

She Persists

Twenty Voices of Celebration,
Resistance and Rebellion

This project has had a deep resonance for all concerned. That there was a need and a desire for a show of all female artists in 2019 was universally acknowledged. Special thanks to Mashael Al Rushaid (Founder of Heist), Mari Wilde (Exhibition Designer, creative force and universal saviour), Tonia Arapovic (Production Manager with Diplomatic skills that will one day deliver her a seat at the UN) and Camilla Bateman (for everything on the ground and across the seas). Finally, thank you to all of our amazing artists who entrusted their belief in curators Sona Datta and Mashael Al Rushaid with unwavering commitment to the vision.

She Persists

Twenty voices of Celebration, Resistance and Rebellion

It would seem fitting that a Palazzo once owned by a voraciously assertive woman, Marina Querini Benzon (1757-1839) should be the setting for an exhibition titled *She Persists*. Erudite and acerbic, her infamous salons saw the rooms of the palazzo filled with the artistic and literary greats of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thomas Moore, Lord Byron and the infamous Casanova were among many illustrious figures to be beguiled by her incredible persona. It is this resolute fortitude that is shared by the twenty female artists in this show.



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Representing the art world in its most capacious sense these artists resist and revel in the contours of female experience. Whilst hailing from vastly different cultural contexts, with each cultivating their idiosyncratic practices, a deep sense of universal female agency across the works is starkly apparent. Whether working in countries perhaps with limited arts infrastructure or restricted opportunities for display, each of the works are share complex and sophisticated assertions concerning the female experience. The perspectives offered in *She Persists* are not necessarily resolved nor entirely polemic, but all are categorically unapologetic. Seeking to subvert grand institutional narratives coveted, which have operated on foundations of exclusion or marginalisation and proliferated through mainstream spaces principally located in the West.

As Delhi based artist, Mithu Sen, famously declared at the start of a studio visit by curators from Tate Modern in London: 'I am not an illustration.'

In a time where female rights are still so often contested or hard won, it is vital to recognise that the art world is still not a level playing field which highlights the immense resilience shown by women globally. By placing a spotlight on a large number of artists from the MENASA region, fissures in the artists' experiences of making, exhibiting and selling



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work, is made pronounced. While the shift from the legacy of the imperial lens has certainly begun, the new vista remains widely untravelling in the popular consciousness and so remains largely out of focus to the all but a few committed curators and academics. As Okwei Enwezor (1963-2019), curator of the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 said, 'There is a growing awareness that the inferiority complex of those who were working under the shadow of the Western art system had to do with that opacity to their concerns, there is a growing awareness that that is shifting somehow. That does not mean it has disappeared, but it means that the Western artistic complex was highly privileged simply because of the art system in museums, auction houses, galleries, and so on.'[^]

Thus aside from regionally designated publications, museum departments and special collections committed to art from vast swathes of land described as 'South Asia' or the 'Middle East', there remains the question of how we translate the considerable distances traversed in academia's landscape of postcolonial studies into real-world, public-facing projects and the art market at large. The disconnect between rarified discourse and the public facing art world demands scrutiny and a viable proposition for extending the debate. As it stands, it remains valid to ask how we achieve integration to a point where

regionality is not the determinant of inclusion or the inordinate cause of interest?

Because my work opens up narratives to offer alternative representations of sexuality and eroticism, it is considered feminist.

Chitra Ganesh's *Transmission* (2012) asserts and celebrates the bonds of femininity. A female sage is consulted by a devotee, whose head has been replaced by a wide lens automatic camera. Disembodied eyes fling themselves between the women, acting as a conduit for transference.

The sexuality of dark-skinned bodies and seemingly 'foreign' influences that a viewer located in the West might not be able to easily connect to Western art history often renders Ganesh's work with labels such as 'exotic' or 'foreign'. Support for her work thus remains more institutional than commercial.

[^] Enwezor, Okwui. "Okwui Enwezor in Conversation with Anthony Downey." *Interview by Anthony Downey. Ibraaz. Ibraaz, 8 May 2014.*

Shifting landscapes

Feminism changed the course of 20th century art by altering the very notion of what art could be. A turn towards more sensuous materias and the more intimate processes of the handmade, at mid-century women artists had already begun to impress a female sensibility in their work, which profoundly shifted the dialogue of art and, in the process, quietly laid the foundations for a revolution. The late 1940s and 1950s already saw female practitioners pressing their own content into the formal geometries of post-war abstraction. By the 1960s and 1970s, the collision of feminism with Post-Minimalism, witnessed women boldly pioneering a 'no going back' course for the generations of the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond. Pioneers within this new narrative included Judy Chicago and Lynda Benglis who respectively forcefully and individually re-envisioned new content and formal engagement. of Tonia Arapovic, Anna Boggon, Chitra Ganesh and Annie Morris) – were propelled by the work of women who, in seeking new means to express their own voices, dramatically expanded the definitions of cultural production could be.

The works shown in *She Persists* reveal how their makers invented radically new forms and processes, ones that privileged solo studio practice, tactility as well as the idiosyncrasies of the artist's own hand. *She Persists* thus rejects the widely accepted precedent of the 'monolithic masterwork' to explore alternative tactics, that create more intimate reciprocity between artist and viewer. The exhibition examines how elements that are central to art today – including engagement with found, experimental, and recycled materials (as seen in the work of Yasue Maetake and Samira Abbassy), as well as an embrace of contingency, imperfection, and unstructured play (as seen in the work of Tonia Arapovic, Anna Boggon, Chitra Ganesh and Annie Morris) – were propelled by the work of women who, in seeking new means to express their own voices, dramatically expanded the definitions of cultural production could be.



3. Judy Chicago "Immolation IV"



4. Judy Chicago "Smoke Bodies III"



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For younger generations of artists, the foundational figure of Judy Chicago has validated the voice of the uncompromising feminist. Instrumental in the 1960s feminist art movement, her anarchic play with fireworks inserted a powerful female voice into an art world hung up on monumental and predominantly male, Land Art.

America's barren wilderness was the scene for creating Atmospheres into which Chicago and fellow women with painted bodies immolated synthetic pyrotechnics registering an aura of pagan ritual to the fringes of the California art scene, something akin to Shakespeare's witches who foretell the future at the opening of Othello.

In stills from Chicago's film *Women and Smoke, California (1971-1972)*, billows of tinted smoke smoulder and interact with the female form, disappearing across the bodies towards a state of diffusion. The disappearance of the environment behind these mysterious emanations of colour served to recalibrate the ground - so well-trodden by Chicago's male counterparts - and stake a claim to women's place in art history.

