

WACK!

ART AND THE FEMINIST REVOLUTION



Magdalena Abakanowicz
Red Abakan, 1969

sisal and mixed media

Courtesy of the National Museum, Wroclaw, Poland

Photo courtesy of Magdalena Abakanowicz

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE FALL 2008

Vancouver
Artgallery

Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

In the sixties and seventies, women changed the way art was made and talked about forever. *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* presents a ground-breaking and wide-ranging selection of artwork by over 100 women from 1965-1980. The work - which is as diverse as the women represented in the exhibition - harkens back to a time of enormous social upheaval and political change that has indelibly influenced the art world and shaped contemporary visual culture.

The exhibition raises many complex issues, some of which will be explored in age appropriate school tours and workshops.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the vocabulary section.

The tour of *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* has three main goals:

- To introduce students to a wide variety of work in diverse media reflecting multiple feminist perspectives
- To understand the body of work within its historical, political and social context
- To consider how individual artworks effected social change and helped shape contemporary visual culture

THE EXHIBITION:

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution highlights the profound impact that feminism had on art between 1965 and 1980, and in turn, the ripple effect that this same art had in effecting social change. The exhibition features innovative and risk taking artwork that emerged from this dynamic relationship between art and feminism. We are provided with a long-awaited opportunity to reflect back on this period and assess the ways that this groundbreaking flood of artworks has influenced and shaped not only contemporary visual culture, but also society at large.

The sixties and seventies were an era of enormous social and political upheaval. Women were colliding with authority and challenging accepted assumptions on every front. They were active in anti-Vietnam protests, the civil rights movement, equal employment struggles - to name but a few. They questioned societal norms, laws and taboos; they analyzed, protested and provoked - both out in the world and in their art.

Feminist art reflected these tumultuous times, breaking all previously accepted bounds of art. Working in a diverse range of media, which included painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, performance, assemblage, photography, film, and video, the artists in *WACK!* explored many unexamined areas, so challenging assumptions about the materials and projects that could be considered art. They used their bodies as canvases. They cut, reinvented, collaged and pieced together. They pushed beyond accepted ideas about artists' media, disciplines and value. They used traditional crafts strategically, as celebratory, subversive and political weapons. They rescued every-day objects, personal histories and mundane data from the confines of domesticity and elevated them to the realms of high art. They questioned, worded, wrote, read, and rebelled, addressing and challenging any and every power relationship that could limit their lives and art.

The exhibition makes no attempt to analyze or order the work. Chronology has been abandoned in favour of eighteen themed areas in which the work is displayed. An artist's work might be found in more than one area, which cover a wide range of ideas, such as Taped & Measured, Autophotography, Making Art History. Subject matter ranges from the intimate portraits painted by Alice Neel to the political photographic analyses of the Black Women's Collective, *Where We At*. Seminal feminist artists such as Judy Chicago approached their art as a conscious attempt to instruct while others like Mary Beth Edelson attempted to redress history in the male-dominated public art world. We are confronted with images by women reclaiming their bodies and celebrating them as art. There are works created by women including Faith Wilding interested in making visible under-valued traditional women's crafts. There is ambiguous imagery in work created by women who claim not to be feminists, like the huge red soft sculpture by Magdalena Abakanowicz. There are domestic spaces and self-representations, abstractions and texts; there are as many approaches as there are artists in the exhibition.

WACK!, organized by the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and curated by Connie Butler, opened in Los Angeles in March of 2007. After travelling to the National Museum of Women and the Arts in Washington, and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, *WACK!* ends its North American tour here in Vancouver, the only Canadian venue for this major exhibition.

Feminism 101: A Quick Refresher

“Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression” is the definition given by American feminist, activist and writer bell hooks (sic).

Wikipedia offers the following definition: “Feminism is a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issues of gender difference, advocate equality for women, and campaign for women’s rights and interests.”

Feminism has held a variety of meanings for various groups of people at different periods over the last century and a half; but most are in agreement that we can divide its history into three waves and isolate some general trends and goals.

The First Wave:

First Wave Feminism is generally thought of as referring to the organized feminist activity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the USA and Britain. While First Wave Feminism is primarily thought of as being about the struggle for women’s suffrage, it actually failed to achieve the vote for women. It was originally focused on:

- the reform of secondary education for girls
- the opening of higher education for women
- equal contract and property rights for women
- the abolition of unjust marriage laws (which essentially allowed for ownership of women by men)

By the end of the nineteenth century, feminist (a term coined in 1895) activity was primarily concerned with gaining political power for women. First Wave Feminists were in essence fighting for rights for well-to-do white women. Working class women and women of colour were simply not part of the equation. First Wave Feminism came to a grinding halt with the advent of the First World War in 1914. Many significant milestones in women’s suffrage only came into being long after the First Wave:

In Canada:

- In 1917 white women were granted the right to vote
- In 1920 white women were granted the right to stand for public office
- In 1960 all First Nations men and women were granted the right to vote

In Britain:

- in 1918 women over the age of 30 who owned property were granted the vote
- In 1928 all women over 18 were granted the vote

In the U.S.:

- In 1919 women were granted the right to vote
- In 1965 the Voting Rights Act prevented discriminatory practices which interfered with African American men and women’s right to vote

In Kuwait:

- In 2005 women were granted the right to vote

The Second Wave:

Second Wave Feminism refers to the women’s liberation movement in the sixties and seventies and was primarily concerned with legal and social equality for women. “The Personal is the Political” became the slogan of Second Wave Feminism, which focused on:

- Economic equality, along with equal education and job opportunities
- Social equality, including legal independence
- Reproductive rights and freedom for all women
- Freedom from the threat of violence, aggression and discrimination

Second Wave Feminism sought to re-educate and redress perceived injustices through consciousness raising, activism, and legal channels. Second Wave Feminists confronted, celebrated, provoked and subverted. They challenged every traditional role and limitation on women. This period saw a huge surge in women's visibility on intellectual, artistic, political, economic fronts.

Second Wave Feminism has been criticized as being over-focused on western middle class white women's concerns.

The Third Wave:

Third Wave Feminism refers to the period from the 1990's to the present and is seen as a continuation of and reaction to the successes and failures of Second Wave Feminism. The Third Wave continues to focus on the political, social, economic and personal empowerment of women.

The Third Wave has become focused on the idea of multiple 'feminisms' where one size no longer fits all. Taking into consideration variations in race, class, culture, age and levels of education, Third Wave Feminists have embraced diversity and challenged the myth of a universal feminine experience.

Third Wave Feminism can be thought of as a lens that can be used to question sensitive issues such as class, race and culture. More questions are being asked than answers provided. Intellectual curiosity is celebrated and Third Wave Feminism embraces controversy and diversity in topics such as Global Feminisms, reproductive and sexual choices and the construction of gender identity. Debates on issues that were once on the fringe of feminist debate, for example: girl power, the beauty myth, feminism in the developing world, gay and lesbian rights, have become part and parcel of the mainstream.

PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS: Nudes in Art

While the tour will not be focusing on images containing nudity, students may see a number of images of the nude body as they walk through this exhibition. It may be helpful to talk with students beforehand about images of the nude in art, and encourage them to examine their own responses to the work and to think about why an artist might choose to include a nude body in a work of art.

Hilarious

A good place to begin is in simply informing students that some of the works of art they will see when they visit the gallery will contain images of nude bodies. When people come to the gallery they have all kinds of different responses to artworks showing nudes. Some people laugh, others feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. All of these responses are normal. But why? Why is the body so humorous and/or embarrassing? Ask the students whether they fall into hysterical laughter when they are in the shower or bath. Probably not. Part of the shock of seeing a nude figure in a museum is just that: we are accustomed to our nude bodies only in private. To see one in public is a shock. Artists know this too. In showing the nude body, they remind us that the human body can mean many things.

Nudity can be a symbol of:

- **Privacy:** The artist observes a very private moment when the person in the artwork is alone or with someone he or she loves.
- **Innocence:** Christian religious images over the last 500 years often include images of angels figured as nude babies and the Christ child is often depicted nude. Like all babies, these figures are innocent, unaware of their nudity.
- **Bravery:** When Michelangelo sculpted the famous statue of David, he spoke of David's nudity as a symbol of bravery. David faced a giant without any protection on his body, relying on his faith and his skill to protect him.
- **Vulnerability:** Nudity can be a symbol of lack of defense—a person who has nothing and has nowhere to hide.

What are you wearing?

Another way to approach this topic is to think about clothing instead of nudity. What do clothes tell us about a person? Clothing can send messages about:

- the time in history
- age and culture
- wealth and style
- the wearer's profession
- stereotypes and expectations

Some artists and art historians suggest that the nude figure is set free from all of this "distracting" information that is provided by what we wear, and becomes just a human being, from any time, place or background.

Feminism's relationship with the nude body

Many feminist artists during the sixties and seventies used the nude female body to challenge the dominant ideology. Some were reclaiming female nudity – literally - from the hands of the male-dominated art world, and questioning its symbolic value. Some wanted to make visible hidden secrets, some were challenging the unquestioned influence of the media on constructions of identity, and some simply wanted to shock viewers out of their complacent acceptance of gender stereotyping. The reasons were many fold and the results were electrifying; they changed what was permissible both in and outside the art world.

ARTISTS' BACKGROUND

The following background information highlights some of the artists whose work we may explore in the school tour.

The exhibition is divided into eighteen sections. The artist's name is followed by the section within which their work can be found.

