

# **NOTICE**

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# WOMEN WHO *RUN* WITH THE BRUSHES & GLUE

by Whitney Chadwick

On March 10, 1914, militant suffragist Mary Richardson entered the National Gallery in London and, with an ax, slashed a Velázquez painting of a nude Venus. The attack was one of several bold public actions carried out by British suffragists convinced that the vote for women could not be won through peaceful, parliamentary means.

In 1989 an anonymous group of art world feminists, who use the name Guerrilla Girls, attacked and altered another famous painting of a nude woman, this time in an ad appearing on buses in lower Manhattan. On a poster, they reproduced an image of Ingres's *Odalisque*, a reclining figure whose sinuous nude back and hips have long stood for idealized female beauty. Rather than meeting the classical profile of Ingres's original, however, our eyes confront a large shaggy gorilla head, mouth open, teeth glistening. Twisted to meet us eye to eye, it challenges instead of seducing. Black block letters above the image interrogate the viewer: *Do women have to be naked to get into the Metropolitan Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Section are women, but 85% of the nudes are female* is the Guerrilla Girls' answer. (See pages 60-61.)

Unlike their suffragist sisters, the Guerrilla Girls have never taken a real weapon to a work of art. Instead, they use a rapier wit to fire volley after volley of carefully researched statistics at art world audiences, exposing individuals and institutions that underrepresent or exclude women and artists of color from exhibitions, collections and funding.

Their first posters materialized mysteriously in the dark of night in 1985. Signed only "the conscience of the art world," they were plastered onto walls, kiosks and



Velázquez's *Venus and Cupid*, 1649-51.

**MORE  
OR**

**THESE GALLERIES SHOW NO MORE  
THAN 10% WOMEN ARTISTS OR  
NONE AT ALL.**

**TH  
TH  
NO**

Blum Helman  
Mary Boone  
Grace Borgenicht  
Diane Brown  
Leo Castelli

Fun  
Marian Goodman  
Pat Hearn  
Marlborough  
Oil & Steel



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

**Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the models are female.**

**GUERRILLA GIRLS**

i water

construction site fences around lower Manhattan. What do these artists have in common? demanded one poster that listed an assortment of successful male artists. Answer: *They allow their work to be shown in galleries that*

*show no more than 10% women or none at all. (See page 34.)*

*These galleries show no more than 10% women artists, proclaimed another poster, above a roster of some of the most prestigious*

galleries in New York City. (See page 35.) In the year following the first poster attacks, the Guerrilla Girls' sassy, irreverent repartee attracted a wide following—and much speculation about who, or what, they really were.

Rumors abounded that some of the "Girls" were well-known artists. Messages left at telephone numbers circulating on art world grapevines elicited call-backs from women who identified themselves in muffled voices as Frida Kahlo, Romaine Brooks, Georgia O'Keeffe, and others. It was as if history's neglected women artists were rising from the dead to assume roles in an agitprop street theater aimed at disconcerting living artists, curators, critics and gallery owners. When the press finally coaxed the poster artists out into daylight, they met well-heeled, black-clad women who agreed to be interviewed and photographed—but who never gave their real names or removed their gorilla masks.

Many people in and around the commercial and academic art worlds cheered at the possibility that feminist activism might become fashionable again after a decade during which the national media all but declared feminism extinct, feminists an outdated fragment of the radical fringe, frumpy and out of sync with the rest of the country. Suddenly here were women with an urgent and timely agenda, making serious statements but with stylish, tongue-in-cheek humor.

Female artists had played a crucial role in the experimental art of the '70s that brought worldwide attention to U.S. artists. But during the economic boom of the '80s, when prices skyrocketed and art became an ever more lucrative form of investment, museums from New York to Berlin began mounting exhibitions with few or no women or artists of color.

It was in this atmosphere of backsliding that the Guerrilla Girls were born. Their poster assault soon moved from the streets of New York into the magazine world. *Artforum*, *Mirabella*, and *Ms.* commissioned spreads from



**YOU'RE  
SEEING  
LESS  
THAN  
HALF  
THE  
PICTURE**

**GUERRILLA GIRLS**

DEBORAH FEINGOLD/OUTLINE

them, while *Vogue*, the *New York Times* and many other papers and magazines ran features about them. Carrying their message with them, various Girls began to appear en masque on panel discussions and at slide presentations in schools and museums. Their schedule of speaking engagements and workshops took them around the country and then abroad. Awards arrived from the National Organization for Women and the Borough President of Manhattan. By the spring of 1987, when they were asked by an independent, not-for-profit gallery in Manhattan to organize an alternative show to the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial exhibition, the Guerrilla Girls had become a highly visible (if always anonymous) public presence.

