare on the visibility of women practitioners, be they artists, curators, or art historians. In 2013, *The Guardian* (see Sedghi 2013) reported on a study carried out by the East London Fawcett (ELF) Group which highlighted the relative (in)visibility of UK women artists. The survey compared the percentage (61.7%) of female students enrolled in British undergraduate arts and design courses to the number of female artists represented by commercial galleries and awarded solo exhibitions in London. Only 31% of the artists were women and only 5% of the galleries represented an equal number of male and female artists. 1 It

seems obvious, but the timing of an artist's ascendance frequently coincides with the peak in a woman's fertility. In London at least half of aspiring women artists, by choice or necessity, seem to move on to other things before achieving commercial gallery representation. The processes of validation are all interconnected, and it can be difficult to retroactively attend to an artist who has been neglected, for whatever reason, by the system.

Angela: This has important implications for how artistic and other labor is valued in the art world, especially given that today, unlike earlier periods addressed by feminism, in Britain, the U.S., and most likely elsewhere, we probably have more female than male art graduates, and so potentially more female than male artists. Partial evidence suggests that greater numbers of women in the art world has not meant greater numbers of "successful" women. If one did the research, I am sure one would find that what Greg Sholette (2011) called "dark matter" – the vast mass of invisible, surplus artists whose non-success is essential for making the happy few stars shine brighter – is mostly female. More research needs to be done to establish why this is the case. I am sure that social reproduction labor, typically women's work and its values, would be found to play a huge role in "art-historical, curatorial, market-driven, and other processes of validation." And this role would be defined by its very absence, the eclipsing of this labor in relation to the 24/7 networking and mobility that the post-Fordist artist must embody.

Koyo: From the perspective of contemporary African societies, for the most part, being an artist, whether a man or a woman, is not regarded as a respectable professional activity. Unless, of course, one is internationally acclaimed and can thus brandish the visible symbols of material success in much the same way as a successful banker or lawyer might. In the case of women, though, there seems to be a noticeable hierarchy of acceptance. There is a classification that differentiates between performing arts and cinema (and, in that, acting or directing), and the visual arts (and in that, it is almost exclusively painting that is recognized). There is a pervasive assumption that one becomes an artist because one has not succeeded in getting a "real" job. Another pervasive assumption, touching performing women artists in particular, is that they are

probably loose women of easy virtue. In such a context, when a woman manages to establish herself as an artist, she is expected to be a painter who produces nicely decorative works devoid of any political concepts. While this is a bit of an exaggeration, it is clear that in Africa, the emergence of female artists as full active producers of meaning is a recent phenomenon – except, perhaps, in South Africa, which in any case has from every angle an exceptional position in the entire continent.

Mirjam: In my curatorial practice I have been conscious of the need to trouble certain canonical conventions within feminism itself. While preparing the 2009 show *rebelle. Art and Feminism 1979–2009* , I realized too late that I had overlooked the influence of the radical and activist nature of the goddess and spirituality movement of the 1970s. Around 1980, when I became infected by feminist art history, this movement was widely dismissed as escapist, nostalgic, essentialist, and anti-intellectual. Thirty years later, I had failed to give this work adequate acknowledgment. So I decided to organize *Female Power. Matriarchy, Spirituality and Utopia*, 2013, an exhibition combining work by artists of the 1970s and contemporary female artists, which gives a new perspective on the spiritual, feminist legacy of the twentieth century.

Koyo: Since the 1990s, the existence of a specifi cally African – and black – feminism, together with the spread of artistic practices, and the economics of art, to international networks, have given shape to the development of a black feminist art. Stemming from the continent and the Diaspora, this black feminist art depicts bodies that continue a tradition of activism and freedom of expression. A lot has been written about the divide between Western feminism and feminism in Africa. One of the major critiques foregrounded by African feminists is that Western feminism has done little to understand the cultural specificities at play in the global struggle for liberation from male-dominated regimes. In addition, African women tended to see Western feminism as being anti-man and anti-birth and as committed to establishing female homosexuality as a contentious issue. African feminism, conversely, is perceived to be pro-man, pro-marriage, pro-natal, and definitely heterosexual. In other words, a woman's independence and freedom is not achieved at the costs of losing the social status that marriage and motherhood provides.

Helena: What have been the important exhibitions of women's and feminist art for you? What have been their particular strengths and shortcomings?

Angela: They are all important, no matter any shortcomings.

Camille: I agree. All these group shows have been landmarks, if only because they have been so rare and most often the result of a fight.

Kerryn: Exhibitions like *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, curated by Connie Butler in 2007, have undoubtedly affected the landscape in which we work as curators today. I acknowledge that exhibitions of women-only artists have been and continue to be necessary, but it is important to recognize the potential of solo exhibitions in changing perceptions and challenging the canon. Some of the most memorable exhibitions I have seen over the past decade have been retrospectives of women artists: Ana Mendieta at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2004), Eva Hesse at the Jewish Museum (2006), and Louise Bourgeois at Tate Modern (2007–8). There are others, of course, but these stand out for me because they convincingly conveyed the depth and breadth of the individual artists' practices, and in so doing, whether advertently or not, advanced the cause of feminism.