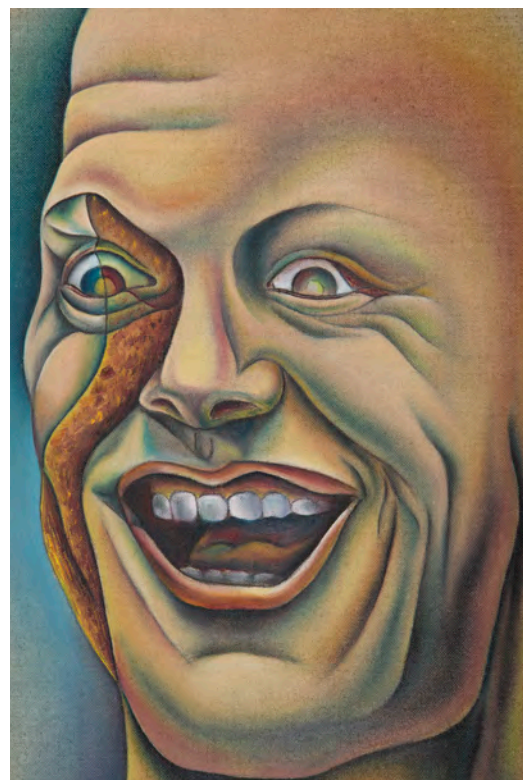
5. Judy Chicago "Purple Atmospheres" — 6. Judy Chicago "Woman with Orange Flares"

Sutapa Biswas, Housewives with Steak-Knives

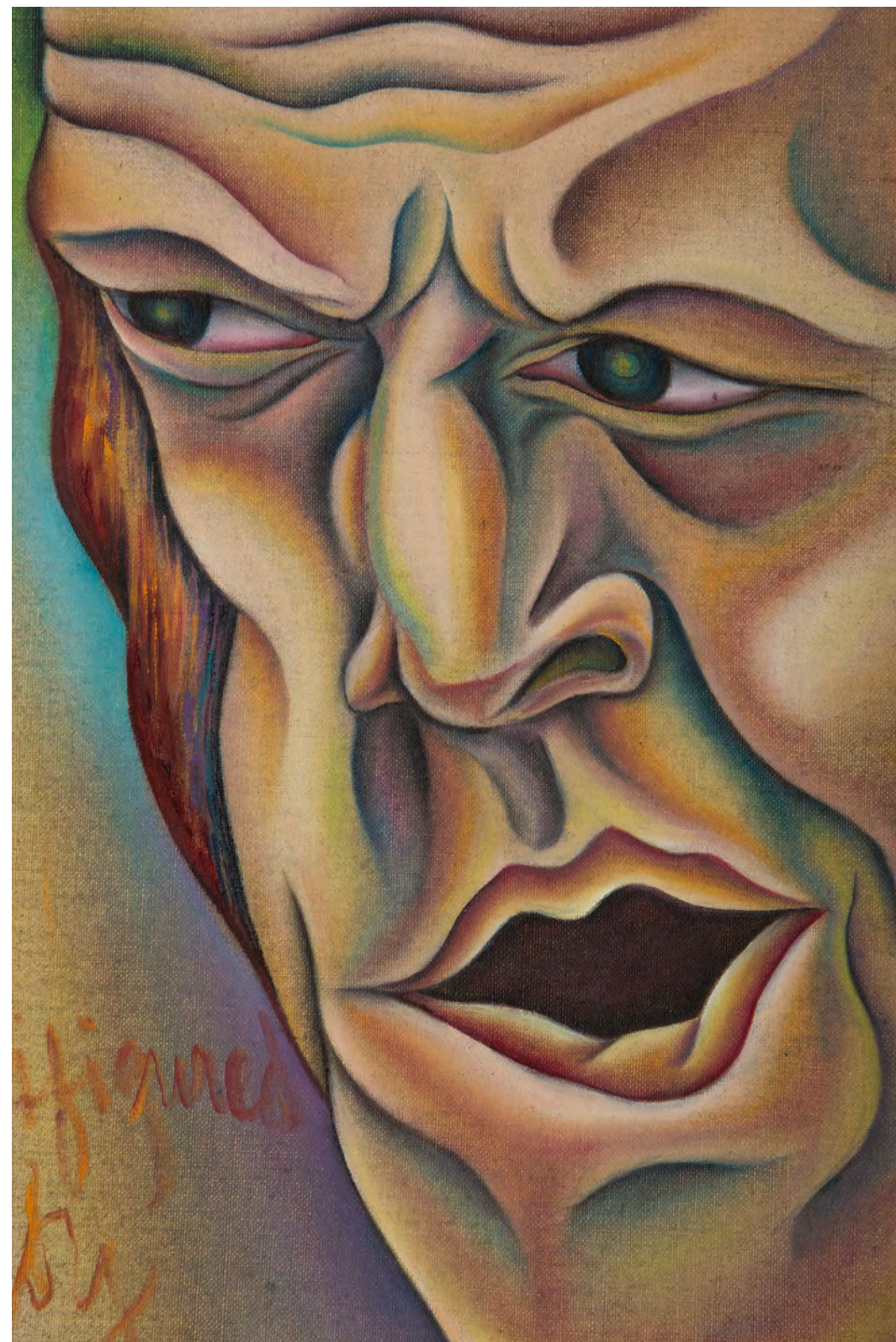
The powerful Hindu goddess, Kali, is foregrounded in this monumental canvas, *Housewives with Steak-knives* (1985), by British artist, Sutapa Biswas. Kali, who is the destroyer of evil, holds a flag showing a photocopied image of *Judith and Holofernes*, the c.1620 Renaissance masterpiece by the female artist Artemisia Gentileschi. The powerful, transcultural visual reference, connects Biswas' image of female empowerment to long history of the suppression of female artists throughout art history.



7. Sutapa Biswas "Housewives with Steak-Knives" (1985)



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Judy Chicago's *Disfigured by Power* (1982-87) series shows a sequence of contorted visages of men who have been seduced by power. Chiselled jaws, often typifying male virility, are rendered scarred or bleeding. *Disfigured by Power* reveals the vulnerability of the human condition, of how our emotional balance is so easily thrown asunder through the corruptive, yet seductive, influences of power. Chicago's social and political importance is today once again on the ascendant as her candid scrutiny of male power has assumed new contemporary currency.

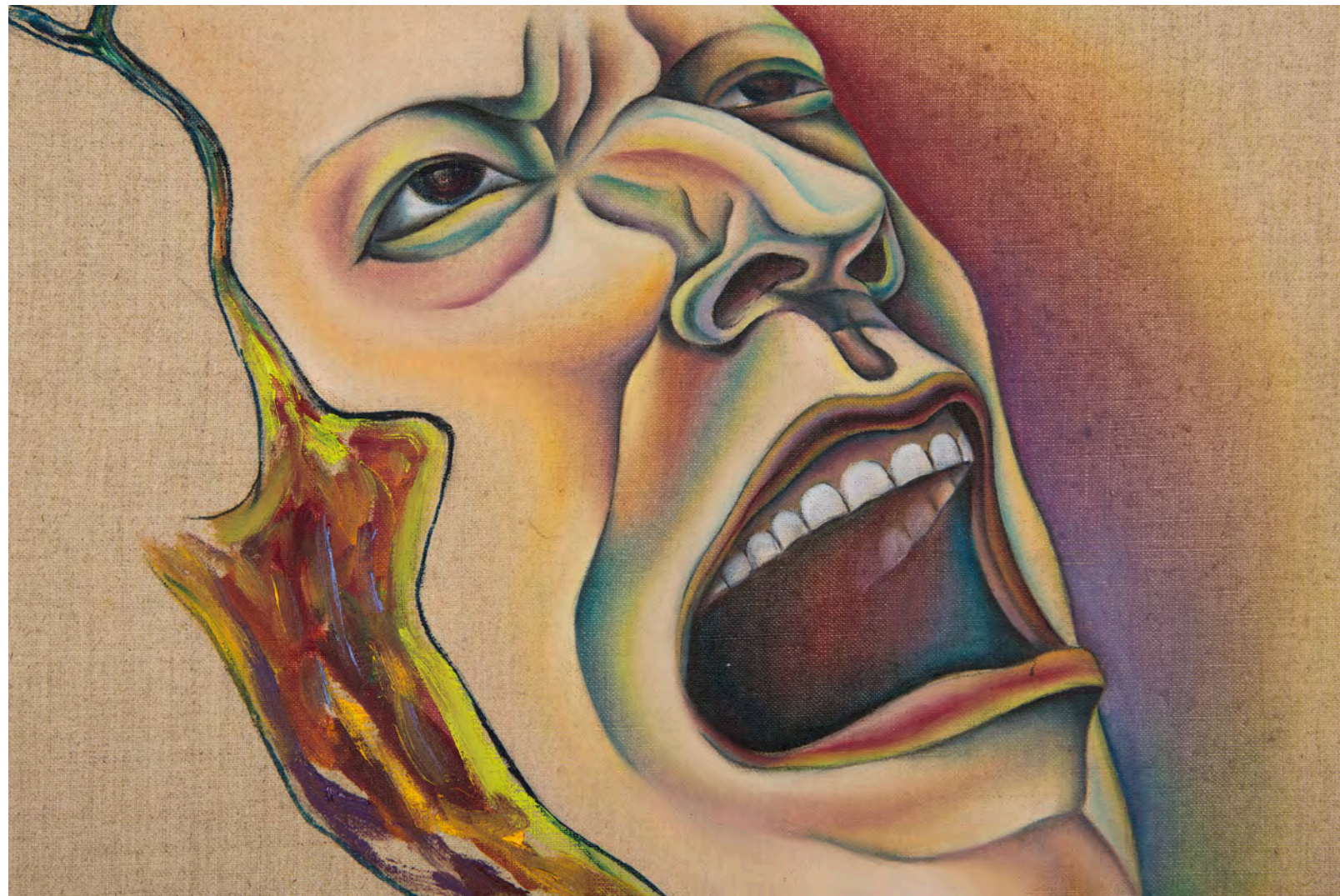
A larger version of Chicago's *Driving the World to Destruction* is held in the National Museum of Women in the Arts in the USA.