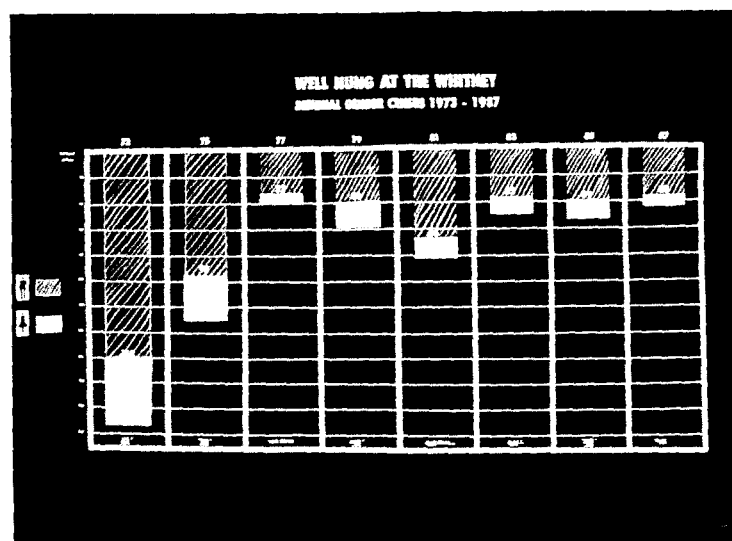
Instead of showing art, the Girls used wall displays to cleverly document the steady downward progress of women and artists of color at the Whitney Museum during the '80s. (See pages 46-48.) Topics included: "Well Hung at the Whitney," a chart of its mostly male shows, and "Colorblind Test," a graph showing that the number of artists of color in Whitney exhibitions was so small as to be imperceptible. Information for the displays was taken from the Whitney's own publications; despite the show's critical success, the museum made no public comment.

Posters that followed pointed a critical finger at double standards (*The advantages of being a woman artist: working without the pressure of success, not having to be in shows with men, being included in revised versions of art history, etc.*; see page 53), praised people who made things better for women ("GG Hits List") and played with the group's anonymity by listing the names of 550 female fellow travelers in the art world in "Guerrilla Girls' Identities Exposed!" (See page 67.)

Anonymity provided the cover that enabled the Girls to circumvent the art world's obsession with individual personalities and, where necessary, protect their own careers from vengeful curators. For women, trained from birth to develop social and public personae based on appearances, torn between wanting to be seen and not wanting to appear too visible, secrecy and disguise have often proved enormously empowering. In an art world still fueled by myths of individual genius and heroic (male) posturing, by masterpieces and Old Masters (but never old mistresses), the Guerrilla Girls have overturned the apple cart and produced a collective identity that draws attention to the ways in which those who wield power do so by excluding and withholding as well as conferring recognition and, with it, success.

Mary Richardson and the Guerrilla Girls are not the lone examples of women in the twentieth century who have claimed power by taking to the streets. By 1919 the National American Woman Suffrage Association had a membership of 2 million, many of whom marched to demand the vote. The same year, Soviet women artists joined male colleagues in publicizing the message of a new state in political posters and broadsheets, in street theater and by transforming boats and trains into moving graphic displays.

Nor were the Girls even the first to accuse the Whitney Museum of discrimination. In November of 1968, Faith Ringgold was in the vanguard of a group of black artists



From "Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney."

# FOR SALE:

The Guggenheim just sold its name for \$10 million to Samuel J. and Ethel LeFrak and someone bought the directorship of the Whitney for only \$2 million.

**PLEASE SEND MONEY TO THE GGS**  
so we can buy part of a major museum  
and have it named after us.



(Maybe the urinals at the Guggenheim)

From "Hot Flashes 2/3"

protesting the absence of African-American artists in the museum's survey exhibition "The 1930s: Painting and Sculpture in America" (despite the fact that the museum owned works by Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden). Out of the ferment of civil rights, antiwar, and feminist activism came several organizations: the Art Works Coalition, Women Artists in Resistance and Women Artists and Students for Black Liberation. A growing feminist movement in the arts would continue to fight to expose the fiction of an art world that claims to be motivated by the impartial, value-free recognition of "aesthetic quality."

Ten years later the Guerrilla Girls repackaged feminist anger using mass-media techniques and advertising world savvy, taking their message straight to the public. "We're the disloyal opposition that bangs people over the head and reminds them that the art world's not this great liberal bastion of aesthetic quality, that it's subject to the same forces as everyone else and every other institution in society," says Guerrilla Girl Käthe Kollwitz.

In many ways, the politics of power in the art world are not unlike those of some medieval court. The larger audience—the people who actually go to museums and galleries—by and large doesn't participate in the process of defining taste (or, more important, the elusive notion of "quality") or conferring the label of "genius." And those who do wield this power—dealers, collectors, curators, publishers—often have vested economic interests in art, and art institutions, that create real conflicts of interest. The Guerrilla Girls struck

at the heart of this closed system with a poster headlined "Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums," which presented commandments like *Thou shalt not be a Museum Trustee and also the chief Stockholder of a Major Auction House*, a situation evident at the Whitney, and *Thou shalt not permit Corporations to launder their public images in Museums until they cleaneth up their Toxic Waste Dumps and Oil Slicks*, a reference to Exxon's contributions to the arts. (See page 63.)

Recently, battles over censorship and funding for the arts have focused attention on the art world's insularity from broader segments of the public. The Guerrilla Girls work across such divides, instituting dialogue and raising public consciousness. And they have received international recognition in the form of invitations to speak all over Europe, Canada, in South America and Australia.

