

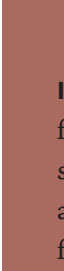
**FOREWORD**

**NOTES FROM THE INSIDE:**  
**BUILDING A CENTER FOR**  
**FEMINIST ART**

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**IF WE ARE TO AGREE** with cultural theorist bell hooks that feminism is a movement to end sexism and women's oppression (hooks 2000: 26) then the pairing of the words feminism and museums seems odd, if not antithetical, insofar as the former is associated with justice, equality, revolution and with challenging the status quo, while the latter – museums – are public, community-based institutions established to acquire and exhibit artefacts and treasures and to preserve heritage. Museums taxonomize, label, divide objects by region, era, style; whereas, feminism, at its best, is open and supple. Art museums are dominated by strict linear narratives in which one white male artist trumps another in a forward progression of avant-gardism, maintaining a patriarchal status quo based on white masculinist assumptions of genius and masterpiece.

Feminism and museums don't mix.

Moreover, museums have demonstrated over and over again that they are averse to simple notions of gender equality. There was, for example, dismal representation of women artists in the re-opening of the Tate Modern, London, in 2016 – of the 300 artists represented in the re-hang of the permanent collection, a third were women. Similar statistics were recorded the previous year, when the Whitney Museum of American Art opened its new location in New York with an inaugural exhibition entitled *America Is Hard to See*, showcasing works in its permanent collection and spanning a period from the twentieth century to the present. In the permanent exhibition galleries at the Pompidou Center, featuring art from 1900 to the present, less than 10% of the works are by women, and even less by non-white artists. It's worse at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where today less than 4% of the artists in the modern

art section are women, with no non-white artists. These don't sound like institutions keen on ending sexism and women's oppression.

And yet, in 2007, in an unprecedented institutional gesture, the Brooklyn Museum, an encyclopaedic museum founded in 1895, opened its doors to the first-ever exhibition and public programming space dedicated to feminist art. It was a landmark moment in the history of museums and art history. How did this happen? How did this seemingly odd pairing – feminism and museums – come together? Here's how the story goes...

The Center itself is the brainchild of art philanthropist Elizabeth A. Sackler. In 2001, she purchased *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, an artist whose work she had collected for several years. After extensive conservation work at The Getty Center, the large-scale work was gifted to the Brooklyn Museum, on whose board Sackler sits. In 2002, it was presented as a special exhibition to enormous crowds estimated at 80,000 people over the course of four months. (Incidentally, this was the second time the work had been presented at the museum – the first had been in 1980 while on its inaugural national tour.)

The gifting of *The Dinner Party* to the Brooklyn Museum was a milestone in the history of feminism. One of Chicago's aims in creating the monumental installation was to end the on-going cycle of omission in which women's achievements are repeatedly written out of the historic record – a cycle of repetition that results in generation after generation of women struggling for insights and freedoms that are too often quickly forgotten or erased again. While it has been seen by over one million people on three continents since it was first presented

at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979, in granting *The Dinner Party* a “home”, the cycle of erasure is broken; that is, at least for the 1,083 women represented or named therein (Figure 1).

It was during the special exhibition of *The Dinner Party* in 2002 that discussions between Sackler and Brooklyn Museum Director, Arnold Lehman, commenced about establishing not only a *permanent* installation for Chicago’s iconic work, but also an exhibition space devoted exclusively to feminist art. Much discussion went into whether the space should be called a centre for “women’s art” or “feminist art,” before the museum settled on the latter, recognizing that feminism has had a profound impact on post-1960s cultural production. In emphasizing *feminist*, the museum also acknowledged how feminism’s challenging ideas, theories and methodologies, and the myriad ways in which those are manifest in the visual realm, has influenced every facet of contemporary art today.