Mirjam: I cherish them all. From the first show on art and feminism I ever saw in particular, the Dutch exhibition *Feministische Kunst Internationaal* in 1979, to *Inside the visible*, which Helena mentioned, to *WACK!* , which Kerryn refers to, up to Camille's ambitious curatorial effort, *Elles@centrepompidou* in 2009, and Bojana Pejić's *Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe in 2009–2010*.

Helena: I value how these big group exhibitions evoke the complex discursive climate within 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. *Gender Check* was unusual for including a number of male artists, which most feminist surveys have not

done. Together with *elles@centrepompidou* , *Gender Check* was also one of the few big feminist exhibitions to include contemporary artworks. Another key exhibition that foregrounded living artists is Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin's 2007 *Global Feminisms*, which took on the challenge of framing art from around the world in feminist terms.

Camille: In terms of how these exhibitions contributed to processes of canonization, I would say that they made artists and their works visible; they started a reflection, they questioned a narrative and initiated a new/a plurality of new narratives. A "canon" takes, if not centuries, then dozens of years to build. So we are in a process.

Angela: However, while exhibitions are important platforms for mediating the struggles of feminism to the general public, the exhibition-form has dangers, not least in terms of what it does to artistic labor (see Dimitrakaki 2012). The power of what I would call biopolitical artwork that is realized in existing social relations, such as Tanja Ostojic's *Looking for a Husband with EU Passport* (2000–05), is diminished when it is disciplined, literally made to be exhibited as "art documentation" (Groys 2002). Much radical art today is no longer "visual art." The only reason it gets "exhibited" [is] because this is a win-win situation for the patriarchal-capitalist complex: it wins because it shows that this work is just like any other, "showable," and doesn't require any new organization of art mediation; and it wins because the exhibition form is, by default, a market aesthetic. Being exhibited is to be seen, is to circulate, to enter a circuit of exchange. In addition, and perhaps to state the obvious, exhibitions can also undermine the validity and honesty of feminist politics when they take place under the signs of corporate sponsors such as the BP in the Tate. There we saw the work of black women artists and Sylvia Pankhurst exhibited under the BP sun, which surely cannot be justified as a positive development for feminism (Horne 2014).

Helena: Moving from representation to infrastructure, have the institutions that sponsored these exhibitions subsequently changed their practices to reflect feminist principles?

Camille: I find it hard to generalize anything about institutions. They are not coherent

enough – as hospitals or banks would be – to be analyzed as an object. Behind these exhibitions are mostly people, individuals, who carried diffi cult projects, very often "against" internal institutional resistance. I hope my curatorial colleagues can back me up on this and help me to explain that institutions are not driven by politics but by a bunch of more or less coherent lobbies who conflict rather than collude.

Angela: I do not have the data to answer this, but I doubt that institutions have changed, because austerity-capitalism makes these institutions compete for funding and therefore expand in whatever "novelty direction" brings in more people. Finances rather than commitment to politics drives institutions, and if eminists came up with huge audiences and sustained funding, we'd see big changes.

Kerryn: Unfortunately, it is often a case of "Catch-22." As I mentioned before, in order to attract audiences and maintain a fi nancially viable program, museums have to exhibit artists with name recognition, which few women artists (particularly non-Western women) have. On the other hand, these artists can only become familiar if someone takes the risk and presents their work. I can only speak for my institution, Tate Modern, where we are actively seeking to challenge and expand the canon, both in terms of previously neglected women artists and those working outside the traditional centers of London, Paris, and New York. For example, I am working on a retrospective of Fahrelnissa Zeid (1901–1991), who was born in Turkey and had a very successful career in Europe and the Middle East, arguably influenced in part due to her
position in high society. While no one questions the importance of curating such an exhibition, Zeid is relatively unknown today, and the pressures to attract an audience are real. Essentially, at Tate we acknowledge that some exhibitions are not financially viable, and yet we still commit to doing them because they are important, and in the long term we hope they will change the way art is viewed, understood, and historicized. However, realistically there are a limited number of exhibitions like this that big institutions can afford to do, especially in these turbulent financial times. It is a process, and there are real constraints, but I think the results are becoming visible both in our exhibitions program, and in our collection displays. Rewriting the canon requires a huge collective

commitment and effort. One has to step outside the historical processes of validation and look anew, not just once or twice, but every day.

Helena: Artists' visibility often stems from who paid attention to their work at the time and how much access they had to influential institutions and publicity circuits. So artists working in regional and non-Western areas have been disadvantaged when it comes to their work being disseminated and historicized. This is why self-initiated archives, like the Women's Art Library in London, which artists set up in the early 1980s as a slide repository of their work, are so important. Even if this art wasn't recognized or valued at the time, the library is a source for further research and exploration. It has latent potential. The 35mm slides themselves possess a materiality that exceeds their documentary function. Conveying artists' instructions and aspirations, they are spaces for what WAL's curator, Althea Greenan, calls "urgent corrections or playful chat." 2 As the custodian who oversees how the collection is organized, stored, and used, Greenan becomes a belated collaborator and advocate for women artists that she rarely meets. The durational work that she provides to care for and keep these histories alive resonates with longstanding feminist attention to the kind of under-valued yet necessary work of background maintenance labor that Angela terms social reproduction.