But they are not without their detractors. While the TV and print media have gleefully grabbed at the Girls' irreverent images and ideas, the art establishment has often remained cool. "I can think of many disgruntled artists who feel they've been victimized, but if they're male there are other reasons," remarked dealer Mary Boone, who added, "I think it's significant that the GGS refuse to identify themselves." "Does Feminism Conflict with Artistic Standards?" critic Hilton Kramer asked in the pages of the *New York Times*, before answering in the affirmative.

"Too male, too pale, too stale and too Yale," shot back the Girls in an exposé of the *Times's* art coverage in the first issue of their impolitely titled newsletter *Hot Flashes*, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. (See pages 87-88.) A second double

issue published in 1994, surveyed museums around the country before offering an anecdotal prediction, based on information provided by the institutions themselves, that "Museums in the East will have a White Male Winter, and a White Male Spring, Summer and Fall." In the same issue, they also played doctor, dispensing Rx's for the future that included the admonition "All Women and Artists of Color Should Be Allowed to Emerge at the same age. Why should women and artists of color have to wait until they're old and dead to get retrospective shows when white boys get them in their 30's and 40's?"

When so many individual women artists are struggling for recognition, what is it that has enabled the Guerrilla Girls to establish, in less than a decade, the kind of notoriety that has resulted in a BBC special on contemporary art with Robert Hughes and interviews on CBS's *Nightwatch*, PBS's *The Eleventh Hour*, CNN's *Gender Wars* and on almost every major TV and radio station in Europe? A documentary film, *Guerrillas in Our Midst*, has won numerous awards and been widely distributed. Guerrilla Girls posters hang in the very museums and institutions they criticize. Major public collections like the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library contain portfolios of their work.

The answer to this question lies in part in the peculiar intersection of cultural politics and history we experience today. In a social milieu that reconstitutes politics and sexuality as entertainment and relies on the mass media to be the arbiter of success, the Girls' particular combination of subversive theatrics and outrageous flaunting of convention finds a ready audience. In an age of sound bytes, their one-liners fly like barbed arrows. Turning their backs on political speeches and ideological harangues, they package cultural injustice as numerical epitaph. It's usually men who collect statistics—as a glance at the sports page will tell—and the Girls are doing similar math in the world of art. Skeptical, ironic, outraged, they undermine the "official" version of events, and overturn the art world's cool insistence that great art, like cream, inevitably rises to the top.

By now the Guerrilla Girls indisputably command the kind of name recognition and success that any artist would covet. Yet no single woman has come forward to confess to being the girl behind the mask. As time passes, more and more people within the arts community who are in a position to know their real identities choose not to name names. By doing so, they too join the conspiracy—a conspiracy that, if successful, just might change the face and complexion of American art as we know it.



TERI SLOTKIN



**WOMEN WE LOVE**

Guerrilla Girls  
Anonymous Art Agitators

8. DEZEMBER 1991

# DER STANDARD KULTUR

## Guerilla im Dschungel der Kunst

In Gorilla-Masken  
abho. Paula Moder  
sner. Die Guerrilla  
Aktivistinnen. d  
von den USA aus  
um des Politisch



Drei aus der künstlerischen  
Gruppe der New Yorker  
Guerrilla-Girls mit einer ihrer  
Arbeiten im Wiener WK  
Originalität und Wert der  
Kunst, das ist doch eine  
Romanze. Dahinter ste  
doch ein System der  
Machtansprüche der  
Künstler, das große  
männliche Genie.

## GUERRILLAS in our MIDST

Women artists take bold action  
to challenge art world's status

HOW MANY WOMEN HAD  
ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS AT  
NYC MUSEUMS LAST YEAR?

Guggenheim 0  
Metropolitan 0  
Modern

## The Bad Girls of the Art World

## Art has monkey on its back

Guerrilla Girls attack  
to gain equality for  
women artists

By Lucy Smith

It is the "Guerrilla Girls" who are  
the standard artists used to  
show art history classes for the last  
decade. The

By Nikki Merrell

D  
GUERRILLA GIRLS HAVE  
BEEN THE MOST VIOLENT  
OF THE ART WORLD'S  
GUERRILLAS. They are the  
most vocal and most visible  
of the Guerrilla Girls, the  
anonymous art agitators who  
use the name of the group to  
criticize the art world's  
status quo. They are the  
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criticize the art world's  
status quo.