MAR posed the question to the artists of *She Persists*, asking them to express an instance of persistence in their lives within the feminine experience. The aches and woes of persistence are usually hushed in dark corners, murmured amongst yourselves and never spoken especially in regards to women. MAR created an echo chamber for these truths in commemoration of all the times we have not spoken, held our tongues or remain unheard of speaking up.

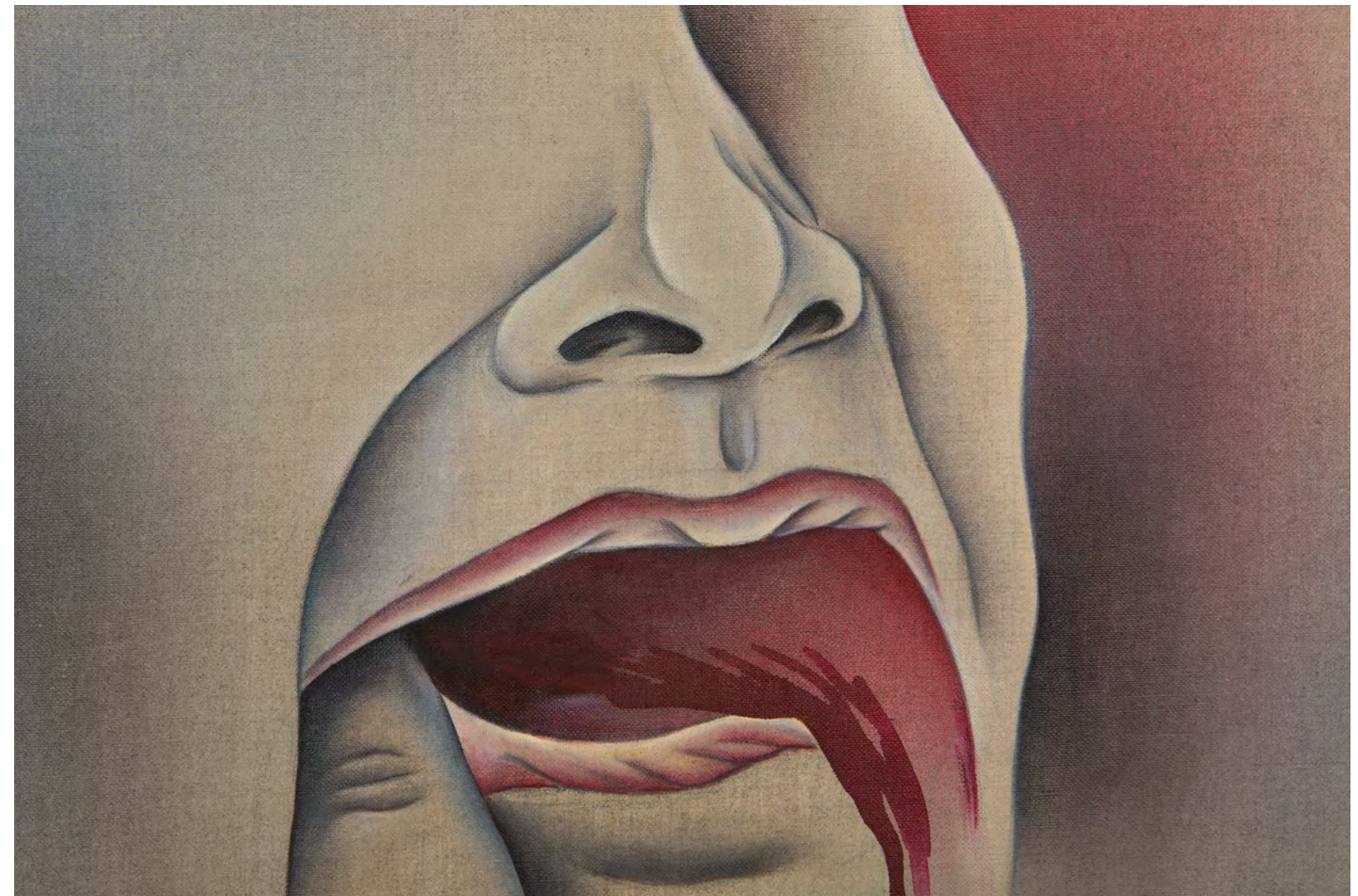
Judy Chicago Birth Project 1980-1985

"My first ideas in developing imagery for the Birth Project involved using the birth process as a metaphor for creation. Long before I finished *The Dinner Party*, I became interested in creation myths. In 1975, while I was having an exhibition at The College of St. Catherine, in St. Paul, Minnesota, I met a radical nun who collaborated with me in writing a reinterpretation of the myth of Genesis from a female point of view. As soon as I could, I began trying to build a visual analog to this myth—one that would affirm the fact that it was women who created life. When I approached this subject matter again in preparation for the *Birth Project*, I went to the library to see what images of birth I could find. I was struck dumb when my research turned up almost none."

It was obvious that birth was a universal human experience and one that is central to women's lives. Why were there no images? Attracted to this void, I plunged into the subject...



10. Judy Chicago "Disfigured by Power" (1982-87)



11. Judy Chicago "Disfigured by Power" (1982-87)



12. Judy Chicago "Crowning"



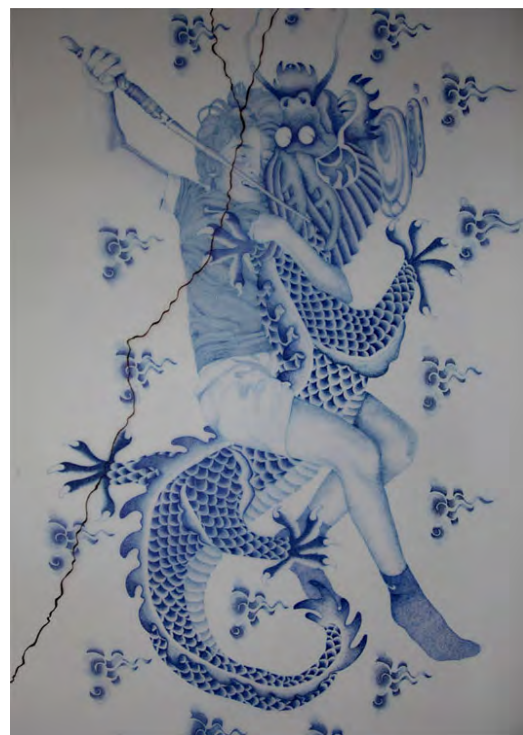
Annie Morris and Judy Chicago provide literal uptakes of this theme. Chicago's phantasmagorical prints from *The Birth Project* (1980-85) depict fertility as a source power of divine magnitude. In a mythological siren blasts transmitter rays from her breasts, immobilising the androgynous people which flail beneath her. It is positivity which Chicago attaches to our female's fundamental capacity to bring life as reiterated by the colourful vagina in *Birth Trinity* (1985) which seemingly pulsates with fecundity.