I was hired in 2003 as the Center’s Founding Curator. My mandate was to “make it happen.” It was a daunting task. How does one begin building and conceptualizing a feminist program from *inside* an institution that in many ways epitomized institutionalized sexism? And within one whose history of representing women artists, while better than most in the U.S., was mediocre at best; that is, if one were to judge by the female ratio of representation in the permanent collection alone? How to begin? There was no space chosen yet for the Center, no staff other than me, no office, no agenda, and no overarching concept for what the Center could or should be. It was mine to conceive and to mould, with input from Sackler and Lehman. Ultimately, we determined that the Center’s mission would



**FIG. 1:** *The Dinner Party* installation by Susan T. Rodriguez/Ennead Architects.  
Photograph ©Aislinn Wiedele/Ennead Architects.

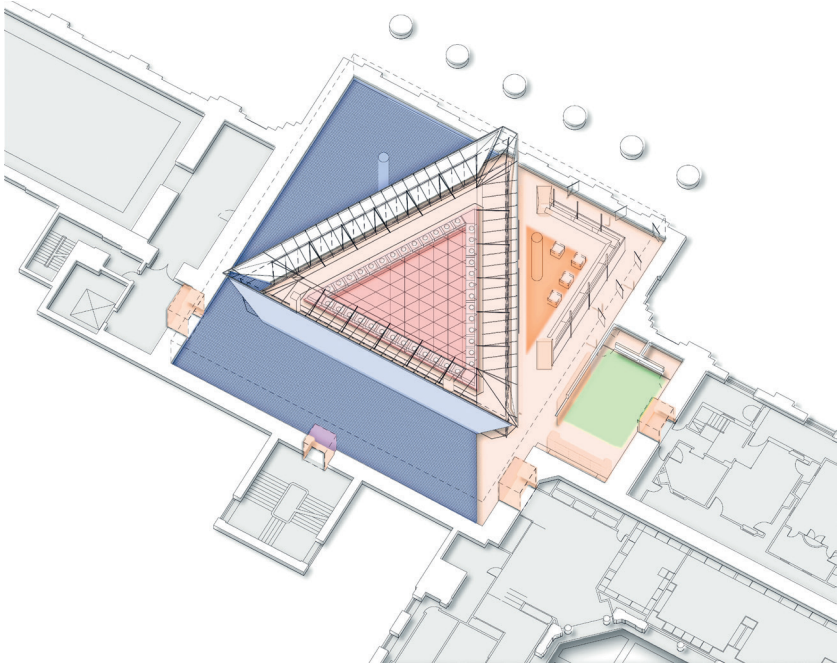
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be to raise awareness of feminism's artistic contributions; to make feminism approachable and relevant to diverse audiences of all ages; and by offering extensive educational and public programming, as well as interactive web components, and a dynamic exhibition schedule, the Center would aim to inspire and educate current and future generations about the living legacy of feminist art and ideas.

With the mission in hand, now came the task of building it (that is, once the asbestos had been removed from the age-old storage area that was to house the future Center!). The architect Susan T. Rodriguez from Polshek Partners in New York was hired to design the 8,300-square-foot space, located on the museum's fourth floor. She was faced with the difficult task of reconciling the permanent installation of *The Dinner Party* (which, with its ancillary components, e.g. Entry Banners, Heritage Panels, Acknowledgment Panels, requires 4,500 square feet), with the desire for substantive exhibition space for contemporary programming. Rodriguez also needed to resolve the triangular geometry of *The Dinner Party* within the rectilinear geometry of the Museum's existing historic structure. Her solution was ingenious (Figure 2).