W

# Atelier

ART FOR LIFE, LIFE WITH ART • JAN. 1991 月刊アトリエ

世界中でいちばんアグレッシブでデリケートな生活人は、たぶん

ニューヨーカー その秘密は

Girls

## GENDER WARS

## Waging Guerrilla Warfare Against the Art World

T

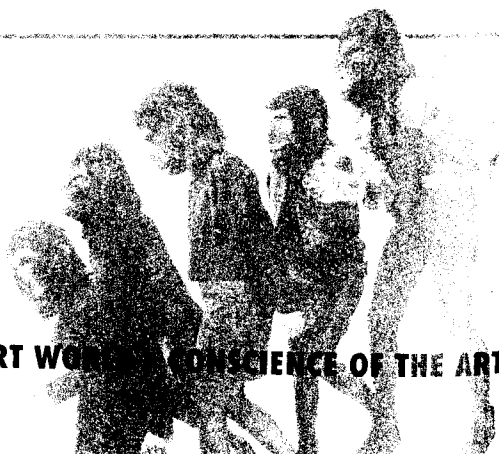
A band of women  
wearing hairy masks  
and, at times, face  
stockings, uses some  
unusual tactics to fight

## CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD • CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD • CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

# Guerrilla Girls

## COMBAT IN THE ART ZONE

They hide behind...



# GUERRILLA GIRLS ~~BEAR~~ BARE ALL.

## AN INTERVIEW

**Rosalba Carriera:** When we first spoke to the press, it was clear we needed code names to distinguish between members of the group. The day we taped NPR's Fresh Air, Georgia O'Keeffe died. It was then that it came to us to use names of dead women artists and writers to reinforce their presence in history and to solve our interview problems. It was as though Georgia were speaking to us from the grave. So far, Frida Kahlo, Alma Thomas, Rosalba Carriera, Lee Krasner, Eva Hesse, Emily Carr, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Romaine Brooks, Alice Neel and Ana Mendieta are but a few of the famous women from history who have joined us. We are actively recruiting Rosa Bonheur, Angelica Kauffmann and Sofonisba Anguissola. (Of course, one Girl didn't care for the idea and calls herself GG1.)

### Q. How did the Guerrilla Girls start?

**Käthe Kollwitz:** In 1985, the Museum of Modern Art in New York opened an exhibition titled "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture." It was supposed to be an up-to-the-minute summary of the most significant contemporary art in the world. Of 169 artists, only 13 were women. Even fewer artists of color were chosen and none were women. That was bad enough, but the curator, Kynaston McShine, said any artist who wasn't in the show should rethink "his" career. And that really annoyed a lot of artists because obviously the guy was completely prejudiced. Women demonstrated in front of the museum with the usual placards and picket line. Some of us who attended were irritated that we didn't make any impression on passersby.

**Meta Fuller:** We began to ask ourselves some questions. Why did women and artists of color do better in the 1970s than in the '80s? Was there a backlash in the art world? Who was responsible? What could be done about it?

### Q. What did you do?

**Frida Kahlo:** We decided to find out how bad it was. After about five minutes of research we found that it was worse than we thought: the most influential galleries and museums exhibited almost no women artists.



ORE  
?

THESE GALLERIES SHOW NO MORE  
THAN 10% WOMEN ARTISTS OR  
NONE AT ALL.

Blum Helman  
Mary Boone  
Grace Borgenicht  
Diane Brown  
Leo Castelli  
Charles Cowles  
Marisa Del Re  
Dia Art Foundation  
Executive  
Allan Frumkin

Fun  
Marian Goodman  
Pat Hearn  
Marlborough  
Oil & Steel  
Pace  
Tony Shafrazi  
Sperone Westwater  
Edward Thorp  
Washburn

THESE GALL  
THAN 10% W  
NONE AT ALL

Blum Helman  
Mary Boone  
Grace Borgenicht  
Diane Brown  
Leo Castelli  
Charles Cowles  
Marisa Del Re  
Dia Art Found  
Executive  
Allan Frumkin

When we showed the figures around, some said it was an issue of quality, not prejudice. Others admitted there was discrimination but considered the situation hopeless. Everyone in a position of power—curators, critics, collectors, the artists themselves—passed the buck. The artists blamed the dealers, the dealers blamed the collectors,

the collectors blamed the critics and so on. We decided to embarrass each group by showing its records in public. Those were the first posters we put up in the streets of SoHo in New York (see pages 34-37).

#### Q. Why are you anonymous?

**GG1:** The art world is a very small place. Of course, we were afraid that if we blew the whistle on some of its most powerful people, we could kiss off our art careers. But mainly, we wanted the focus to be on the issues, not on our personalities or our own work.

**Lee Krasner:** We joined a long tradition of (mostly male) masked avengers like Robin Hood, Batman, the Lone Ranger and Wonder Woman.

#### Q. Why do you call yourselves "girls"? Doesn't that upset a lot of feminists?

**Gertrude Stein:** Yeah. We wanted to be shocking. We wanted people to be upset.

**Frida Kahlo:** Calling a grown woman a girl can imply she's not complete, mature, or grown up. But we decided to reclaim the word "girl," so it couldn't be used against us. Gay activists did the same thing with the epithet "queer."



#### JUNGLE DRAG

It's not easy spending hours in a gorilla mask. But more conventional women's clothing—bras, tight skirts, high heels—isn't exactly comfortable, either. At least gorilla masks have a higher mission.

They get us attention. Without them you probably wouldn't be reading this book. If we ever get a MacArthur "Genius"

Award, we'll use it to commission a designer mask that's miked and air conditioned.