13. Judy Chicago "Guided by the Goddess" (1985)

The counterpoint to Chicago's assertions is taken up by Morris, who shows great strength in the face of adversity. Annie Morris love of line uses abstraction to tell powerful human stories. Her stacked spheres of pigment have a lightness of touch, yet seem to defy gravity and upend the laws of nature, delivering us the illusion of western naturalistic painting while simultaneously revealing its tricks. The artist's children, dressed in pyjamas, each wrestle a fearsome dragon - their childlike pleasure in the act of imminently plunging their swords into its scaly body creating a scene of habitual family life.



14. Judy Chicago "Birth Trinity" (1985)



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Annie Morris Stack 9, Cobalt Turquoise Light, is a precarious tower of coloured spheres, that courageously addresses the devastating loss experienced when a pregnancy is not carried to term. Formed in commemoration, these are works about hope and harmony in the face of hardship. Reference to the history of the feminist aesthetic runs throughout Morris' work whose approach is both personal, accessible and universal.

If age is a premise for exclusion, motherhood is often another. Despite an increasing social awareness for maternal welfare, albeit far from universal, there are distinct social pressures and challenges associated with motherhood and, in particular, its integration with work. FIG 17: Faiza Butt's *My Love Plays in Heavenly Ways* (2013) reconciles the artist's roles as creative, mother, wife and daughter. The diptych featuring her two children, is a delicate blue ink drawing which celebrating both her artistic and maternal identity. Depicted as a scene from a Chinese blue-white porcelain, emphasised by fine trompe l'oeil cracks which run through the image delivering us the illusion of western naturalistic painting while simultaneously revealing its tricks. The artist's children, dressed in pyjamas, each wrestle a fearsome dragon - their childlike pleasure in the act of imminently plunging their swords into its scaly body creating a scene of habitual family life.

Faiza Butt arrived in London from Lahore in the early 1990s as a postgraduate student at, with her hopes for a life in the West stuffed into her back pocket only to encounter was a macho culture of large canvases painted with broads muscular strokes. Her technique of water-based painting on paper - handed down from the ateliers of the great Mughal courts of India - was deemed decorative and feminine, so much so that artist's encounter at the world famous Slade School of Art resulted in her abandoning painting altogether. Having planted her familial roots in London with English husband Richard and children, Layla and Zac, Faiza Butt has often gently pointed out, that the feminist agenda for a woman growing up in Pakistan in the 1980s under the military dictatorship of General Zia Ul Huque and his state sponsored Islamic agenda, was a very different proposition to the equivalent time in the West where perhaps a statement act of 'burning one's bra' would perhaps suffice.

Inverting agendas

These values are reflected in Lalla Essaydi's riposte to voyeurism. Borrowing from the compositional conventions of Manet's *Olympia* (1863), the gaze inferred in *Les Femmes du Maroc: Grande Odalisque* (2008) is given a decidedly male or Occidental character. The well-rehearsed narrative about sex and servitude is hard to shake but is nevertheless ingeniously disrupted as the woman who reclines on a bed of Arabic text, her body branded with condensed words while she inhabits the space with a steely stare of unnerving comfort. Paired back from the original with background and characters erased, the woman is emboldened in her visibility, disdainfully staring back at Orientalist Western image making and its legacies in which Manet was implicit. This comes with an allusion to, the still persistent, albeit diminished, aesthetic privilege endowed to those operating from the 'centre' - the art world is yet to shake the imperial past which determined visual value.





18. Hamra Abbas "Paradise Bath", Archival pigment print (41"x 30")




These legacies are found contorted in Hamra Abbas's *Paradise Bath* (2009), a series of nine photos in which Manet has been repositioned in a fifteenth century Ottoman bath-house. Atop a stone slab a reclining nude is bathed by Abbas, dressed for servitude. Foamy suds slip along her idealized white form born from the industrious hands of Abbas constructing a servitude replicative of imperial relationships; the colonised fulfilling the colonizer's demands. An uncomfortable politics of desire plays out across the images, the forbearing sexuality of the nude who knowingly engages with the viewer, eclipsing Abbas's presence. In her languid pose, her seductive eyes loll with pleasure, enticing the viewer to become the voyeur. Yet arguably the work's potency comes also from its prohibition in Abbas's native Pakistan. This raises important questions about histories of censorship, religious convictions and in the context of this exhibition, considers the ethics of representation: when is a woman's naked body deemed viable or acceptable, inoffensive and accessible?

Faiza Butt subverts the male gaze in *Get Out of My Dreams II* (2008) playing on our fears and prejudices. Two bearded men speak to contemporary anxieties around 'bombs, beards and burquas'. Conspicuously surrounded by what the artist calls 'food porn', the accoutrements of consumption and desire remind us that our beliefs are often constructed upon what we consume from the media, often without thinking. This work was placed here in order to objectify the opposite sex.

19. Faiza Butt "Get Out of My Dreams II" (2008)



The Guerrilla Girls would have an answer. Exposing the consistent lack of female visibility within the art world, they would claim that the inclusion of women in the 'Canon' is predicated on the whole-hearted embrace of the nude. Their astringent poster campaigns and performances present statistics garnered from research, which establish that for women, only nudity alone will assure entry into art world institutions. Implicit is the power wielded by these spaces; the influential museums, galleries and funding bodies reinforce which gender inequality by reducing women's inclusion too often on the basis simply of how they look (to the powerful men who run those institutions) rather than on the merits of their artistic talent. As they proclaim, 'Less than 3% of the artists in the Metropolitan Museum are women, but 83% of the nudes are female'.



Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?

Less than **4%** of the **artists** in the Modern Art sections are women, but **76%** of the **nudes** are female.

Statistics from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 2011

GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
www.guerrillagirls.com



22. Maria Kreyn "The Allegory of Indecisions" (2018), Oil on Canvas (62 x 76in)



Turning into the microcosm of the art world determines that for a purportedly liberal industry there remains a deep collusion in a greater narrative about women's continuing denigration in society. The appearance of Rose McGowan, a key figure in the recent #MeToo movement, in the film *Indecision IV* only serves to corroborate this point. Inspired by Maria Kreyn's striking painting, *The Allegory of Indecisions* (2018), its inclusion in the exhibition is a reminder of the turbulent and testing process involved in Rose's activism.

Indecision IV, directed by Tonia Arapovic (2018) is an immersive art film directed by Tonia Arapovic and starring activist and actress Rose McGowan. In order to challenge prescribed notions of gender, the project set out to capture a magnetic encounter between actress Rose McGowan and dancer James Mulford.

McGowan was positioned in the middle of a derelict chapel listening to an ambient soundscape by artist David Triana. McGowan and Mulford were kept isolated from one other until the cameras started rolling, which

23. Tonia Arapovic "Indecision IV" (film stills)

amplified a sense of natural anticipation between the two. The idea that neither would have any preheld expectations from the other within the performance space was integral to their being able to express their own journey through the experience in responsive flow. David Triana further elevates the viewer's journey with the use of sound manipulation. The audience hears this soundtrack on headphones; an orchestra made of everything from Mulford's ballet shoes - custom-made with sandpaper soles for this very purpose - to McGowan's breathing.