Upon entering the Center, the visitor is encouraged to approach *The Dinner Party* via the artist's Entry Banners, a series of six Aubusson tapestries, which appear to float within the space. *The Dinner Party* gallery follows, which the visitor accesses through an aperture at the apex of the triangular space. Defined by large canting walls, a glass membrane that subtly reflects the space, sound abating flooring, and carefully focused light that illuminates the intricate details of each place setting, the viewer silently





**FIG. 2:** *The Dinner Party* installation by Susan T. Rodriguez/Ennead Architects.  
Photograph ©Aislinn Wiedele/Ennead Architects.

circumnavigates the triangle chronologically from pre-history to the early modern era. Exiting the installation, one enters an ancillary gallery (which, at one point featured shows related to *The Dinner Party*, as well as the seven *Heritage Panels* that portray the lives of the mythical and historical women whose names are inscribed on the Heritage Floor). Nearby is a forum for dialogue with the community on issues relevant to diversity, as well as a 3,200-square-foot exhibition space for rotating exhibitions of contemporary feminist art. The primary entrance to the Center is located directly adjacent to the northwest overlook to the Beaux-Arts Court and the museum's permanent exhibition displays of contemporary art.

In addition to the technical and architectural challenges presented by an intervention within a nineteenth-century structure, conservation requirements for the permanent installation of a fragile artwork had to be addressed. Although the two main materials of *The Dinner Party* are ceramic and textile, a wide range of organic (calfskin, snakeskin, deerskin, shells, bone needles, and starfish, wool, silk, linen, horsehair) and inorganic materials incorporated into the fabric presented challenges for the preservation of this work while on long-term view. The environmental factors that were considered when planning the exhibition space included light exposure, temperature, relative humidity, and air quality. To ensure a stable environment for the installation, I worked closely with a brilliant team of conservators, architects, lighting designers, and environmental engineers, who designed mechanical, filtered air, and lighting control systems – all in an effort to ensure the work's longevity.

Once the architectural design for the Center had been



finalized, and the Center's mission declared, my real work began. Once I got over my fear and feelings of paralysis (as the Founding Curator of the first museum space dedicated to feminism, I felt tremendous pressure to "get it right"), my curatorial mission became clear. First, from the outset, I insisted that the Center be a philosophically integrated (versus a separatist) space within the museum. Second, it was imperative that the Center launch with a large-scale exhibition that would make a foundational statement about the *current* state of feminist art scholarship. Third, understanding that few museums could boast strong holdings of feminist art, I knew that collection building would be critical to the success of the Center. Four, the Center would aim for global accessibility via a series of major web initiatives.

Despite my best intentions, however, I was fully unprepared for people's reaction to the F-word. Having been schooled in feminist art history, feminism was and is not a threatening concept to me. I was quick to learn, however, that the vast majority of people still think that feminism is anti-male – clearly a misunderstanding learned from patriarchal mass media. Sexism was a foreign concept. I found myself having to defend the need for the Center over and over again, and minimizing feminism to a single word: equality. I wasn't happy with that reductionism, but folks seemed to be okay with that concept. What they were not okay with, however, was if the work "looked" feminist. I was asked by teachers, board members, staff, and others if the Center would be exhibiting pornographic work; my colleagues in the Education Department were particularly worried, for instance, about young students seeing Chicago's "vagina plates," and how they were going to explain their significance to them. These were just

some of the many obstacles I had to overcome. Focus groups with educators, parents and teachers ensued, and collaborative education packets were produced.

To ensure the Center was integrated into the museum's overall programming, and to address some of the museum's internal anxiety about the F-word, I invited curatorial colleagues to participate in cross-departmental collaborations. This necessitated an understanding of feminism as a methodological approach that could be applied to history and to art objects. Using feminism as a "tool" to examine other non-contemporary collections and cultures in the museum helped to shed light on sex-gender disparities throughout history, and opened dialogue about the roles of women historically. While there, I organized two cross-departmental collaborations.

