

WAS (WOMEN ARTISTS SHOWS · SALONS · SOCIETIES):  
EXPOSITIONS COLLECTIVES D'ARTISTES FEMMES 1876-1976

Jeu de Paume, Paris  
December, 8-9, 2017

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In December 8 and 9, 2017, at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, the nonprofit organization *AWARE (Archives of Women Artists)* and the *Artl@s* project organized a pioneer conference focused on a new field of research: the history of all-women shows.

Informed by the long tradition of feminist approaches to art history, about thirty participants gathered to discuss the points of contact and the significant divergences of all-women exhibitions around the world from the nineteenth century on. The period chosen by the organizers encompassed the first one hundred years of all-female shows: from 1876 to 1976, when the landmark exhibition *Women Artists 1550-1950*, curated by art historians Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Before the official opening of the event, on December 7, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill spoke at the École Normale Supérieure about the complex process of curating, with Dr. Andrea Giunta, the groundbreaking exhibition *Radical Women in Latin American Art 1960-1985*. This show opened in 2017 at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Fajardo-Hill offered a remarkable account of the decisions and challenges both curators faced. Her presentation gave not only an overview of the different sections of the show, but also a nuanced analysis of many of the artworks included in the exhibition. Perhaps, her long and interesting conference can be summed up with a key reflection: it is the curatorial approach, not the works themselves, that can be described as feminist.

On the morning of December 8, the colloquium opened with the remarks of Marta Ponsa, who is in charge of the artistic and cultural projects at the Jeu de Paume. She highlighted the importance of this event, significantly taking place eighty years after the all-female show *Les femmes artistes d'Europe exposent au Jeu de Paume*.

The first session included the presentations of Thomas Galifot, Francesca Lombardi, and Paula Birnbaum. They explored late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century all-female shows in Europe across different media: photography, painting, and sculpture. Thomas Galifot's

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presentation highlighted the role of American photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston, the epitome of the “new woman,” in the organization of all-female photography shows. Francesca Lombardi’s paper focused on the first all-women shows in Italy, offering a precise analysis of the role of the male elite in the organization. Lastly, Paula Birnbaum examined the *Femmes Artistes Modernes* salons in 1930s Paris. The art historian explained that they offered an alternative vis-à-vis the noted *Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs*. She also analyzed the diversity of the participating women, explaining the approaches to motherhood by Tamara de Lempicka and Maria Blanchard, an artist honored with a retrospective by the *FAM*.

The second session included Denis Laoureux, Ewa Bobrowska, and Rudolfine Lackner and Barbara Karahan (collectively known as forthelongrevolution.net). They explored all-women shows in Belgium, Poland, and Austria. Denis Laoureux examined the *Cercle des femmes peintres de Bruxelles*, offering an outstanding example of female organization. Ewa Bobrowska explained the importance of the Parisian model for professional women artists in Poland in the early years of the twentieth century, while analyzing the experience of travelling as a key event in these artists’ lives. Finally, forthelongrevolution.net gave an exceptional account of the links between feminism and the arts, which must be examined not only for the 1970s but for previous decades as well.

The first keynote speaker, Agata Jakubowska, presented an ambitious and pioneering research project about all-women exhibitions in Poland. She guided the audience through the design of the project’s methodology and its findings, including the links between Poland and other parts of Europe.

The third session, which closed the first day of the colloquium, included the presentations of Natalia Budanova, Gloria Cortés Aliaga, and Georgina Gluzman. The papers dealt with the relation of feminism and art history in Russia, Chile, and Argentina. The gathering of scattered data in these papers offered a glimpse of a shared situation: the lack of archives and the need to reconstruct entire events from scratch, combining the most diverse sources.

On December 9, the first session included seven speakers: Joanna Gardner-Huggett, Sofia Gotti, Glafki Gotsi, and M. Lluïsa Faxedas, Isabel Fontbona and Patricia Mayayo. Joanna Gardner-Huggett focused on the art scene of Chicago in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. She gave a detailed account of the *Women’s Artists Salon of Chicago*, exploring issues like the art market, the genre of the nude, and even civil rights’ struggle. Sofia Gotti offered a contribution to the genealogy of feminist artists in Latin America through the case of women artists in

Colombia between 1951 and 1961. Glafki Gotsi analyzed the association of Greek women artists, a group that reunited women of different generations. She carefully reconstructed the clichéd critical reception of the events, for many art critics identified a “lyrical” element common to all women. Finally, Faxedas, Fontbona, and Mayayo skillfully analyzed the *Salón Femenino* in the obscure years of Franco’s dictatorship. They offered a subtle account of the strategies deployed by women artists and of the art critics’ reception of the events. The key word was “femenino”, a multi-layered word that could be assimilated by Franco’s supporters.

The second session included the presentations of Nadine Atallah, Laura Iamurri, and Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, Marina Mazze Cerchiaro and Talita Trizoli. Nadine Atallah carefully analyzed a ten-women show that took place in El Cairo in 1975, the International Women’s Year. She examined the links that Egyptian modernization had with women and nationalism. Laura Iamurri explored the 1976 show *Il complesso di Michelangelo*, an all-female retrospective. Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, Marina Mazze Cerchiaro, and Talita Trizoli examined the 1961 show *Contribuição das Mulheres às Artes Plásticas no Brasil*, which received little attention despite its rather ambitious aims.

Fabienne Dumont delivered the second keynote speech. She focused on the all-women groups of the 1970s in France, the galleries in which they exhibited, and their struggle against discrimination. She also emphasized the role that cultural magazines played in the feminist art scene.

The magnificent final roundtable included Camille Morineau, Juan Vicente Aliaga, Julie Crenn, and Cecilia Fajardo-Hill. Even though the art historical issues were present, the roundtable focused on the challenges faced by curators in their practice. A key question was whether feminist art exhibitions should exclude men. The diverse approaches to this topic evidence the dynamism of feminist thought: separatism or integration is still the question.

Throughout the conference, the poster sessions prepared by Wiebke Hölzer, Adriana De Angelis, Chiara Iorino, Roberta Serra, Eva Belgherbi, Kat Buckley, and Victor Monin offered compelling synopsis of equally interesting researches.

The colloquium was an extraordinary meeting point for art historians and curators from diverse countries, some of them seldom present at international art history conferences, in an effort to write a more balanced art history. Thanks to the high standard of all sessions, this colloquium promises to become a major event for feminist approaches to art history and curating, since the papers will be published as a special issue of the *Artl@s Bulletin*, after the usual peer-review.