## INTERNATIONAL EPIDEMIC

I took a vacation to Indonesia last year as my non-GG self, and on the island of Bali I visited a town well known for its indigenous painting. Walking along the mud-lined streets, I saw an unusual sign, in English: Gallery for Women's Art. Since it's men in that culture who traditionally make art, I went in and began talking to the owner, who was English-speaking. When she realized I was from New York, she became very animated and asked, "Do you know the Guerrilla Girls? I'd love to be on their mailing list."

—Violette LeDuc

### Q. Why are you Guerrillas?

**Georgia O'Keeffe:** We wanted to play with the fear of guerrilla warfare, to make people afraid of who we might be and where we would strike next. Besides, "guerrilla" sounded so good with "girl."

### Q. Isn't calling yourselves the Conscience of the Art World a little pretentious?

**Eva Hesse:** Of course. Everyone knows artists are pretentious!

**GG1:** Anyway, the art world needs to examine itself, to be more self-critical. Every profession needs a conscience!

### Q. Why the gorilla masks?

**Käthe Kollwitz:** We were Guerrillas before we were Gorillas. From the beginning the press wanted publicity photos. We needed a disguise. No one remembers, for sure, how we got our fur, but one story is that at an early meeting, an original Girl, a bad speller, wrote "Gorilla" instead of "Guerrilla." It was an enlightened mistake. It gave us our "mask-ularity."

### Q. What about the short skirts, high heels and fish-net stockings?

**Emily Carr:** Wearing those clothes with a gorilla mask confounds the stereotype of female sexiness.

**Meta Fuller:** Actually, we wear mostly nondescript, bohemian black clothes—like everyone else in the art

world. Sometimes we do wear high heels and short skirts. And that's what people remember.

### Q. Why do you use humor? What does it do for your message?

**Paula Modersohn-Becker:** Our situation as women and artists of color in the art world was so pathetic, all we could do was make fun of it. It felt so good to ridicule and belittle a system that excluded us. There was also that stale idea that feminists don't have a sense of humor.

**Eva Hesse:** Actually, our first posters weren't funny at all, just smart-assed. But we found out quickly that humor gets people involved. It's an effective weapon.

### Q. Do you allow men to join?

**Frida Kahlo:** We'd love to be inclusive, but it's not easy to find men willing to work without getting paid or getting credit for it.

## BEWARE: GUERRILLAS AT WORK

Early on, in our research gathering, we realized that when we called a museum or art dealer for information and said we were the Guerrilla Girls, our calls were likely to be put on hold, our questions evaded.

We lost a lot of time.

Then we learned not to ask for the boss, but just to tell the secretaries and receptionists who we were and what we needed. Like magic, they always gave us the statistics right away.

—Rosalba Carriera

**Q. What was the response to your earliest actions?**

**Anaïs Nin:** There was skepticism, shock, rage and lots of talk. It was the Reagan '80s and everyone was crazed to succeed, nobody wanted to be perceived as a complainer. Hardly any artists had the guts to attack the sacred cows. We were immediately *the* topic at dinner parties, openings, even on the street. Who were these women? How do they dare say that? And what do their facts say about the art world? Women artists loved us, almost everyone else hated us, and none of them could stop talking about us.

**Q. What have you done since then?**

**GG1:** One poster led to another, and we have done more than fifty that examine different aspects of sexism and racism in our culture at large, not just the art world. We've received thousands of requests for them, and they've found their way all over the world. Museums and libraries have collected entire portfolios. We've

**CROWD CONTROL**

In 1987 we appeared at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in front of a crowd of three or four hundred shouting supporters. Three GGs went on stage, one being eight and a half months pregnant.

The crowd seemed aghast that in our presentation we disagreed vociferously among ourselves on a number of points, which is standard behavior at meetings and in conversation. Our soon-to-be-a-Guerrillamom was especially outspoken.

Afterward, we heard that the audience was afraid to ask provocative questions for fear she might go into labor under stress.

—Diane Arbus



C. FISCHER

spoken to large audiences at museums and schools on four continents, sometimes at the invitation of institutions and individuals we have attacked.



Visiting East Berlin.

**Q. You sound surprised by your success. What did you expect?**



Lunch with Berlin's Minister of Culture.

**IS THAT A BANANA IN YOUR POCKET,  
OR ARE YOU  
JUST GLAD TO SEE US?**

We were flown to Berlin by the cultural advisor on women's affairs to organize a protest against the exclusion of women and artists of color in the exhibition "American Art of the 20th Century."

We snuck into the reception in full gorilla regalia, accompanied by a bunch of supporters wearing paper gorilla masks that we had supplied.

We headed straight for the mayor of Berlin, who was making a speech. Security guards drew their guns. We presented the mayor with a bunch of bananas and a few choice words about sexism and racism.

He smiled. The guards looked relieved and relaxed the grip on their pistols.

—Joan Mitchell and Eva Hesse

**Romaine Brooks:** We didn't expect anything. We just wanted to have some fun with our adversaries and to vent a little rage. But we also wanted to make feminism (that "F" word) fashionable again, with new tactics and strategies. It was really a surprise when so many people identified with us and felt we spoke for their collective anger. We didn't have the wildest notion that women in Japan, Brazil, Europe and even Bali would be interested in what we were doing.