Magdalena Abakanowicz (Goddess)

Magdalena Abakanowicz was born in 1930 in Poland to aristocratic Polish/Russian parents whose fortunes suffered under the repressive period of Soviet occupation and difficult war years. She studied at the Warsaw Art College - which she found rigid and conservative - during a period when the only acceptable type of art was Social realism. She was forced to take classes in textile design and weaving, which had enormous impact on her subsequent work. She continues to live in Warsaw, although she has travelled extensively in the years since Poland's borders were reopened.

The first works for which she became well known - from the late sixties through the mid seventies - were her so-called Abakans, which were huge woven 3D soft sculptures. Living through the harsh times of post-war deprivation and tight Soviet control, she relied on found materials, searching for discarded ends of rope along the river, which she unraveled, hand-dyed and then wove into their final forms - all in her tiny one room apartment which she shared with her husband. Her work has often been said to explore not only the forms themselves, but also the space found inside and around them.

Abakan Red is a raw, enormous presence - bright red, woven, inescapable. Although many viewers interpret this piece as sexual imagery, Abakanowicz describes *Abakan Red* as a metaphor, which can be thought of as many things, but speaks to the organic qualities in our lives.

Helena Almeida (Autophotography)

Helena Almeida was born in 1943 in Lisbon, Portugal, where she still lives today. Her family was involved in the arts and encouraged her interest from a young age. She trained as a painter at the Lisbon School of Art, where she soon began to question traditional approaches to art.

In her early paintings she destroyed the integrity of the two dimensional canvas by cutting into the surface and projecting pieces into the viewers' space. She has, over the years, incorporated photography, performance, sculpture, video, drawing and painting in her work.

In her work in the seventies, she became interested in self-representation, and in the way the space between the artwork and the viewer is occupied. She played with the illusion of space in her work *Inhabited Painting* where she has applied blue acrylic paint onto black and white photographs of herself gesturing with a paintbrush. She further confuses the space with the use of mirrors, so that we, the viewers, are no longer able to make sense of the layers of space.

Mary Beth Edelson (Making Art History)

Mary Beth Edelson was born in 1933 in Chicago into a supportive family who encouraged both her creativity and activism. Always a controversial artist, her senior year artwork at

university was slammed by critics as overly provocative. She lives in New York City, where she continues to create artwork that is based on a deeply held feminist conviction, community involvement, collaboration and political activism.

Her art has taken many forms; she has worked in photography, painting, drawing, performance, sculpture, collage, silk-screen, video and installation. Proficient in many areas, she selects her medium according to the needs of each project.

Edelson's *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper* (1971) is one of a series of collaged reconstructions of paintings that bring into question the role of women and the construction of art history. It consists of a poster of Da Vinci's famous portrayal of the Last Supper, which she has superimposed with photographs of women artists over the original faces. Edelson has said that this process of collage spoofs "the patriarchy for cutting women out of positions of power and authority". Within the existing framework of art history Edelson is both seeking to subvert established art history and reclaim and celebrate the work of neglected women artists.

Gathie Falk (Gendered Space)

Gathie Falk was born in 1928 in Alexander, Manitoba to Mennonite parents who fled Russia to escape persecution. Her father died not long after she was born, and Falk had a difficult childhood, finally finding herself having to leave school at sixteen to work. After moving to Vancouver, she trained as a teacher, and taught elementary school while studying painting and ceramics at UBC. Since 1965 she has worked as a full time artist, and has achieved considerable success as one of one of British Columbia's leading artists.

Falk's subjects are the objects and activities of everyday life: fruit, eggs, men's shoes, women's clothing, garden flowers. Repetition, strong colour and architectural form are the hallmarks of ceramic works that Falk created in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She has become known internationally for the imaginative and conceptual treatment she gives to everyday objects.

Home Environment is a room-sized installation in which she has juxtaposed incongruous everyday objects such as ceramic fish positioned on the arms of an armchair, a plucked chicken in a bird cage and a telephone wired to an oil can.

40 Oranges (from Pile Series) consists of a pyramid-shaped mound of gleaming ceramic oranges, stacked on a plexiglass base. The *Pile Series* contains other bright and shiny ceramic fruit such as apples and grapefruit similarly displayed.

Alice Neel (Making Art History)

Alice Neel was born in 1900 in Pennsylvania and lived most of her early life in a small town, where she finished high school and worked to earn money to support her parents. She then attended the Pennsylvania art school for women. Soon after, she married and lived first in Cuba, then in New York. Devastated by the death of her first child, and then by her husband's return to Cuba with their second daughter, Neel suffered a serious breakdown. She spent the next period of her life in and out of hospital. Finally stable, she lived as an artist in New York, and went on to have two sons. She died in 1984.

