

In Sight: Visual Culture

Series Editor: Nicholas Mirzoeff

This series promotes the consolidation of the interdisciplinary field of visual culture in academic study. These books offer a thematic approach to visual culture in a way that is both accessible and rigorous. The series is designed to provide a critical and theoretical framework for the study of visual culture. The books are intended as a resource for students and scholars alike.

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THE GUERRILLA GIRLS

INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION TO THE GUERRILLA GIRLS' BEDSIDE COMPANION TO THE HISTORY OF WESTERN ART

THERE IS A GOOD PRINCIPLE, WHICH
CREATED ORDER, LIGHT, AND MAN,
AND AN EVIL PRINCIPLE, WHICH
CREATED CHAOS, DARKNESS, AND
WOMEN.

—PYTHAGORAS, 6TH CENTURY B.C.

GIRLS BEGIN TO TALK AND TO
STAND ON THEIR FEET SOONER
THAN BOYS BECAUSE WEEDS
GROW MORE QUICKLY THAN
GOOD CROPS.

—MARTIN LUTHER, 1535

INSTEAD OF CALLING THEM
BEAUTIFUL, THERE WOULD BE
MORE WARRANT FOR DESCRIB-
ING WOMEN AS THE UNESTHETIC
SEX. NEITHER FOR MUSIC, NOR
FOR POETRY, NOR FOR FINE ART,
HAVE THEY REALLY AND TRULY
ANY SENSE OR SUSCEPTIBILITY.

—ARTHUR SCHOENHAUER, 1891

Forget the stale, male,
pale, Yale textbooks,
this is Art Herstory
101!

If you were to believe
what many of us were taught in
school and museums, you would
think a clear line of achievement
links one genius innovator to the
next. For example, Michelangelo
paves the way for Caravaggio. Or, a
few hundred years later, Monet
begets Cézanne, who influences
Picasso, who brings us to Pollock.
This is the canon that—until recent-
ly—most of us took for granted as the
history of Western art. It reduced
centuries of artistic output to a
bunch of white male masterpieces
and movements, a world of “semi-
nal” and “potent” art where the few
women you hear about are white,
and even they are rarely mentioned

and never accorded a status anywhere near the big boys. Now, the Guerrilla Girls
admire the old “masters”—and lots of young ones, too. But we also believe—along
with most contemporary scholars—that the time has come, once and for all, for the
canon to be fired.

The famous query by feminist artists and art historians goes, “Why haven’t there
been more great women artists throughout Western history?” The Guerrilla Girls
want to restate the question: “Why haven’t more women been *considered* great
artists throughout Western history?” And we have a lot more questions (see below),
because even though making it as an artist isn’t easy for *anyone*, the history of art
has been a history of discrimination.

Look at the attitudes toward women emanating from some of the most celebrated
male minds of Western culture (quotations, above). Notice how little these attitudes

Who are the Guerrilla Girls?

We are a group of
women artists and arts
professionals who
fight discrimination.
We're the conscience
of the art world, coun-
terparts to the mostly
male tradition of
anonymous do-gooders
like Robin Hood,
Batman, and the Lone
Ranger. We have pro-
duced over 80 posters,
printed projects, and
actions that expose
sexism and racism in
the art world and the
culture at large. We
wear gorilla masks to
keep the focus on the
issues rather than our
personalities. We use
humor to prove that
feminists can be funny.
Our work has been
passed around the
world by kindred spir-
its who consider them-
selves Guerrilla Girls
too. We could be any-
one; we are every-
where.

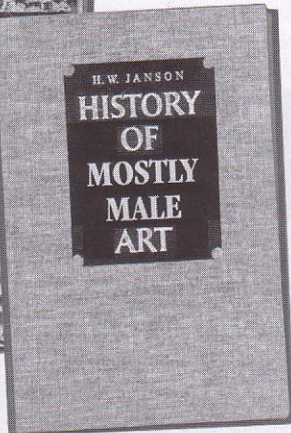
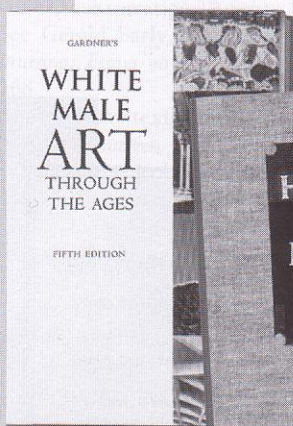
*Why do we always have to be
called "women artists"? They
don't call Rembrandt and
Van Gogh "male artists."*

*Why does being African-
American and female make
it twice as hard for my
work to be remembered?*

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

EDMONIA LEWIS





changed from the 6th century B.C. to the 19th century A.D. (Remember, women didn't even get the vote in the U.S. until 1919, in France until 1945.) With misogyny and racism the ideologies of the day, backed up with repres-

sive laws, it is amazing that any women became artists at all, especially when you realize that until this century, women were rarely allowed to attend art schools, join artists' guilds or academies, or own an atelier. Many were kept from learning to read or write. For most of history, women have, by law, been considered the property of their fathers, husbands, or brothers, who almost always believed women were put on earth to serve them and bear children.