For the first, titled *Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses: Feminism's Impact on Egyptology* (2007-8), I invited my colleague Edward Bleiberg, Curator of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, to work together on an exhibition dedicated to powerful female pharaohs, queens, and goddesses from Egyptian history. The central object of the exhibition was an important granite head from the Brooklyn Museum collection of Hatshepsut, the fifth pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1539–1292 B.C.), and one of the 39 women represented with a plate at *The Dinner Party*. Hatshepsut was featured alongside other women and goddesses from Egyptian history, including queens Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and Tiye and the goddesses Sakhmet, Mut, Neith, Wadjet, Bastet, Satis, and Nephthys – many of whom are featured on *The Dinner Party's* tiles. By incorporating multiple objects from the Museum's extraordinary Egyptian collection, the exhibition also sought

to encourage viewers to make visual and historical connections with the museum's long-term installation *Egypt Reborn*, which offered additional objects on view at the time that pertained to *Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses*. The exhibition sought to demonstrate how extensively feminism has changed Egyptology during the years that coincide with the creation and subsequent popularity of Chicago's work. Today Egyptologists understand that Hatshepsut preserved her family's claims on the throne while the male heir was still a child. Hatshepsut has transformed from villain to heroine of her own story in the most recent telling. In much the same way, Egyptologists now recognize Tiye and Nefertiti as their husband's equal partners in ruling Egypt rather than women who attempted to claim more power than was proper for queens. Even Cleopatra, whose reputation among the ancient Romans (as well as many historians) was essentially negative, is today recognized primarily as the legitimate guardian of her country's political interests.

The second cross-departmental collaboration, *The Fertile Goddess* (2008–2009), was co-curated with Madeleine E. Cody, Research Associate in Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art. As the second “guest” at *The Dinner Party* table, after the Primordial Goddess, the Fertile Goddess is the first to be embodied in the form of a figurine, which evokes the earliest Palaeolithic female forms such as the *Venus of Willendorf*, made about 20,000 years ago. Chicago was inspired at the time by the recent discovery of these ancient female figurines, believing that they reflected goddess-worshipping societies, a notion that was at the fore of feminist thought, as was then being asserted by Riane Eisler, Merlin Stone, and later Marija Gimbutas. Nine extraordinary ancient female figures were

the focus of the exhibition, including the museum's oldest sculpture, which represents a woman, made by people living in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) or Syria in the late fifth millennium B.C.E. (Figure 3.)

Speculation about the meaning and functions of such figures began with their discovery and continues today. Were they goddesses, ritual objects, votive offerings, vehicles for working magic or fulfilling wishes, talismans for protection, teaching or initiation devices, or an ancient culture's embodiment of women? All nine sculptures were small in scale and not made to stand upright by themselves, as if they were meant to be transportable. The ubiquity of these figurines was demonstrated by the geographic breadth and timeline, which ranged from the fifth to the first millennium B.C.E. and came from ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq or Syria), Nubia (modern Sudan), Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, Anatolia (modern Turkey), and Iran.

These two small-scale, cross-departmental exhibitions demonstrated to the museum community how feminism itself can be a useful methodological tool – and one that can be *safely* and easily applied to other disciplines and historical objects to open new frontiers of thinking. Indeed, it can be so useful as to open whole new storage units: these exhibitions presented many never-before-seen (because female?) objects from the museum's esteemed collection.

While working with the museum's extensive collection was rewarding, deciding on the subject of the 2007 inaugural exhibition was quite difficult. I knew that it had to be a major exhibition that would make a significant statement about the current state of feminist art. I always knew that it would not be an historical exhibition, even before knowing that Connie Butler



**FIG. 3:** Ancient Near Eastern. Female Figurine, late 5th millennium B.C.E. Clay, pigment, (10.4 x 4.7 x 4.2 cms). Brooklyn Museum, Hagop Kevorkian Fund and Designated Purchase Fund, 1990.14. Creative Commons-BY. Photograph: Brooklyn Museum, 1990.14