In Cuba, Neel connected with the vibrant art scene and developed a life time political and social awareness. During the Depression years in New York she developed a reputation for

her non-conventional confrontational style of portrait paintings. By the sixties she was becoming well-known for her intimate personal portraits of the famous and the not so famous, and was embraced by the Women's' Movement, becoming something of an icon for feminist artists. By the time she died she was enjoying an international reputation as an artist, and exhibiting her work widely.

Linda Nochlin and Daisy, painted in 1973, is a large-scale, unromantic double portrait of the famous feminist art historian and her daughter. They sit, staring straight ahead, their faces large and their hands prominent.

Sally Potter (Gender Performance)

Sally Potter was born in 1949 in London into a highly artistic family, who encouraged and supported her in the arts from an early age. She continues to live in London, although she travels extensively for her work.

She left school at the age of sixteen to become a filmmaker. She soon started making experimental films, then trained as a dancer and choreographer. She has since become a successful performance artist, theatre, opera and film director, screen writer, singer, songwriter and composer.

In 1976 she collaborated with Rose English on a number of performances. *Berlin* was a large scale, elaborate theatrical performance which took place over an extended period of time, and is shown in video form in the exhibition.

In 1979 she made *Thriller*, a short film which she produced, scripted, directed and edited herself. The film retells the story of La Boheme from Mimi's perspective, in which the protagonist investigates the reasons for her death. The film was very much in tune with work by contemporary feminist artists who were questioning the way mainstream culture constructed the idea of femininity, and the way society at large accepted this portrayal of gender as a given truth. *Thriller* became not only an instant cult hit but also extremely influential in the art world. This debate on the construction of gender identity continues today.

Martha Rosler (Taped & Measured, Female Sensibility)

Martha Rosler was born in 1943 in Brooklyn, New York, and educated both there and in California.

Since the early 1970's she has worked with video, photography, text, performance and installation, as well as writing criticism, teaching and lecturing both in the U.S. and abroad. Her work has been exhibited in prestigious exhibitions and museums internationally, her writing has appeared in major art magazines, and to date, she has had ten books published.

Her works tackles big issues, ranging from women and their body-image and representation, to the Vietnam War, to symbolic value attached to every-day objects. They tend to be not didactic but are left open for the viewer to interpret and puzzle their meaning.

Her works in *WACK!* include:

- *Body beautiful, or Beauty knows no Pain*(1966-1972) which consist of a series of images collaged mostly from popular magazines, giving a commentary on women's bodies as portrayed in the media.

- *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) which is a six minute black and white video of the artist demonstrating various kitchen tools. The violence of her gestures subverts the apparent normalcy of the suburban housewife's place in the kitchen
- *Bringing the war home* (1967-1972) is a series of photo-montages taken from the pages of Life magazines, where Rosler invites us to make connections between a war being fought abroad with consumerism at home in the USA.

Betye Saar (Pattern & Assemblage)

Betye Saar was born in 1926 in California, where she attended art school and university. She and her siblings were raised by their widowed mother during the depression years to be creative and resourceful. During childhood visits to her grandmother, she watched Simon Rodia build the Watts towers. This experience influenced her later work enormously, as did her exposure to the artist Joseph Cornell's assemblages.

Saar began her career as an artist while raising her three children. Trained as a print-maker, she soon began to include found objects into assemblages. In the seventies, her interest in exploring her heritage led her to collect and using 'derogatory images' of African American culture in her work. She was one of a stream of feminist artists who helped redefine the boundaries of what could and couldn't be considered art or craft, confusing the distinctions between high and low art, and confronting accepted power relationships.

The Liberation of Aunt Jemima (1972), has become internationally known – she considers herself “blessed to have a signature image”. The work was a result of a request for a submission to an exhibition on heroes. Determined to turn the negative stereotype of African American on its head, she armed her Aunt Jemima with a rifle as well as a broom. Saar's figure is certainly empowered and liberated from the negative context of the subservient stereotype.

Faith Wilding (Female Sensibility)

Born in 1943 in Paraguay, Wilding immigrated to the United States in 1961. After completing her undergraduate studies, she took her masters at the California Institute of the Arts where she was a founding member of the Feminist Art program. She has continued to be an integral part of feminist art collectives, programs, institutions and art to date. She lives and works in Chicago.

Wilding has become known as a multi-disciplinary artist, writer and educator. She has worked with painting, drawing, digital media, video, installations and performance. She lectures and exhibits her work widely, in the United States and Europe, and her writings have been widely published in books and magazines internationally.

Crocheted Environment (1972) was first created as part of the now legendary and monumental Womanhouse, in which artists from the California Institute of the Arts Feminist Art Program took over a house in Los Angeles. The work was subsequently stolen, and was recreated in 1995 by Wilding with the help of two of her students. Wilding describes it as “a fanciful, airy, complex web-work of forms suggesting bridges, body parts, ladders, chandeliers, grottoes, umbilical cords and doilies.” By choosing a traditional 'female' craft to create a contained interior space, Wilding at once critiques and pays homage to the domestic nature of the space, materials and process.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: WACK! Artists, Art & Impact (all grades)

Objective:

Students research and present some of the important and sometimes provocative artists represented in this exhibition, and discuss the impact and effect of the art on society at large as well as on contemporary visual culture.