The truth is that, despite prejudice, there have been lots of women artists throughout Western history. From ancient Greece and Rome there are accounts of women painters who earned more than their male counterparts. In the Middle Ages, nuns made tapestries and illuminated manuscripts. In the Renaissance, daughters were trained to help in their fathers' ateliers; some went on to have careers of their own. In the 17th and 18th centuries, women excelled at portraiture and broke new ground in the scientific observation of plants and animals. In the 19th century, women cross-dressed for success or lived in exile, far enough from home to behave as they pleased. In the 20th century, the ranks of white women artists and women artists of color swelled. These artists were part of every 20th-century "ism" and started a few of their own, too.

A WOMAN BY ANY OTHER NAME...

For years the Guerrilla Girls have been using the label "women and artists of color" to describe the "others" we represent. But we've always felt the phrase was inadequate because it's unclear where women of color fit in: they are BOTH women AND artists of color. Furthermore, the history of Western art is primarily a history of white Europeans in which people of color have been excluded and marginalized. So, while we declare that when we use the word "women" we mean ALL women, we wish there was a better term to express the diverse experiences of Asians, blacks, Latinas, Native Americans, etc.

But even after overcoming incredible obstacles, women artists were usually ignored by critics and art historians—who claimed that art by white women and people of color didn't meet their "impartial" criteria for "quality." These impartial standards place a high value on art that expresses white male experience and a low

Why is The Museum of Modern Art more interested in African art than in art by African-Americans?

Why did so few male art historians mention me in their survey books?



ALMA THOMAS



ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI

value on everything else. Twentieth-century art historians have worse records vis-à-vis women than their earlier counterparts: Pliny the Elder in the 1st century A.D., Boccaccio in the 14th, and Vasari in the 16th acknowledged more women artists than Meyer Schapiro, T.J. Clark and H.W. Janson in the 20th.

Luckily, in recent decades feminist art historians, most of whom are—surprise!—women, have resurrected and revalued hundreds of women artists from the past. Whenever an art history survey, like Janson's *History of Art* or Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* adds a female author, the number of women artists included—white and of color—miraculously increases. The Guerrilla Girls have gratefully benefited from the ideas and research of these scholars, several of whom have secretly helped us write this book.

The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art isn't a comprehensive survey of women artists in history. It doesn't include all the cultures of the world. It's not a list of the most significant women artists. It wasn't written for experts who already know all this stuff. Writing about women artists in Western history is complicated. There are lots of contradictory positions and theories. We have opted to stay out of the theory wars, and present our irreverent take on what life was like for some females in the West who managed, against all odds, to make art. It's ammunition for all the women who are—or will become—artists.

Why aren't my quilts hanging next to the Matisses and Picassos?

Whose story is the history of art, anyway?



HARRIET POWERS

PAN YULIANG

FRIDA KAHLO

OFFICIAL DISCLAIMER: A GRAVE APPROACH TO ART HISTORY

WE'VE RESTRICTED THE BOOK TO DEAD ARTISTS BECAUSE WE DON'T BELIEVE IN EVALUATING OR EXCLUDING OUR PEERS. EVEN SO, IT'S BEEN HARD TO DECIDE WHOM TO WRITE ABOUT. THERE

ARE MANY WOMEN ARTISTS WHO DESERVE TO BE IN THIS BOOK AND WOULD BE IF WE HAD MORE ROOM.

CLAUDE CAHUN

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success.
Not having to be in shows with men.
Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty.
Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger.
Being included in revised versions of art history.
Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS** CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
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POSTER BY THE GUERRILLA GIRLS, 1986

Conclusion



GUERRILLA GIRLS,
POSTER, 1989

WHEN RACISM & SEXISM ARE NO LONGER FASHIONABLE, WHAT WILL YOUR ART COLLECTION BE WORTH?