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was organizing the *Wack!* exhibition. I believed that the Center's inaugural show needed to say something new and, most importantly, hopefully something that could help push feminist discourse in a new direction. Inviting Linda Nochlin to co-curate the inaugural exhibition seemed obvious. She had been my mentor when I was a graduate student at the Institute of Fine Arts in the 1990s, and the intergenerational examination of the current state of feminist art seemed irresistible. (There is a 37 year difference between us.) Besides, the very first museum survey dedicated to women artists (titled *Women Artists 1550-1950*) had been curated by Nochlin (and Ann Sutherland-Harris) in 1976 for Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and had then travelled to the Brooklyn Museum in 1977, exactly 30 years prior to the Center's opening. What could we learn if we were to place these two exhibitions as bookends, we asked? And, as is the inevitable question asked always in the presence of Linda Nochlin, how far have women artists come since she wrote her canonical essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*, in 1971? What we concluded was this: certainly, women have achieved greater recognition and visibility in the Western art world over the course of the last half of a century. However, it must be stated that the majority of those advances have been bestowed on women from and in the privileged centres. The conspicuous marginalization of large constituencies of non-western women can no longer be ignored, and we insisted that an understanding of co-implicated histories and identities, as well as "common differences," is crucial to a rethinking of feminism and contemporary art in an age of increased globalization. With this in mind, it was decided that the inaugural exhibition must take transnationalism and feminisms as its

curatorial project – to acknowledge the major shifts in feminist theory and practice that have occurred over the last few decades with the introduction of postcolonial and antiracist ideas, shifts that resulted in feminism’s global mandate. The fortuitous coincidence of the anniversary of the *Women Artists* exhibition was another inspiration because it highlighted those shifts within feminist discourse by pointing specifically to a switch in emphasis from the 1970s interest in challenging the masculinism of the art historical canon and its exclusion of women artists to the more recent interest in the early 1990s, after decades of work by feminists of color in every discipline, in querying the white Euro-American-centrism of the always already masculinist canon.

Thus, *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* called special attention to work by women as cultural producers across cultures, not just in the West, with the goal of challenging the broader framework of contemporary art as implicitly masculinist as well as Euro-US-centric. Presenting the work of 88 female artists (only four of whom were born in the USA) from 62 countries, the exhibition featured a multitude of voices, calling attention to the fact that feminism is a truly global issue. In using a plural noun – “feminisms” – we implied that there is not a single unitary “feminism,” any more than there is a universal “woman.” Similarly, *Global Feminisms* sought to challenge the concept of a “global sisterhood,” a term that assumes a universal sameness among women without taking into account social, racial, ethnic, economic, sexual, cultural, and other differences.

The exhibition’s installation was neither chronological nor geographical; instead, it was organized loosely into four sections that demonstrated both the interconnectedness and

the diversity of women's histories, experiences, and struggles worldwide. The first section, *Life Cycles*, charted the stages of life – from birth to death – in a non-traditional and subversive fashion, featuring artists who preferred to explore lesbian motherhood (Catherine Opie), primate wet-nurses (Patricia Piccinini), male pregnancy (Hiroko Okada), the dark underbelly of childhood (Loretta Lux), cyber-feminist marriages (Tanja Ostojic), hipster grandmas (Miwa Yanagi), and seductive tombstones (Pipilotti Rist) (Figure 4).

Section two, *Identities*, took as its starting point feminist theorist Donna Haraway's declaration that identities are "contradictory, partial, and strategic" (Haraway, 1991: 155)<sup>1</sup> and included works by artists like Oreet Ashery, Cass Bird, Dayanita Singh, and others, that sought to reveal that a person's identity cannot be restricted to a single definition, and that recognized identities – of race, class, gender, sex – are fluid, and never stable. The third section of the exhibition, *Politics*, examined world politics through the eyes of women artists whose overt declarations demonstrated that the political has become deeply personal. It included works that explore the problematic relationship between the individual and those institutional or political forces that give rise to war (Lida Abdul and Michele Magema), racism (Fiona Foley), sex trafficking (Skowmon Hastanan), suppression of female sexuality (Ghada Amer), colonialism (Tania Bruguera), geographical displacement (Emily Jacir), and industrial pollution (Yin Xiuzhen). *Emotions*, the final section, explored the representation of various emotional and psychological states – ranging from ecstasy to self-loathing, psychosis to contentment, sexual pleasure to hysteria – in an attempt to dismantle the confining





**FIG. 4:** *Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Museum.

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structure of what is “natural” for women, and men, to feel and express. Many of the works in the section evoked strong emotional responses in the spectator, as one was confronted with passionate kisses (Tracey Moffatt), domestic violence (Julia Loktev), self-mutilation (Ryoko Suzuki), fits of laughter (Boryana Rossa), and bouts of tears (Sam Taylor-Wood).