Background:

The artwork in this show includes an exciting collection of work that includes a seemingly infinite variety of processes, materials and approaches. The women represented in this exhibition were pushing and challenging every standard, norm and rule in order to make their art.

Much of the work in the exhibition will be unfamiliar to students. Some will be eye-opening. Some of it has been extremely influential and has changed the way subsequent generations of artists – and the public – have approached visual art. Some of it has changed not only the world of the visual arts, but many of the norms in Western society.

Teachers note: younger students will need to be supervised and guided through the material available on-line. Although the terms of the research are specific and safe, students could encounter graphic images during the course of their research. Alternatively, you could find relevant articles and distribute them to the students to work with.

Materials:

- The Internet; some useful sites to start with are:
 - www.nmwa.org/clara/
 - www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/
 - www.artcyclopedia.com
 - www.wikipedia.com
 - <http://www.moca.org/wack/>
 - <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/>
- art books
- Artist Information Sheet (see next page)

Process:

1. Ask students if they know any artists from the sixties or seventies? Any women artists?
2. On the board write these headings: **Art Processes**, **Art Materials** and **Art Approaches**.
3. Ask students to provide examples of each. The lists might include:
 - **Art Processes** – sculpture, photography, film, video, painting, drawing, performance, installations, mixed media, assemblages...
 - **Art Materials** – paint, clay, wood, fabric, plastic, pantyhose, sand, clay, artists' bodies, canvas, clothing, mattresses, rope, steel, paper, string, documents, papier-mâché, found objects, magazines...
 - **Art Approaches** –
 - conceptual (idea is more important than object portrayed)
 - political (portrays an event or injustice)
 - didactic (attempts to teach or instruct through the artwork)

- social (attempts to make a change in the community)
 - realistic (attempts to depict the world as it appears)
 - figurative (represents an identifiable form, often human)
 - abstract (does not represent anything recognizable, or distorts or changes something that is recognizable)
4. In small groups, assign a different artist (from the Artist Information Sheet on the following pages) to each.
Have each group:
- Read the information on the artist.
 - Find additional biographical information
 - Explore some of the artist's work between 1965-1980 in terms of the above discussion on **materials, processes** and **approaches**.
 - Gather some copies of significant artworks by the artist from this period.
5. Have each group present their artist to the class.
As a class, discuss:
- Why do you think this artist's work is important in an exhibition subtitled *Art and the Feminist Revolution*?
 - 'The Personal is the Political' was one of the slogans of Feminism during the sixties and seventies. In what way can this artist or their work be called 'political'?
 - How do you think this artist might have influenced or contributed to contemporary visual culture? Can you think of anything in today's world that could have been affected by these ideas or this way of working?

Conclusion:

Have students consider, digest and comment on what they have discovered and learned about the art and artists.

- What did they find interesting?
- Unusual?
- Surprising?
- Shocking?

Artist Information Sheet

Magdalena Abakanowicz

- Born in Poland in 1934, continues to live there
- Studied art during repressive times, suffered deprivation
- Began making huge soft sculptures in the sixties out of found and reconstituted materials
- *Abakan Red* is a huge, raw, red, woven work

Helena Almeida

- Born in Lisbon in 1934, continues to live there
- Family encouraged interest in art, questioned traditional art at art school
- Started as a painter, has used photography, performance, sculpture, video and drawing in her work.
- *Inhabited Painting* plays with space and illusion, uses blue acrylic paint on a black and white photograph

Mary Beth Edelson

- Born in Chicago in 1933, lives in New York
- Family supported artistic endeavours, created controversial artwork at university
- Political and community activist who has used photography, painting, drawing, performance, sculpture, collage, silk-screen, video and installation in her work
- *Some Living American Women Artists/Last Supper* is a collaged reconstruction of Da Vinci's portrayal of the Last Supper, with photographs of women artists over the original faces

Gathie Falk

- Born in Manitoba in 1928, lives in Vancouver
- Had a difficult childhood, had to leave school at the age of sixteen to work
- Works with painting and ceramics, creating colourful, imaginative sculptures and installations often containing unusual found objects
- *Home Environment* is a room-sized installation containing strange, colourful objects. *40 Oranges* consists of a pile of shiny ceramic oranges on a plexiglass base.

Alice Neel

- Born in Pennsylvania in 1900 and died in New York in 1984
- Attended Art School, soon married and had two daughters; devastated when the baby died and her husband took their other child to live in Cuba. She later had two sons.
- By the end of her life she very well known for her intimate, direct style of portrait painting, both of famous people and her friends.
- *Linda Nochlin and Daisy* is a dual portrait of the famous feminist art historian with her young daughter.

