BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

BUILDING A FEMINIST ART COLLECTION

Burning Down the House comprises nearly fifty works of art drawn from the Brooklyn Museum and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art collections. Inspired by the feminist masterpiece *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, this exhibition features artists who have risen above the narrow roles imposed on women and whose work has challenged the status quo, particularly within the canons of art history. The exhibition title refers to the idea of the "master's house" from two perspectives: the museum as the historical domain of male artists and professed masters of art history, and the house as the supposed proper province of women.

Burning Down the House is the first of many exhibitions planned to showcase the Museum's holdings of feminist art. With the gift of *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago in 2002, and the establishment of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in March of 2007, the Museum embarked on an explicit mission to support work by feminist artists. Its aim is to create an exhibition space that will sustain the values of feminism—equality and justice for all—while inspiring and promoting diversity in institutional collections across the world.

Since its founding, the Museum has placed great importance on collecting and exhibiting work by women artists, beginning with the first Museum exhibition devoted solely to the art of Georgia O'Keeffe in 1927. Since then the Museum has held many solo exhibitions devoted to women, presenting the work

of such outstanding artists as Mary Cassatt, Anni Albers, Louise Bourgeois, Consuelo Kanaga, Malvina Hoffman, Nancy Graves, Pat Steir, and Lee Krasner. The Museum has also historically collected important works by women, from acquiring major pieces by Berthe Morisot, Georgia O'Keeffe, Florine Stettheimer, Louise Nevelson, and Helen Frankenthaler to engaging with those by more recent feminist visionaries like Catherine Opie, Kara Walker, Jenny Saville, Berni Searle, and Hannah Wilke.

While feminists share the common goal of eradicating gender inequities, *Burning Down the House* does not assert a rigid definition of feminist art and ultimately suggests, through the diversity of forms, ideas, and voices, that feminist art is not limited to a particular look or reading. The history of feminist art is an ongoing conversation between past and present, yielding new interpretations with every generation and individual. As you walk through the exhibition, you will encounter "talking head" video iPods that feature interviews with artists in the exhibition. Here, the artists discuss the diverse ways their work relates to feminism, pointing to the great strengths of feminist art practice: its openness, richness, and complexity.

The installation was organized by Maura Reilly, founding curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, and Nicole J. Caruth, independent curator and former Manager of Interpretive Materials at the Brooklyn Museum.