*Global Feminisms* received mixed reviews. Writing for *Artforum*, Carol Armstrong railed against the curators for not including male artists, and said she “came away depressed” (Armstrong, 2007: 360); Peter Schjeldahl of the *New Yorker* described it as “a big, high-minded, intermittently enjoyable show” (Schjeldahl, 2007); and Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* as “a false idea wrapped in confusion” (Smith, 2007).<sup>2</sup> The exhibition did have its fans, however. Helena Reckitt, writing for the international feminist art journal *n.paradoxa*, praised the exhibition’s focus on non-Western artists, and the organizers’ consultation with critics and curators in regions that were not traditionally part of the Western art-world’s orbit – in so doing, they avoided mainstream curatorial tendencies to select artists who had already been rubber stamped by the international arts community (Reckitt, 2006: 34-42).<sup>3</sup> Dena Muller agreed, writing for *SIGNS* that the exhibition was “impactful,” “progressive and challenging,” and arguing that if critics found it “falling short of their bated anticipation,” then they were ignoring curatorial intention altogether – intentions, she reminded readers, that are clearly outlined in the exhibition’s wall texts and catalogue essays (Muller, 2008: 471).<sup>4</sup>

In retrospect, ten years on, I believe firmly that *Global Feminisms* was too radical for a museum setting; it didn’t sit nicely therein. One didn’t leave the exhibition feeling all warm and

fuzzy. This was not just art by women, but art by women that conveyed a sense of political or social critique, and often with urgency. Many of the issues that women artists are dealing with outside of the western context – rape, AIDS, domestic violence, sex trafficking – are not ones that western visitors generally want to experience, nor are they necessarily easily digestible. We had hoped that our extensive didactics would have provided the localized context for deeper understanding – long wall texts, a cell phone tour with many of the artists discussing their works in relation to feminism, as well as artists talks online. I’m not certain this additional context assisted viewers. It was, after all, an exhibition with a strong theoretical framework that may also have been lost on many viewers. *Global Feminisms* was not a feminist-lite exhibition. It did not offer a “boiled-down” or consumable version of feminism. To be effective, I think that feminist exhibitions should sit uncomfortably within the museum. *Global Feminisms* certainly did that; as such, I suppose you could call it a success.

*Global Feminisms* was an enormous exhibition that used 12,000 square feet of exhibition space, including one of the special exhibition wings. It was made up entirely of loans from around the world, and was therefore an enormous financial, curatorial and registrarial undertaking. While some of the works in the exhibition subsequently entered the museum’s collection, the Center did not have an acquisition budget of its own while I was on staff. My mandate was to solicit gifts from collectors, artists, gallerists and so on. Given that there are few collectors with substantive feminist art collections, this became a difficult task. The museum had historically collected and exhibited work by women artists since its founding,

beginning with the first museum exhibition devoted solely to the art of Georgia O'Keefe in 1927, and boasted works by such outstanding artists as Mary Cassatt, Anni Albers, Louise Bourgeois, Consuelo Kanaga, Malvina Hoffman, Nancy Graves, Lee Krasner, Florine Stettheimer, Louise Nevelson, and Helen Frankenthaler. While not "feminist" *per se*, it did represent a history upon which to build a collection.