Sally Potter

- Born in 1949 in London where she still lives
- Highly artist family supported her when she left school at the age of sixteen to become a filmmaker.
- Has become very successful for her work as performance artist, theatre, opera and film director, screen writer, singer, songwriter and composer
- *Thriller* is a short film she produced, scripted, directed and edited. She collaborated with Rose English on *Berlin*, a large scale, elaborate theatrical performance.

Martha Rosler

- Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1943, continues to live there
- Attended universities in New York and California, teaches and lectures in U.S. and internationally
- Has worked with video, photography, text, performance and installation, as well as writing theory and criticism
- *Body beautiful, or Beauty knows no Pain* is a series of collages commenting on the portrayal of women's bodies in the media. *Semiotics of the Kitchen* is a short video demonstrating kitchen tools – by a woman gesturing violently.

Betye Saar

- Born in California in 1926, lives in Los Angeles
- Raised by a single mother during the depression years to be creative and resourceful; only became an artist as a mother with three children.
- Interest in exploring her heritage led her to collect 'derogatory images' of African American culture which she incorporated into her work which included print making and assemblages.
- *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* has become Saar's signature image for which she is known internationally.

Faith Wilding

- Born in Paraguay in 1943. lives in Chicago.
- Studied at California Institute of the Arts where she was a founding member of the Feminist Art program
- She is known as a multi-disciplinary artist, writer and educator; has worked with painting, drawing, digital media, video, installations and performance.
- *Crocheted Environment* is a small room which Wilding has created using a traditional 'female' craft.

PRE or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: A Women's Work is Never Done (all grades)

Objective:

Students discuss gender issues and identity politics around the area of domestic crafts and make a group art piece using some of these materials and processes.

Discussion:

- Many feminist arts were concerned that women's crafts –along with women themselves - were marginalized, and felt that this undermined their roles as artists. Several female artists took it upon themselves to elevate traditional women's crafts and legitimize them as art. Pushing at accepted ideas about artists' media, artistic disciplines and value, they disputed art history's distinctions between 'high and low' and 'art and craft'.
- There has been a strong stream of community involvement, political activism, group mobilization and educational projects within the feminist art community. It might be helpful to discuss this idea of community-based projects with students before they embark on their own class project.

Materials:

- Some examples of artists work exhibited in *WACK!*, which can be found on the following sites:
www.wackatnmwa.org
<http://www.moca.org/wack/>
- The Internet and/or books on crafts
- Materials to create chosen craft – e.g. knitting needles and yarn OR fabric, embroidery thread and needles OR scraps of fabric, needles and thread, etc.

Process:

Part 1

1. Discussion:
 - Ask students if any of their grandmothers or other relatives knit, embroider, crochet, quilt, weave, etc.
 - Do they have any heirlooms of their great-grannies' stitching/crafts in their homes? Have they learned any crafts from their mothers or grandmothers?
 - Do/did the women work at their craft alone, or meet in groups to do their work?
 - Ask if any of men in their families have ever made any handworks. Why or why not?
 - In the past, in many of our traditions, hand worked crafts, stitching etc, have been the domain of women. Is this true in the traditions/cultures familiar to the students?
2. List on the board what students would consider to be traditional women's crafts. The list might include sewing, embroidery, knitting, crocheting, appliqué, beading, quilting..
3. Ask students to choose one they would like to learn more about, and have the students convene in small groups with others interested in the same craft.
4. Ask each group to conduct some research, including:
 - Some history of the craft – who, where, when, and if aspects of the craft have changed over time.

- Some good examples and where they would be found – in a museum, private home, etc
 - What materials are necessary and some instructions on how to do it.
 - If students have any examples at home, have them bring them in.
5. Have each group present their craft to the class.

Part 2

1. Have the class decide as a group which craft they would most like to learn, and have them decide on a group project for a specific purpose. They might decide to knit squares to make a blanket for a women's shelter, stitch pieces for a quilt for a new baby in their midst, embroider a pillow case for a gift, etc. They might want to 'think big' and challenge other classes to create similar items and be able to present a pile of blankets to the local shelter.
2. Ask if any student/relative/family friend can help advise/complete the project.
3. Have each student complete their piece of the craft, and have it assembled or completed.

Conclusion:

Before sending the object to its destination, display and discuss the work and the ideas behind its creation.

- Did it make a difference that students were making this item for a specific purpose and not for themselves? Did it make a difference that the whole class was doing the same thing?
- Did boys/girls have different experiences of it? Were any of the boys uncomfortable doing what is generally perceived of as women's work? Were any girls resentful doing what is often denigrated as women's work?
- Did any of their family/friends think that this should be 'only' women's work?
- Have ideas about mens/womens art/craft changed since feminists raised these issues in the sixties?
- Is it valuable to have women's traditional crafts brought into mainstream culture or should it be kept separate and valued as women's cultural work?