**Q. What have you done besides posters?**

**Eva Hesse:** The posters have been our most public communication, but we've

## A LOVE RANGERTITE

In 1992 I went, with six other Girls, to Washington for the Abortion Rights March, which was the largest political demonstration in that city's history (over one million participants). After we descended from the train, we donned our masks and costumes in the swelling crowd. After a while I realized that the political and social movement had pulled me away from my colors, and suddenly I was a guerrilla in a sea of homophobes, trying to panic and hyperventilate, but soon other women began asking if I would have their pictures taken with me.

—Tibbo Popeye

## GUERRILLA GIRLS DEMAND A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES ON ABORTION.

Before the mid-19th century, abortion in the first few months of pregnancy was legal. Even the Catholic Church did not forbid it until 1869.\*



TERI SLOVIN

## GUERRILLA GIRLS AND A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES

done billboards, bus ads, magazine spreads, protest actions and letter-writing campaigns too. We're particularly proud of having put up broadsheets in bathrooms of major museums (see "Guerrillas in Love," right).

**Rosalba Carriera:** We send secret letters to egregious offenders, honoring them with bogus awards. We gave John Russell of the *New York Times* an award for "The Most Patronizing Art Review of 1986" when he reviewed Dorothy Dehner's show

## GUERRILLAS IN LOVE

On one of the first Valentine's Days I spent with my husband, he and I pasted Guerrilla Girl stickers on the inside of the toilet stalls at the Guggenheim. He did the men's rooms and I did the women's. The stickers showed a poster that explained that, in the U.S., women earned two-thirds of what men did, but, in the art world, they earned only one-third. We also put copies of it inside every book in the bookstore and behind every first postcard in the display racks. The bookstore staff saw us but never said anything, perhaps because we looked so "in love."

—Rosalba Carriera

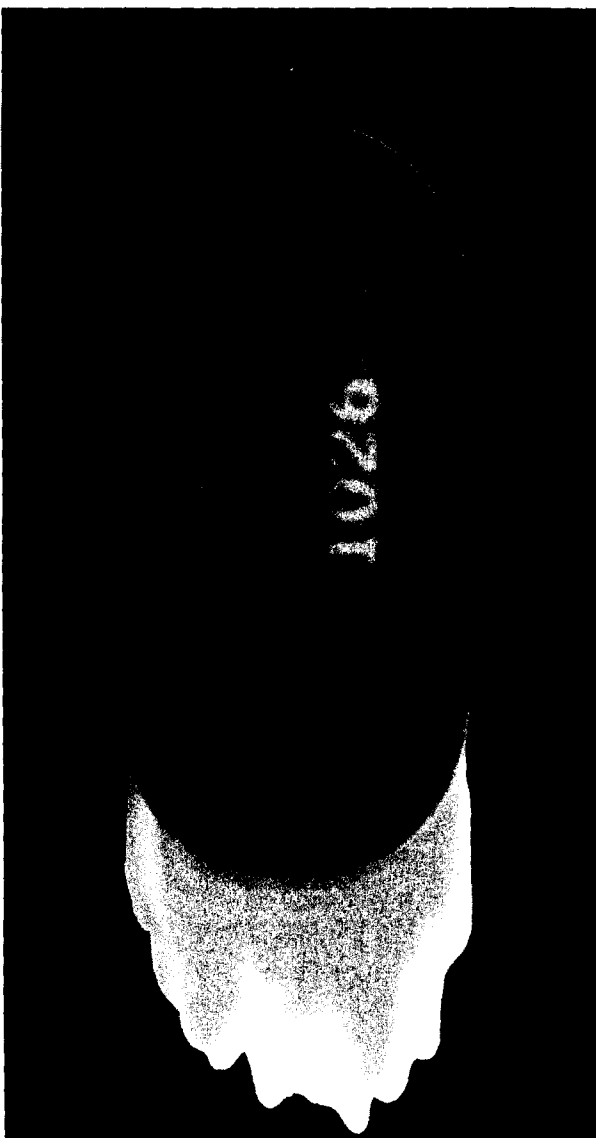
and called her "Mrs. David Smith," referring to her famous sculptor husband. (They had been divorced for years.)

**Alice Neel:** "The Norman Mailer Award for Sensitivity to Issues of Gender Equality" went to painter Frank Stella when he said he liked the "muscular" work of "girl" artists like Helen Frankenthaler. We shook a hairy finger at art market superstar Brice Marden when he said in *Vanity Fair* that he wasn't sure if it was good for him to be represented by a female dealer.

**Tina Modotti:** We sent "The Apologist of the Year Award" to a woman critic, Kim Levin, for reviewing a show of David Salle without dealing with his misogynist imagery. (Recently, on a discussion panel in Berlin, she claimed to be grateful for the criticism.)

**Gertrude Stein:** We send seasons greetings to friend and foe (see below). We remind the latter that "We know who's been naughty or nice." We wish the former "Peace on Earth. Goodwill toward women."