As Mulford approaches McGowan she reacts to the dance with improvised movements. The original choreography, by Chudi Okoye* draws inspiration from Maria Kreyn's baroque painting *The Allegory of Indecision* (2018). The painting depicts the figure of Saint Sebastian, an eroticised icon of forbidden pleasure. Shot in one continuous take; the film was created in May 2018 during a watershed moment in McGowan's life and forms a physical expression of her state of mind at that time.





25. Chitra Ganesh's "Transmission" (2012)



26. Maria Khan "Curse the Fig Tree" (2017)

It is Chitra Ganesh who proffers an image of the female divine. *Transmission* (2012) is awash with mystique and supernatural powers. Gold spheres and disembodied eyes bounce across the collage forming a connection between a goddess and her devotee. Conflating Hindu and Buddhist iconography with sci-fi and comic book visuals, merging sea, land and sky, the work finds a central place for the female body and more significantly for the artist, a brown female body. Ganesh regards this visual celebration equally as an intervention and retort to glaring omissions in the Western art canon.

Much like Maria Khan's portrait, *Curse the Fig Tree* (2017), the work makes space for what is shockingly subaltern imagery. Even within this exhibition, the unclothed older woman cuts an uncommon figure. Shown within the branches of a fig tree, her face is crudely depicted with fine charcoal lines. Her body is partly obscured by a garland of ripe succulent fruits, two of which sit on her bulbous breasts which attempt to evade her bra, leaving the edges of her nipples exposed. The image puns on a miracle performed by Jesus, in which he curses a fig tree to find it withered the next day. Showing the tree as fecund and healthy imbues the woman with transformative powers. As if presiding over her achievement, she sits proud in her body and refuses to be sequestered by society.



'She Persist' is an effort to do this and to muddy the geographically charged centre/periphery complex which haunts the art world. Many of the artists included knowingly work with the art world's stratification and insolently play out the assumptions and anxieties embedded in its modus operandi. It is with sartorial, if somewhat juvenile, humour that Aisha Abid Hussain articulates what it is to have and live life 'compromised' by gender. Bolstered by a coloured foil curtain, spindly strips of tinsel and gauche fairy lights, Hussain re-enacts the marriage ceremony of her mother and father. The series of photographs, based on historic originals from the event, form a storyboard of immense emotional fluctuation; Hussain as the imminent wife looks dutiful, she sticks out her tongue and surrenders to her husband and by extension her new life. The title, *Two, Not Together* denies the joyous union expected of this show of commitment and does away with the clichés of romantic love and matrimonial purity. The final image in the series, with the couple side by side, untouched and looking blankly outwards, leaves the viewer in no doubt about the vast chasm between the two individuals.



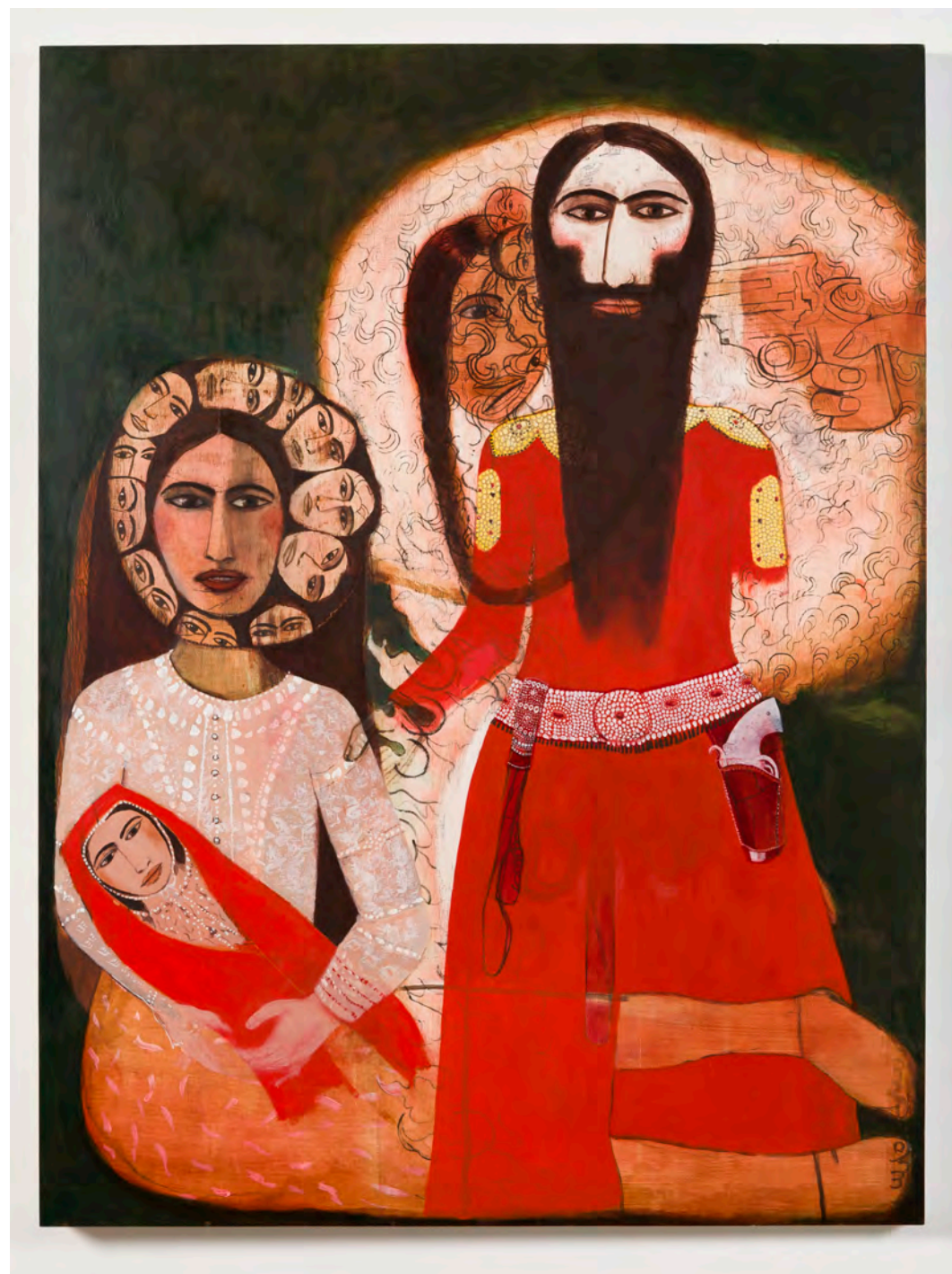
28. Aisha Abid Hussain "Two, Not Together" (2014), Archival print on Hahnemuhle photo rag (12×16in)



29. Aisha Abid Hussain "Two, Not Together" (2014), Archival print on Hahnemuhle photo rag (12×16in)



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30. Samira Abbassy "The Accused", doll parts, fabric, teeth (33 x10x10cm) — 31. Samira Abbassy "Love and Ammunition I" (2015), Oil on Gesso Panel (48x36in)



And at a time when so much art is mechanically fabricated these works celebrate the enduring power of the handmade. FIG 29: Emilie Pugh's *Twin Cyclone* (2019) process involves burning layers of Japanese kazuke paper. Does the cyclonic weather pattern become a metaphor for the challenges encountered by women? Pugh's complex technical processes explore the micro and macro structures of life and its cycles. Cyclones are deep, vast, beautiful and unpredictable and can alter the state of nature, perhaps not unlike the female spirit itself.