PRE or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: The Medium is the Message (intermediate and secondary students)

Objective:

Students look at some of the defining moments of social change of the sixties and seventies, and consider some artistic responses of those times. Students choose a topic they feel strongly about today and formulate an artistic response.

Discussion:

The sixties and seventies were an era not only of change, but of collision. Anti-Vietnam war protests, civil rights, the generation gap and the sexual revolution – these were but a few ideas exploding on the world's stage.

Feminist art reflected these significant changes, breaking all accepted bounds of art. This was the time of the message, the idea, the big statement. Women confronted taboos, analyzed issues and provoked authority. They questioned, worded, wrote, read, and subverted, addressing and challenging any and every power relationship that could limit their lives and art.

The artists and their art in turn had enormous impact in effecting change on the world surrounding them. In turn these effects are reflected in today's world – indeed much of contemporary art is in deep debt to the innovations and explorations by the women of these times.

Materials:

- ❑ Some examples of artists work exhibited in *WACK!*, which can be found on the following sites:
www.wackatnmwa.org
<http://www.moca.org/wack/>
- ❑ A variety of materials, which might include some of the following:
 - Old magazines and newspapers, scissors and glue
 - Cardboard, paper, markers, fabric, paint and brushes
 - Digital cameras, video and/or music recorders
 - Musical instruments and/or recorders
 - Assorted props and costumes
 - Computer and printer
 - Found objects, personal items

Process:

1. Show students a variety of artists' work that used unconventional materials, photos of performances, videos, installations, collages etc. Ask students what they think the main idea that each artist was trying to put across in the work.
2. Discuss why each artist might have chosen to work in such materials. What is the impact of their choice of materials? How would the impact of the work be different if it were presented in a traditional way such as a painting?
3. Have the students break into small groups and choose an idea they would like to portray in an artwork. Ask students to focus on something they feel passionately about, are uncertain about, disagree with each other on, feel disturbed by – in short, something controversial or pushing the edge a little. This is an opportunity to prod

boundaries, consider big issues, and think outside the box. Stress that they do not have to find a solution here – rather, they are cracking the idea open.

4. Once they have a topic, have students decide on a mode/process/approach/form that their artwork will take. They could choose a painting, video, sculpture, performance, series of photographs, musical piece, collage, installation.... the limits are their imagination.
5. If necessary have students do some internet research, looking at ways artists might use approaches students are unfamiliar with – e.g. performance art or installations.
6. Students choose and find materials and create their artwork.
7. Present to the class.

Conclusion:

Discuss the process and the finished works. Helpful questions could include:

- Did the medium match the message?
- Were the pieces successful as artworks? Or were they merely propaganda? Why or why not? Does the distinction matter?
- Did the finished works stand alone or did they need added explanation – verbal or written? Must an artwork always stand alone?
- Does it matter if the message is unclear?
- Should art have a clear message, or should it be open to interpretation?
- Should art have – as an important goal – the desire to change or motivate or affect people?

PRE or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?

(secondary students)

Objective:

Students consider a provocative question, the title of Linda Nochlin's seminal essay "Why have there been no great women artists?" – and discuss the validity of such an argument in today's world.

Discussion:

It is shocking to discover that even today only an abysmal 5% of works represented in major museums are by women. How can this possibly be? Are we not raising a generation of girls who believe they are equal contenders in the world stakes, that they are capable of anything and everything? So how is it then that success and recognition as a female artist is the exception and not the rule? Does this transfer over to all areas of life? Is this generation of girls growing up with unreasonable, unrealistic and unrealizable expectations? Is gender equality a big lie?

If there are still so many goals that have not been achieved in terms of equal gender opportunity, why are young girls and women not creating a stir? Is Feminism dead? Is it still relevant? Would students consider themselves feminists today? Why do girls and women need a separate voice from boys and men? Why do we need a perspective called "feminism?"

Materials:

- Internet
- Books and articles (see resource page for suggestions)
- Stats Sheet (see next page)

Process:

1. On the board write the following question:
Why have there been no great women artists?
2. Ask students for their initial responses.
3. Inform students that this is the title of an article (1971, Artnews) written by the first and foremost feminist art historian, Linda Nochlin. (The article is readily available on the Internet for reference.)

Ask students to consider the following possible responses:

- This is untrue; there have been plenty of great women artists.
- Women are simply not as good as men.
- Women artists have had different – but equally good – standards in art, that have just not been given their due by the mainstream (read predominantly male) art world.
- Political, social, educational and economic structures have prevented women from both working and gaining recognition as artists.
- The art world is a male-defined world and cannot by its very nature include and incorporate a female-centred artistic vision; the myth of the struggling, true genius artist cannot tolerate a female counterpart.