The final exhibition I organized, titled *Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection* (2008-2009), was comprised of 50 works drawn from the museum's collection, most of which I'd solicited during my tenure, including major works by Ida Applebroog, Hannah Wilke, Nayland Blake, the Guerrilla Girls, Tracey Moffatt, Tomoko Sawada, Carolee Schneemann, and Miwa Yanagi. Also on view were works by Kiki Smith, Tracey Emin, Kara Walker, Miriam Schapiro, Adrian Piper, Joyce Kozloff, Ana Mendieta, Jaune Quick-to-See-Smith, Lorna Simpson, Cindy Sherman, Carrie Mae Weems, among others. The exhibition title referred 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. The exhibition did not assert a rigid definition of feminism, but ultimately suggested through the diversity of forms, ideas and voices on view that feminist art is not limited to a particular look or reading. The history of feminist art was presented as a moving, living conversation, yielding new interpretations with every generation and individual. As the visitor walked through the exhibition, then, they encountered video iPods (also available online) that featured interviews with many of the artists in the exhibition who discussed their relationship

to feminism, pointing to one of the strengths of feminist art practice: its openness, richness and complexity.

Feminism is for everybody, bell hooks tells us. I took that idea as one of my primary tenets in building the Center. How could we make it accessible to a global audience other than via a series of online initiatives? The web is the greatest educational tool, so, from the outset, I set the goal of developing an extensive, interactive website, housed within the Brooklyn Museum site. My ambitions for the launch of the Center's site were ambitious. I wanted to create a massive database dedicated to the 1,038 women featured in *The Dinner Party*, an illustrated timeline of feminist-related events, a multi-media digital archive for feminist artists, and a blog. Working with a brilliant team of developers who made my ideas come to life on the screen, we launched the site in 2007.

*The Dinner Party* database is the most multi-layered of the site's components. At the time of its launching, it featured an online 360-degree virtual reality tour, so that those who might not ever have the opportunity to visit the installation might be able to explore the work from a myriad of angles, from their home computer, anywhere in the world. That fun feature has since been removed. But each of the 1,083 women celebrated in the work has a scholarly entry (replete, where applicable, with multiple images, literary or artistic examples, and a bibliography). When I initially designed it, each entry had a wiki component that allowed scholars to sign on and update information on each woman. The database also features a lengthy curator's essay about the work's art historical significance, a biographical section about Judy Chicago, and an area for teachers that includes downloadable lesson plans about *The Dinner*

*Party* and about feminist art prepared by the Museum's Education Department. These are still used today.

For the Center's website, I also designed the Feminist Art Base, the first online digital archive dedicated solely to feminist art. It was meant to be an ever-growing database that offered multimedia profiles from the most prolific contributors to feminist art from the 1960s to the present. Each profile (which were compiled by a group of interns working directly with the artists) included multiple images, video and audio clips, short biographies, CVs, and, importantly, a Feminist Artist Statement. The latter was a statement provided by either the artist (or a curator, scholar, gallerist) that contextualized their work in relation to feminism. The goal was to make this groundbreaking searchable archive a comprehensive resource for artists, curators, scholars, and the general public. It was meant to be continually expanding. When it was launched in 2007 there were 550 profiles. Today, there are only 320, and the profiles no longer feature videos or performance clips, only 2D works.

Another component of the Center's website that has since disappeared is The Feminist Timeline, which listed key moments in American feminist and women's history from 1950 to the present. Each entry, where possible, included a thumbnail image. For example, a user could find images of the first covers for *Ms. Magazine* in 1972, or could click on the entry for "Womanhouse Exhibition 1972," and pull up an image of the exhibition catalogue cover showing Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro on the steps of the house along with a short description of the historic installation.

During my tenure there, the Center's blog was the most active of the site's components. Each week visitors could find

a Picks of the Week column that recommended feminist art shows, lectures, and performances around the world. Entries were also written about the Center's current exhibitions, events, special guests (Roseanne Barr), press, or more personalized entries about gender-sex inequity in the art world. The blog entries were written by myself, by the Center's Research Assistant, or by a dedicated crew of interns who came from around the world to volunteer at the Center. Unfortunately, this component of the website has since disappeared, as well, perhaps because it requires too much upkeep.