**Frida Kahlo:** The next time art critic Michael Kimmelman pans a show that actually includes a fair number of women and artists of color—like his hysterical rant against the Whitney Biennial of 1993—we're going to send him a year's supply of Midol.

**BIOLOGICAL WARFARE**

We have a great idea to finally bring peace to the world. We're developing it in conjunction with Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Department of Defense.

We want to create the Estrogen Bomb.

When it is dropped on an area of violent conflict, men will throw down their guns, hug each other, apologize, say it was "all their fault" and then start to clean up the mess.

—Frida Kahlo



**Q. Have you ever been accused of discrimination yourselves?**

**Alma Thomas:** Yes. Menopausal women felt we were making fun of them by titling our newsletter *Hot Flashes from the Guerrilla Girls*. I guess they didn't know the Girl who named it was having them herself.

**Käthe Kollwitz:** One male journalist is still threatening to sue us for charging white males a higher

subscription rate to *Hot Flashes* than women or artists of color. We thought it was fair, because white men earn more. We told him to go sue hairdressers—who charge women more for a haircut.

**Romaine Brooks:**

We also heard from a gay white male who was angry about having to pay the same as straight white males. So we refined our language to read, "Straight white males with superior earning power: \$12. Everyone else: \$9."

**Q. Is there anything you'd like to apologize for?**

**Anaïs Nin:** Our spelling mistakes.

**Q. Any regrets?**

**Gertrude Stein:** Not naming more names.

## SPEAKING IN MOTHER TONGUES

At the Adelaide Arts Festival in Australia, we confronted Anselm Kiefer, the rich and famous German Neo-Expressionist painter, for allowing his work to be shown in galleries that don't exhibit women or artists of color. After ranting about his mystical experiences in the bush, his fluent English suddenly escaped him and he sputtered in German when asked for a response.

—Romaine Brooks

Earlier, when Kiefer spoke, the audience was silent with adulation for this God-like person. He, in turn, seemed comfortable with a mass reaction of nearly religious awe. Then we came on. The audience burst into enthusiastic hoots and shouts, as if someone had pulled back flood gates. We weren't unapproachable or deified. The audience saw themselves in us. Instead of being the Great Goddesses, we were the Great Apes.

—Ana Mendieta

**Q. How many are you?**

**Lee Krasner:** We don't have any idea. We secretly suspect that all women are born Guerrilla Girls. It's just a question of helping them discover it. For sure, thousands; probably, hundreds of thousands; maybe, millions. Let's see how many books are sold.

**Q. How do you work?**

**Alice Neel:** Over the past ten years, we've come to resemble a large, crazy but caring dysfunctional family. We argue, shout, whine, complain, change our minds and continually threaten to quit if we don't get our way. We work the phone lines between meetings to understand our differing positions. We rarely vote and proceed by consensus most of the time. Some drop out of the group, but eventually most of us come back, after days, months and sometimes years. The Christmas parties and reunions are terrific. We care a lot about one another, even if we don't see things the same way. Everyone has a poster she really hates and a poster she really loves. We agree that we can disagree. Maybe that's democracy.

**GG1:** Over the years we've managed to break the stereotype of the artist as a difficult loner, unable to work with anyone—even though some of us might be like that in our other lives.

**Zora Neale Hurston:** Being anonymous, operating under code names and alter egos, has meant there are no career gains to be earned by being a Guerrilla Girl. This makes us all equal, gives each of us an equal voice, no matter what our positions may be in the "real" world.

**Q. Where do you get your information?**

**Violette LeDuc:** We usually just count—in galleries, in museums, in the media.

**Eva Hesse:** One of our best sources is the magazine *Art in America*, which publishes an "Annual Guide," in which galleries and museums proudly announce their "discriminating" lineups for the year.

**Alice Neel:** Lots of institutions provide public information that we reinterpret. That's how we did our exhibition about the Whitney Museum's pathetic record of not showing women and artists of color (see pages 46-48).

**GG1:** For the second issue of *Hot Flashes*, we wrote a phony letter from an imaginary graduate student asking PR departments of 150 museums what was happening (see page 88).

**Romaine Brooks:** For the first issue (see page 87), we sat for days in the New York Public Library, reading everything in the *New York Times* about art during 1991-92. Then we got personal dirt on the critics from confidential sources all over town.

**Ana Mendieta:** We're a large, powerful, anonymous group and that means that we could be anyone, anywhere—like Leo Castelli's proctologist, Mary Boone's plastic surgeon, David Salle's hairstylist or Carl Andre's next girlfriend.

**IS IT ART OR IS IT POLITICS?**

**ONLY OUR MOMA KNOWS**

People always ask if what we do is art or not. From the beginning, as a group, we could never agree. But this is a very important issue to art pundits, because if what we do is art, then they have to take us seriously. If what we do is politics, then they can treat us as ingenuit, not universal.

When the Museum of Modern Art organized a show of political posters called "Committed to Print," the curator exulted us, saying what we did wasn't "art" but "politics."

She seemed to have lost criterion while a poster protesting war could be safely called "art," a poster denouncing museum ethics was clearly "politics."