The tricky bonds between father-mother-daughter recur and are core to Samira Abbassy's work. Whilst Hussain assesses the heterosexual power politics and the patriarchy that has overshadowed her upbringing, Abbassy's interest lies in the dynamics of the intergenerational maternal relationship. The intensity of this attachment is embodied by the young woman who sits in the corner of the painting FIG30: *Love and Ammunition I* (2015). Her faintly painted hands hold a child whose face closely resembles the mother's

as well as a halo of visages which ensconce her head. The flattened ring circulates and clamps the mother's face. This sets up a chain of transmission and makes vivid the women's line of inheritance: between the two mothers and the new daughter there are memories exchanged and experiences shared. As suggested by the vivid colours and ominous male figure sporting a holster around his waist, these are not definitively positive encounters. Traumatic and painful events are unavoidably part of this life cycle which must be overcome.

The fear of female ascendancy is expressed in Abbassy's diminutive but mighty sculpture *The Accused* (2014) [FIG 31: THE ACCUSED] at once acknowledging Christianity's history of the damned woman from the fall of Eve to the seventeenth century's puritanical burning of witches. The bust of an adult female doll has a set of teeth affixed from the neck up, thus appearing to let out a deafening screech that symbolically reverberates through centuries of man's quashing of female power.

32. Emilie Pugh "Twin Cyclone", 6 layers of burnt kazuke Japanese paper (160 x108 x21cm)

Making space

The artists in *She Persists* engage space more aggressively in order to work through questions of structure and material, drawing performance, social critique, and previously untried media into their practice. Collapsing the intimate and the monumental, Mithu Sen *I have only one language; it is not mine* (2015) and Anila Agha *Shimmering Mirage* (2019) are examples of such eliding agendas.

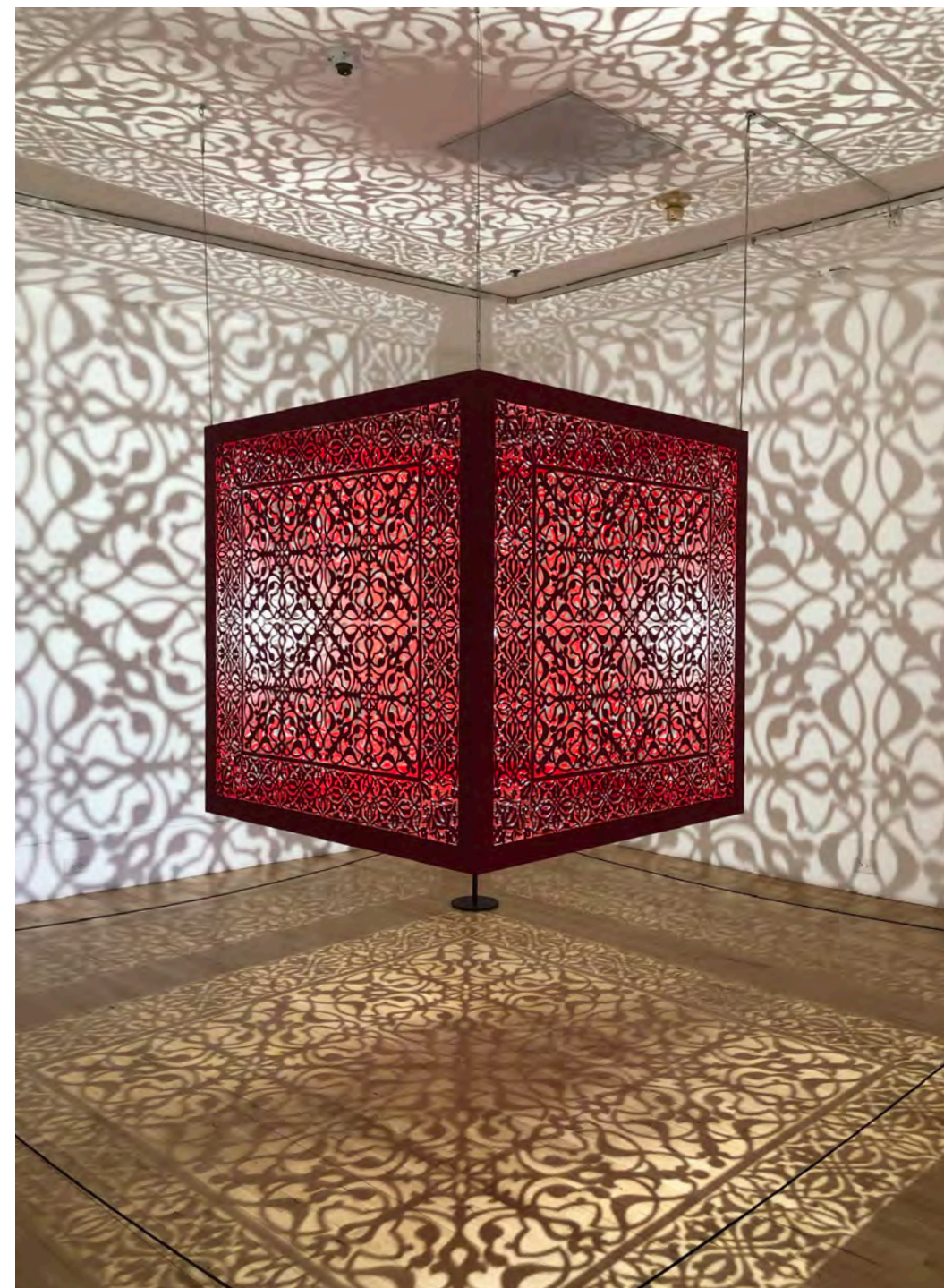
Our increasingly global artists are far more expansive in their use of space. Their whose works signal a foundational shift from discreet sculptural objects toward more installation-based practices. These women have focused upon dimensional forms as alternatives to the criticality of the feminist gaze conveyed in other media as represented by the shift seen in the imagery on the one hand of Faiza Butt, Lalla Essaydi and Hamra Abbas and, on the other, with Mithu Sen and Anila Quayyum Agha.

The strength of character in overcoming personal circumstance and challenges is a trait pivotal to Mithu Sen's video, *I have only one language; it is not mine* (2014). Filmed during a performance by the artist at a South Indian orphanage for victims of sexual violence and abuse, the footage confirms the adaptability of these girls whose trauma and abandonment has delivered them to need refuge under a new roof. Sen acts as a character called Mago, who speaks a made up language unintelligible to the girls who communicate in their local language of Malayalam. Mago is deliberately inquisitive and persistent in her urge to interact, testing the limits of their respective languages and hospitality. This imposed barrier does not inhibit the exchanges as a non-verbal communication is found and successfully deployed standing testimony to the emotional intelligence and empathy between the females.





34. Shirin Neshat, Sara Jafari (Masses), from "The Book of Kings" series (2012), ink on LE silver gelatin print (101.6x76.2cm)



35. Anila Agha, Shimmering Mirage (2019), Installation, Laser-cut black steel and bulb (91.4x91.4x91.4cm)

By submerging the viewer in her work, Anila Quayyum Agha's immersive piece has a similarly if not more profound effect. *Shimmering Mirage* (2019), saturates the room and viewer with Islamic inspired designs informed by Granada's medieval Islamic palace, the Alhambra. Created from a centrally hung light box cut with these intricate sinuous patterns, a wash of mesmerising shadows casts itself across the room making the walls, floor and ceiling converge. For Agha this unification of the space and the unified experience of the viewers within it, is a rebuff to the isolation she has encountered as a woman and a Muslim. Spaces were unavailable to her both growing up in Pakistan and relocating to America.