The art market won't bestow mega-buck prices on the work of a few white males forever. For the 17.7 million you just spent on a single Jasper Johns painting, you could have bought at least one work by all these women and artists of color:

Bernice Abbott	Elaine de Kooning	Dorothea Lange	Sarah Padden
Ami Albert	Lois Dodd	Mary Leventon	Lillian Peacock
Selma de Kooning	Maria Waneck Fuller	Edwina Lewis	Olga Kostomarov
Donna Arbus	Adriana Gherardini	Judith Sandler	Nadia Abu Ryan
Vernice Bell	Marguerite Ghera	Barbara Longhi	Kathel Ruych
Isabel Bishop	Natalia Goncharova	Dora Maar	Barbara
Rosa Bonheur	Kate Greenaway	Lee Miller	Augusta Savage
Charlotte Brontë	Barbara Hepworth	Janine Miel	Suzanne Spassman
Margaret Bourke-White	Eva Hesse	Paula Modersohn-Becker	Barbara Steinhilber
Rosemary Bruck	Harriet Herz	Tom Mott	Sophie Tompkins
Julia Margaret Cameron	Anna Heringham	Gertrude Moses	Adrian Toulson
Emily Carr	Mary Howard Jackson	Charlotte Neuberger	Remedios Varo
Bertha Cassin	Paula Klee	Estimote Neuberger	Elizabeth Vigor la Bru
Mary Cassatt	Angelus Kaufmann	Alison Neri	Louise Waring Worthing
Caroline Maria Chapman	Willa Klee	Georgia O'Keeffe	
Frances Cunniff	Kathel Kollwitz	Meryl Oppenheim	
Frances Cunniff	Lee Krueger		

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM THE GUERRILLA GIRLS CONCERNING THE ART WORLD
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TODAY WOMEN ARE EQUAL, RIGHT?

In our introduction, many pages back, you probably remember that we decided not to write about living women artists in this *Bedside Companion*, because we didn't want to put ourselves in the position of having to evaluate (or exclude) our peers. We think of ourselves as representing all women artists, not just a few. But this doesn't mean we can't discuss the collective accomplishments of our contemporaries, which have been enormous. How's it going for women artists today? Well...

It's been good...

- More women's art has been exhibited, reviewed, and collected than ever before. Dealers, critics, curators, and collectors are fighting their own prejudices and practicing affirmative action for women and artists of color. (The GG's take some of the credit for this.)
- Everyone except a few misogynist diehards believe there are—and have been—great women artists. Finally, women can benefit from role models and mentors of their own gender.

- Feminists have transformed the fields of art, history, and philosophy, making room for the point of view of the "other" (that's us, girls). They have made people aware that what most of us learned as objective reality was actually white male reality.
- Recently, there have been shows of openly gay and lesbian artists, and shows that attempt to explore homosexual sensibility.
- The age of the isms is over. Few art historians still cling to the idea that there is a mainstream, that art develops in a linear direction from artist A to artist B. In the current postmodern era, more kinds of art practice and more kinds of artists are accepted and written into the historical record. This is creating a truer, richer picture of the present and the past.

It's been bad...

- Women artists still get collected less and shown less. The price of their work is almost never as high as that of white males. Women art teachers rarely get tenure and their salaries are often lower than those of their male counterparts.
- Museums still don't buy enough art by women, even though it's a bargain! Our 1989 poster "When racism and sexism are no longer fashionable..." pointed out that for the amount of money spent at auction on a single painting by Jasper Johns, an art collector could have bought a work of art by every woman in this book!
- There's still a materials hierarchy, with oil paint on canvas at the top. Other media—like sculpture, drawing, photography, installation, and performance—are not quite as prestigious. Ironically, this has made it easier for women to make it in these fields.
- Museums and galleries in Europe and New York are the worst. All our research shows that the farther you get from New York and Western Europe, the better it gets for women and artists of color.
- Although the West has lost some of its cultural hegemony, the art of Asia, Africa and the Americas is still not accorded equal status with European art, or taught as often.

It's been ugly...

- Women of color are at the low end of the totem pole and have the hardest time getting their work shown. When they are exhibited, it's often as tokens: there never seems to be room for more than two or three in prestigious shows like the Whitney Biennial, Venice Biennial, etc.
- Some women still think that feminism is the "F" word.
- Women artists and theorists are still arguing over whether there is an essential female sensibility or whether the feminine is a cultural construct. GG advice: agree to disagree, find some common ground, and get on to more important things.

AND IT'S NOT OVER YET...

What would Western art history be without Gentileschi, Bonheur, Lewis, Kahlo, or any of the women who are or could have been in this book? What would contemporary art be without all the great women artists of the last few decades? Let's make sure that, generations from now, we never have to find out. Let's make sure that the work of women and artists of color is valued, exhibited, and preserved by our institutions. Guerrilla Girls plan to keep up the pressure on the art world. We'll continue to identify and ridicule the powers that be and to drag the misogynists and racists kicking and screaming into the 21st century. We invite you to join us. Tell your local galleries and museums how to behave. Write letters, make posters, make trouble.