Helena: How have collecting practices impacted public and private museums and foundations?

Camille: That's a very important question, as 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.

Kerryn: I agree with Camille. Collections sit at the heart of museums, and this is where transformation really needs to take place. It is the only way we can ensure that women

artists are recognized permanently and repeatedly. Temporary exhibitions might be more visible in the short term, but they quickly come and go.

Helena: It's not only collections that sit at the heart of museums but collectors and their money and influence! Targeting collectors to support initiatives that challenge the status quo might be one tactic we can adopt.

Mirjam: Collecting is one thing. Ending up in a cellar – as happens to many artworks – is another. Museums need to develop exhibition policies that not only show work by women artists repeatedly but that also acknowledge feminist legacies, as Angela remarked earlier, not just in celebratory but in revelatory ways. Canonizing means to me also a sort of sustainability in which museum collections can play an important role, especially since many museum collections are put online and made accessible for research.

Helena: On sustainability, a gap often exists between the lack of support that female artists receive during their lives and how they are "discovered" by the art world at the end of their lives or when they have died. Several commercial galleries have recently done well from female artists' estates. I'd like to see them offering the same level of commitment to living women artists.

Helena: Aside from exhibitions and collections, what else must we focus on?

Angela: For me, nothing beats academic research and the depths it can reach, in terms of data provision, interpretation, and in identifying the contradictions that inhere in our struggle. Contradictions cannot be resolved, but how they are handled can make or break you. And, of course, we need activism – feminist activism in the arts. Where are our current feminist art-historical collectives, our feminist free schools? Is there at least a website where feminists in the art world can make public positions on the lamentable state of women across the globe? Do feminist charities even understand how our work connects to "real women"?

Camille: I agree with Angela about the importance of academic research, the production of new information, the re-creation of new narratives and also archives. Most women artists have suffered from lack of recognition, and consequently lack of commentaries, publications, interest . . .. So that most of the material is lost. Reconstructing the information and securing the archives is essential. Thinking, collecting, archiving . . .. These are the three crucial achievements that we should now focus on, after the activist and exhibition period. We need to go beyond activism and build something; and find appropriate means to build. Building information means raising money, gaining power, and that should be done with the help of institutions, money . . . and men!

Helena: Picking up Angela's point about activism, I am inspired by the work of the U.S. group Working Artists and the Greater Economy (W.A.G.E.), which campaigns to regulate the artist fees paid by non-profit art institutions. W.A.G.E. awards a certificate to nonprofits that follow processes of best practice. Setting up a feminist code of best practice could be a powerful tool for agitating on the level of collections and exhibitions. It could also put pressure on art institutions to invest in the support systems of social reproduction that sustain cultural production from childcare, parental leave, and provisions for people with disabilities, to fair pay and employment practices. This strategy calls for feminist curatorial attention to shift to what Ruth Noack calls the "production (of work and discourse and political practice and solidarity) instead of representation" (quoted in Dimitrikaki and Perry, 2013).

Angela: This approach would be immensely productive, possibly cheaper, and it is politically necessary. It is one way to shift from canon formation to awareness raising.

Helena: Indeed. As we know, art institutions are adept at exhibiting challenging content – from feminist and other critical perspectives that call for new practices of collectivity and sharing – while resisting such art's deeper implications. Beyond agitating for more, better, and more diverse exhibitions and collections of women's and feminist art, we need to transform the conditions under which these activities occur.

Pauline/Renate: We would like to introduce a third term since we prefer to speak of practices instead of representation or production. The political effects that might be set off by the art exhibition take place between the beholders/visitors that enter the space and encounter objects, spatial arrangements as well as other visitors. Processes of becoming cannot happen "in" an artwork; they need a process of someone being displaced from their position and identities. For us, desire is an important mode of connecting and disconnecting, of affirming displacement and of opening up to the unpredictable future of dealing with difference, which an exhibition might very well push along.

Helena: What else can we do to build new futures for feminist art and curating?

Camille: We need to work together, to help each other to re-create an international team of researchers/academics who build a new narrative and turn the history of art upside down. But while we are turning it upside down, let's not forget the "down side." The future must be woven into the past; retroactive history must take into account the "old" history and rework in from its center instead of attacking it from its peripheries.

Pauline/Renate: For us, intersectionality is very important. We can't separate feminist critique either from a critique of whiteness and hegemonic cultural identity or from queer politics. Not only because these intersect in our own lives but because it doesn't make sense politically to isolate the different directions of political intervention. Which makes it very often complicated, because you don't want to just add up terms – feminist, queer, of color, anti-capitalist, etc. – and because each term again excludes other critiques. It seems that there isn't a solution except to always subvert each of these terms, to always include other perspectives than the one that is generally subsumed, and of course to avoid new fixations or categorizations.

Notes

1 The researchers surveyed 134 commercial galleries collectively representing 3,163 artists.
2 Althea Greenan, email to Helena Reckitt, February 29, 2016.

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