In childhood her view of Pakistan's mosques stopped at the facade being privy to strict gender segregation laws, the interiors were inaccessible with female prayer having its place at home. This politic of alienation re-emerged, under different conditions, in America where her Muslim identity was a basis for exclusion.

Shirin Neshat's stark photograph negotiates trauma of a different kind. Sara Jafari (*Masses*) (2012), part of her monumental photographic project *The Book of Kings*, shows the portrait of a diasporic Iranian woman from New York. Her face and exposed skin are covered in verses of contemporary Iranian poetry. Made following the Arab Spring and inspired by the country's Green Movement, the woman's expression belies the trauma of political exile and upheaval.

This negotiation of diasporic identity is central to Shirin Neshat's oeuvre and specifically her two year project, *The Book of Kings* (2010-2012). Composed of forty five monochrome photographic portraits made of Iranian citizens living in New York, each figure's bare skin is engrained with lines of faint text; verses of contemporary liberal Iranian poetry which was suppressed or censored in the Islamic Republic for its themes. Setting up the body as an allegorical nexus where Western, Eastern, political and religious thought coalesce, Sara Jafari (*Masses*) (2012), one of these sitters, appears a complex mix of overwhelmed yet dignified, vulnerable and resilient. It is precisely this amalgam of experiences, particularly in relation to women, which drives Neshat. Believing in art's revolutionary potential, her work is an ongoing attempt to expose and unsettle power relations which profoundly shape female worlds.



At a time when borders become walled barriers and nationalisms approach fascism, it is heartening to see Anna Boggon's wonderful piece 'Souvenir' again. It revisits the joyful curiosity of travel, of the chance to experience different tastes and customs, and of honouring those differences rather than harbouring fear towards them. It up-ends expectations as the best art must do.

Cherry Smyth, art writer and poet

A sense of individuality is emphasized by Anna Boggon's installation *Souvenir* (2000). Hundreds of female figurines are reflected in a horizontal mirror. Products of the souvenir industry, varying in nationality, age and condition, the dolls have all been collected specifically for this work, discarded trophies which have been collected by various people over the years, keepsakes of having been somewhere, sometime. The dolls thus represent stereotypes of female national identity and the burden such figures bear in carrying a sense of national beauty. In being isolated from one another their idiosyncratic clothing is made all the more powerful and difference becomes valuable currency. This melee of global traditional dress is in part ridiculed for the prescription of nationality superficial through attire with bonnets, frills and felt strips glued to plastic dolls. *Souvenir* calls out the reductive terms of production that are used to assert stereotypical notions of female beauty. On the other side, however, the dolls' gravity defying poise and brilliant array of materials, colours and styles offers an illusionary world and a vision of cross-cultural female independence deserving of celebration.

Boggon is interested in the idea of being a foreigner. She travels extensively and enjoys the frequency with which she is referred to as a foreigner in China. "We are all foreigners" she says "and with that comes a differing vantage point and a humbling experience".



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The visual unity found in Maimouna Guerresi Trampoline Series speaks to this sense of female intuition. Three stunning female forms with seemingly spiritual significance levitate above thin wooden boards. Draped in cloth from Guerresi's travels in Africa and Asia, abundant material falls in folds from their frames lending them iconographic status. Brought together on a single visual plain, the photographs mark a transcendence to higher worlds and, as with Chicago and Abbassy, sublimates the female form evoking her powerful role within multiple religious narratives.

Materiality

The celebration of femininity is altogether more abstract for Lynda Benglis and Yasue Maetake. Benglis had already worked out how to translate gestural abstraction into sculpture by engaging walls and floors with powerfully suggestive violations of spatial conventions. Recycling has now become the craft tactic of the present for which Lynda Benglis paved the way with her forthright and highly gestural tumbling waterfalls of poured and cast aluminium.

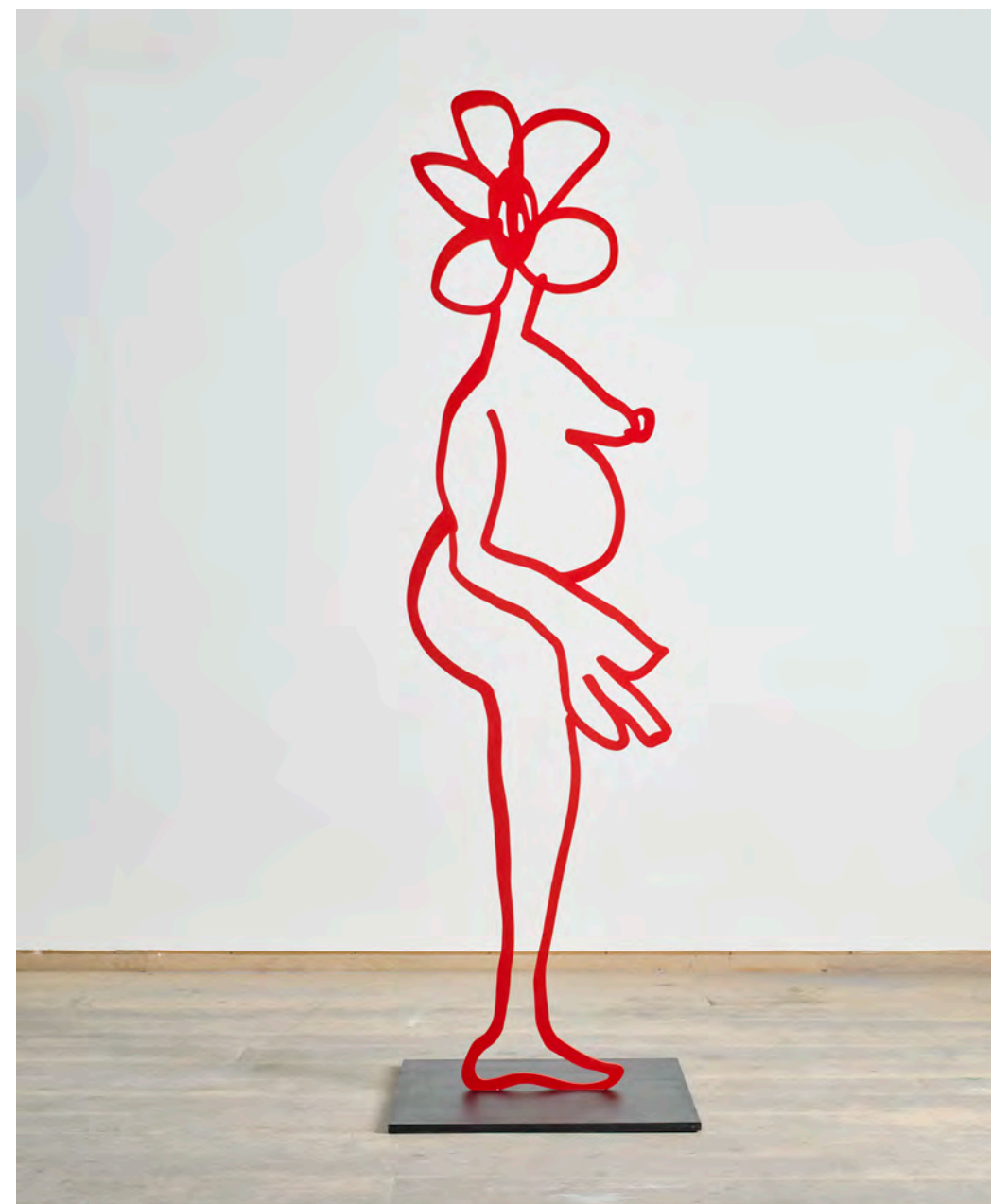
Lynda Benglis's is a visceral anthropomorphic tangle of aluminium, which curls away from the wall as if ready to leverage itself across the gallery floor. Characteristic of her practice, underpinned by her desire as a younger artist to use materials that had not yet been deployed by male artists, Figure 4 asserts a gargantuan presence and can be described as a 'frozen gesture'; it is with definite shape yet wholly unresolved and nebulous. As a pioneer of post-Modernism, Benglis's work cannot be seen without acknowledging her radical actions.