4. Divide the class in five groups, with each group taking one of the above perspectives.
5. Have students research the topic, at school and/or at home, finding facts and opinions that substantiate their arguments.
6. The 'Stats Sheet' can be used to kick-start discussion; there is much available in books and the Internet. Have students 'Google' phrases such as women artists + statistics, gender studies, guerrilla girls, feminist artists, museum statistics...etc.
7. Have each group choose 2 students to present their side of the argument.
8. Debate the issue; have the rest of the class add their arguments and ask questions to the speakers. Take a vote.

Conclusion:

- Have students changed their opinions? How?
- Are there any unresolved issues would they would like to investigate further?
- Are there extenuating circumstances where they think certain arguments presented will not hold, or are flawed?
- How do these arguments apply to other areas outside the art world?
- How do they think that girls of their generation might be limited in their futures? What can/should be done to address this?
- Is feminism relevant today? Would the girls consider themselves feminists? Would the boys consider themselves supportive of feminism?

STATS SHEET: Women & Art in the U.S.

- 51.2% of all artists are women
- 30.7% of all photographers are women
- 67% of bachelor degrees in Fine Arts go to women
- 46% of bachelor degrees in Photography go to women
- 65% of bachelor degrees in Painting go to women
- 60% of MFAs in Fine Arts go to women
- 55% of MFAs in Painting go to women
- 47% of MFAs in Photography go to women
- 59% of Ph.D.s in Fine Arts go to women
- 66.5% of Ph.D.s in Art History go to women
- 59% of trained artists and art historians are women
- 33% of art faculty are women
- 5% of works in museums are by women
- 17% of works in galleries are by women
- 26% of artists reviewed in art periodicals are women
- Women artists' income is 30% that of male artists'
- 30% of Guggenheim grants go to women
- 90% of all artist's models are women

VOCABULARY

abstract: a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- a. the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- b. the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

assemblages: art made by assembling various elements or objects which might be found, bought or created.

conceptual: art in which the ideas behind the creation of the work are seen as more significant than the end product. During the 1960s and '70s, conceptual artists rejected the idea of the unique, precious art object and focused on the importance of ideas to artistic practice.

contemporary: created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists.

curator: the person who is responsible for an exhibition – including selecting and displaying works, writing labels and organizing support materials.

formal: the visual elements used by an artist to make an artwork – line, shape, colour , texture etc.

installation: art that is created from a wide range of materials and installed in a specific environment. An installation may be temporary or permanent. The term came into wide use in the 1970s, and many installation works were conceptual.

multi-disciplinary: many contemporary artists are multi-disciplinary, often working with numerous artistic disciplines, for example: painting, photography and performance.

narrative: a story or representation of events taking place over time.

performance art: works in any of a variety of media that are performed before a live audience. The performance itself, rather than a specific object, constitutes the artwork. Documentation is often an important part of the performance.

self-representation: artwork which includes a representation of the artist as part of the image, but is not necessarily a self-portrait.

visual culture: refers to all visual imagery and visual experiences, both refined and popular. It contains a wide range of visual objects from paintings and drawings to commercial advertising, film, video, television and computer graphics.

RESOURCES

Print:

Broude and Garrard (eds); *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*. Icon Editions, 1982.

Broude and Garrard(eds); *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*. Harry N. Abrams: 1996

Chin-Lee, Cynthia. *Amelia to Zora: 26 Women who changed the world*; Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Press, 2005.

Duffy, Carol Ann (ed); *I wouldn't thank you for a Valentine: Poems for Young Feminists*. Henry Holt & Co. New York. 1992.

Guerrilla Girls; *The Guerrilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. Penguin Books. 1998

Jones, Amelia (ed); *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. Routledge. 2003

Nelson, Pam (ed); *Cool Women*. Girls Press, New York. 1998.

Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* January 1971: 22-39, 67-71.

Nochlin, Linda. *Women, Art, and Power: And Other Essays*. Westview Press, 1988.

Pollock, Griselda (ed.); *Psychoanalysis and the Image*. Blackwell, Oxford. 2006

Pollock and Parker ; *Old Mistresses; Women, Art and Ideology*, Routledge & Kegan, London 1981.

Pollock and Turvey-Sauron (eds); *The Sacred and the Feminine*, I.B. Tauris, London. 2008.

Watts, Julia; *Women's Studies*. Spinster Inc. Florida. 2006

Online:

www.artcyclopedia.com

online art encyclopedia listing international artists, and museums and galleries with collections of their work.

www.nmwa.org/clara/

national museum of women in the arts library and research centre – artists' biographies

www.wackatnmwa.org

<http://www.moca.org/wack/>

museum websites containing images and information about WACK!

www.wikipedia.com

online dictionary and encyclopedia, created collaboratively by laypeople.