The Center is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Since its launch in 2007 it has presented dozens and dozens of exhibitions and countless public programs. While many of my initiatives are no longer being prioritized, the Center is going strong, and I'm delighted. If I could offer a few words of advice, I would ask the current staff to take more risks, to not offer feminist-lite programming, to be far more radical. Of course, it's important not to offend the general public, members, staff, board, community leaders, school teachers, or funders, but not for the sake of the cause – feminism, which is always already an emancipatory, anti-hegemonic project, and one that should and must always seek to transform. Its criticality should never be muted. I fear it has been.

While there are still no other exhibition and public programming museum spaces like the Center in the U.S., there have been other major museum initiatives undertaken simultaneously that deserve noting. In 2005, MoMA experienced its own moment of institutional consciousness-raising, when arts patron Sarah Peter approached the museum with a request to find ways of supporting women artists more effectively there. Her offer provoked internal discussion, which led to

the decision that curators would research the women artists in the museum's collection – the ratio of male-to-female artists was about five to one at the time. What started as a book about female artists at MoMA soon sparked other ideas, and led to the establishment of the Modern Women Fund (MWF), which is now the umbrella organization for a series of on-going initiatives. The aim of the MWF is to reassess the traditionally masculinist canon and to make room for women artists, incrementally, and on a long-term basis. The MWF also manages an acquisitions fund devoted to purchasing work by women artists for the collection. These acquisitions are supported by a funding group of trustees and collectors who pay dues that go towards those acquisitions. The MWF initiative has resulted in many important changes since 2005, including extensive educational and public programs, support for major solo exhibitions dedicated to women artists, and the staging of international symposia focusing on women's issues in the art world. The current Curatorial Chair of the MWF, and Curator of Drawings and Prints, Sarah Suzuki, says the effects of the Fund only continue to reverberate and amplify within the institution. A newly reconstituted internal group, the Modern Women's Leadership Council, has recently brought together female staff from across MoMA's departments to continue to brainstorm in meaningful ways to make the contributions of women artists more visible, with an eye towards sharply recalibrating the five-to-one ratio previously seen in the permanent galleries. Indeed, there have been marked improvements: in 2004, women represented only 4% of the artists on view in the permanent galleries; in 2016 that figure had risen to 21%. While MWF has chosen "women" and not "feminist" in the Fund's name, their project



is wholly feminist. It is rooted in a desire to right the wrongs of past histories within the institution and to make “correct” decisions in the present and moving forward. They have the full backing of the institution from the top down, strong funding, and an inspired staff to ensure its success. I look forward to seeing how their feminist vision affects the reinstallation of the permanent galleries when the museum opens its much-anticipated Diller, Scofidio + Renfro expansion in 2019.

## NOTES

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1. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 2000), p. 26.
2. Carol Armstrong, “Review: Global Feminisms and Wack!”, *Artforum*, May 2007, p. 360; Peter Schjeldahl, “Women’s Work: Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum,” *The New Yorker*, April 9, 2007; Roberta Smith, “They Are Artists Who Are Women; Hear Them Roar,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2007.
3. Helena Reckitt, “Unusual suspects: Global Feminisms and WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution,” in *n.paradoxa*, Vol. 18, July 2006, pp. 34–42.
4. Dena Muller, “Review: Global Feminisms,” *SIGNS*, winter 2008, p. 471.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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Maura Reilly is a curator and arts writer, and executive director of the National Academy of Design in New York. As the founding curator of the Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, she launched the first exhibition and public programming space in the USA devoted entirely to feminist art, where she organized multiple exhibitions, including the permanent installation of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* and the blockbuster *Global Feminisms*. Reilly has authored and edited many books and articles on contemporary art, including most recently *Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader* (Thames & Hudson, 2015) and *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (Thames & Hudson, 2018). She is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Women's Caucus for Art, and in 2015 was voted one of the 50 most powerful people in the art world by both *Blouin Art Info* and *Art+Auction*. She received her MA and PhD from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University.