40. Lynda Benglis "Figure 4" (2009), Aluminium (250.2 x 168.9x63.5cm)



41. Yasue Maetake "Urethane Flower on Steel Stem Clad with Foam" (2013), Steel, polyurethane resin, epoxy clay, burnt and varnished styrofoam



42. Annie Morris "Flower Woman Red" (2018), Steel, Red point (200x60cm)

Yasue Maetake is a beneficiary of the veteran sculptor, Lynda Benglis' practice. Urethane Flower (2013) is a statuesque composite of polyurethane resin, clay and Styrofoam, that owes much to the physicality associated with Benglis' practice. Maetake's presence is felt in the pitted limbs of this surreal figure, its contorted stance and crisp head of cinged plastic resembling a sunflower. The evidence of her actions make the work surprisingly tactile, soft and approachable. An animistic elegance and grace propagates from the flower.

Rather than vehicles of meaning, Maetake is of a generation of progressive women sculptors who produce forms that celebrate process itself and a highly interpersonal relationship with materials. Her work evidences a powerful sense of materiality through stacking, layering, cutting, gouging, and other tactile processes.

The allegorical allure of the flower is strong. Annie Morris's striking Flower Woman Red (2018) [FIG 41 ANNIE MORRIS FLOWER WOMAN RED] places a bright flower in full bloom as the head of a voluptuous female body. The hand-drawn quality of the sculpture and its oversized arm and three fingered hand, imbues it with humour, reminding us of the artist's unbridled love of drawing. As if transferring a meaningless doodle into an enlarged sculptural form the roughness and inaccuracy lends the work intimacy and an ease of viewing, based on common recognition of the form. This accessibility gives its message of female affirmation profound depth.

In common with this work is the intention of the exhibition as a whole to transgress the very real and explicit psychological boundaries which inhibit and constrict the female creative experience and its achievements.

With the powerful contemporary relevance of this exhibition She Persists, must also come the recognition and internalisation of the very real need to remain persistent. As numerous works show, tenacity is fundamental to what is to be a woman; an aspirational quality which is instrumental in securing an improved future with gender parity across the board. Undoubtedly, this will take collective effort. Staged in Venice in 2019 on the foundations of an exceptional woman, Maria Bazon, this show hopes to assist in generating the emotional resource and inspiration it will take to reach parity.

1. Marina Querini Benzon
2. Chitra Ganesh's "Transmission" (2012), Mixed media on board (213x305cm). Courtesy of Chitra Ganesh and Gallery Wendi Norris
3. Judy Chicago "Immolation IV. Courtesy of Through the Flower and Salon 94, NY
4. Judy Chicago, Smoke Bodies III. Courtesy of Through the Flower and Salon 94, NY
5. Judy Chicago "Purple Atmospheres". Courtesy of Through the Flower and Salon 94, NY
6. Judy Chicago "Woman with Orange Flares". Courtesy of Through the Flower and Salon 94, NY
7. Sutapa Biswas "Housewives with Steak-Knives" (1985) © The artist and Bradford Museums and Galleries
8. Judy Chicago "Disfigured by Power", Sprayed acrylic and oil on Belgian Linen (25.4 x35.6 x3.8cm). Courtesy of Judy Chicago and Salon 94, NY.
9. Judy Chicago "Disfigured by Power", 1984, Sprayed acrylic and oil on Belgian Linen (35.6x 25.4x3.8cm). Courtesy of Judy Chicago and Salon 94, NY
- 10-11. Judy Chicago "Disfigured by Power" (1982-87), Courtesy of Judy Chicago and Salon 94, NY
12. Judy Chicago "Crowning" (2010), Lithograph (78.7x78.7x78.7cm). Courtesy of The Artist and Salon 94, NY
13. Judy Chicago "Guided by the Goddess" (1985), Silkscreen on Grey Rives BFK (76.2x101.6cm). Courtesy of the Artist and Salon 94, New York
14. Judy Chicago "Birth Trinity" (1985), Serigraph on Stonehenge natural white (76.2x101.6cm).Courtesy of the Artist and Salon 94, NY
15. Faiza Butt's "My Love Plays in Heavenly Ways" (2013), Ink on polyester film (60x84cm). Collection of Amin Jaffer
16. Annie Morris "Stack 9, Cobalt Turquoise Light" (2016), Form core, pigment, concrete, steel, plaster, sand (330cmxVariable). C. Courtesy of the Artist.
17. Lalla Essaydi "Les Femmes du Maroc: Grand Odalisque" (2008), Chromogenic print (122x147cm), Houk Gallery. © Lalla Essaydi. Courtesy of the artist and Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York
18. Hamra Abbas "Paradise Bath", Archival pigment print (104x76), Copyright the artist. Courtesy PILOT Gallery Istanbul
19. Faiza Butt "Get Out of My Dreams II" (2008), Light box, Ink on polyester film (55.9x72.4cm).Collection of Clemy Slade.
20. The Guerrilla Girls, Copyright © Guerrilla Girls. Courtesy guerrillagirls.com
21. The Guerrilla Girls "Do Women Have to be Naked to get into the Met?", Copyright © Guerrilla Girls. Courtesy guerrillagirls.com
22. Maria Kreyn "The Allegory of Indecisions" (2018), Oil on Canvas (62x76in). Courtesy of the Artist
- 23-24. Tonia Arapovic "Indecision IV" (film stills)
25. Chitra Ganesh's "Transmission" (2012)
26. Maria Khan "Curse the Fig Tree" (2017), Charcoal and pastel on canvas (42x60in). Courtesy of Maria Khan.
- 27-28-29. Aisha Abid Hussain "Two, Not Together" (2014), Archival print on Hahnemuhle photo rag (Each 12x16in / 30.48x40.64cm). Courtesy of Aisha Abid Hussain.
30. Samira Abbassy "The Accused", doll parts, fabric, teeth (33 x10x10cm). Courtesy of Samira Abbassy
31. Samira Abbassy "Love and Ammunition I" (2015), Oil on Gesso Panel (48x36in). Courtesy of Samira Abbassy
32. Emilie Pugh "Twin Cyclone", 6 layers of burnt kazuke Japanese paper (160 x108 x21cm)
33. Mithu Sen "I have only one language; it is not mine" (2015)
34. Shirin Neshat, Sara Jafari (Masses), from "The Book of Kings" series (2012), ink on LE silver gelatin print (101.6x76.2cm). Courtesy of the artist
35. Anila Agha "Shimmering Mirage" (2019), Installation, Laser-cut black steel and bulb (91.4x91.4x91.4cm). Courtesy of Anila
- Quayyum Agha
36. Anna Boggon "Souvenir" (2000), dolls, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist
- 37-38-39. Maimouna Guerresi "Trampoline Series", Lambda print on dibond (2016) — Red (200 x 82.52cm) — Blue (200 x 90.83cm) — White (200 x 82.52cm). ©Maïmouna Guerresi, courtesy Mariane Ibrahim Gallery
40. Lynda Benglis "Figure 4" (2009), Aluminium (250.2 x 168.9x63.5cm). Courtesy of the artist, and Cheim & Read, New York
41. Yasue Maetake "Urethane Flower on Steel Stem Clad with Foam" (2013), Steel, polyurethane resin, epoxy clay, burnt and varnished styrofoam. Copyright of Yasue Ma. etake
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She Persists

by Sona Datta and Mashael Al Rushaid

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