**Q. How often do you meet?**

**Tina Modotti:** Every twenty-eight days.

**Q. Who finances you?**

**Georgia O'Keeffe:** In the beginning, we paid for the posters out of our own pocketbooks. And we received unsolicited contributions—like one from a secretary at a New York museum who wrote, "I work for a curator you named on one of your posters. You're right, he's an asshole. Here's \$25." Now we get a lot of contributions from women artists when their careers take off. We even got a government grant for our newsletter *Hot Flashes*, to "monitor sexism and racism in the art world." There is no one funding source—no matron of the arts who writes us big checks—no PAC for the Guerrilla Girls. We

#### OUR BRILLIANT CAREER

Pat Hearn, a trendy art dealer, approached us a few years back and asked if we were interested in doing an installation for her gallery.

We kicked the idea around but were pretty much split on the issue of participating in a commercial system that is discriminating to the extreme. It seemed like sleeping with the enemy. So we made her an offer she had to refuse. We proposed a show about the situation of women and artists of color in her gallery. She would have to open her books so we could compare their sales prices.

We promised not to mention names, just gender and race.

"How interesting, how radical," she cooed.

"Let me think about it and get right back to you."

We never heard from her again.

—Gertude Stein

# DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

Wednesday, November 4, 1987

36c

## Zany, creative get Dinkins's awards

By JOAN SHEPARD  
Manhattan Cultural Affairs Editor

An underground group whose members wear guerrilla masks and protest against sexism and racism in the arts, a jazz music composer, and a theater group boused in a former Sanitation Department Building, were among the winners of the second annual Manhattan Borough President's Awards for Excellence in the Arts.

The ceremony, which drew about 500 people to Davis Hall at City College at W. 134th St., was held Monday night.

The award program was started in 1986 by Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins, to give recognition to the smaller arts groups and important but non-celebrity artists who work in Manhattan. Since taking office two years ago, Dinkins has been a strong and visible advocate for the city's arts scene.

"I am privileged to be able to recognize and reward the artists who serve a constituency among whom artistic vision abounds and a borough in which art flourishes."

Many artists, including Yomo Toro, Richie Havens, and the 4 Downers performed at the award presentation.



**DAVID DINKINS**, Manhattan Borough President (center), and Lowry Sims II, associate curator at Metropolitan Museum of Art, present award to Guerrilla Girls, underground protest group whose members wear masks to protect their identities.

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GG meeting at the Barcelona Zoo

ELIZABETH SISCO

do accept retributions from institutions we have attacked—when they buy our posters and pay our lecture fees.

**Q. What's the ethnic makeup of the Girls?**

**Gertrude Stein:** Our membership is a secret, but the percentage of women of color is better than that of the general population.

**Q. Has anyone said your masks are racist, that they conjure up images of lower forms of jungle life that have been used to humiliate black people?**

**Zora Neale Hurston:** We've talked about that. We are exploding stereotypes here, like when we use the word "girl."

**Meta Fuller:** There is nothing second rate or inferior about gorillas and to think so is *Homo sapiens*-centric. We did find an albino gorilla in the Barcelona zoo who agreed to do a photo shoot with us (see picture above).

**Alma Thomas:** I would have preferred pink ski masks.

**Q. You've also done posters about abortion rights, the Gulf War, the homeless, rape, Clarence Thomas and other issues that have nothing to do with the art world. Why?**

**Paula Modersohn-Becker:** We consider ourselves inhabitants of many worlds and can appear in any one we wish.

**Liubov Popova:** We wanted to try out what we had learned about making effective posters in a larger arena.

**Käthe Kollwitz:** We're not systematic in our attacks. It happens in a less orchestrated way. Members bring issues and ideas to the group and we try to shape them into effective posters. Sometimes we're all interested in an issue but can't figure out or agree on how to make it into a poster, so we table it for a later meeting.

#### NEW MATH

One of our earliest posters pointed a finger at art dealer Diane Brown for not showing enough women artists. One day, I found my non-GG self in a street conversation with her and a group of others. A copy of the poster was plastered on a wall just behind her, facing the rest of us. Her young son was with her, and he seemed proud of being able to read it. In a singsong voice, he recited out loud, "Diane Brown . . . shows less than ten percent women artists or none at all. What does that mean, Mommy?"

She never answered him that day, but when she remembered the poster for a CNN special called "Gender Wars," on camera she complained that the Guerrilla Girls attacked her for showing less than 50 percent women. Math is soooo hard for women.

—Frida Kahlo

**Emily Carr:** Lots of issues are important to us. We focus on the world for a while, go back to the art world and come back out again.

**Ana Mendieta:** An event like the Gulf War, which outraged us, can precipitate a whole bunch of posters in a very short time [see pages 68–70].

#### Q. How does an artist "make it"?

**Romaine Brooks:** Even without discrimination, it is very hard to succeed as an artist.

**Alma Thomas:** You work in your studio, then take your art around to galleries, which act as agents for a small number of artists and sell their art. Sometimes galleries are approached by hundreds of hopeful artists a week. You also try to get museum curators interested in your work. Museums are public, not-for-profit institutions that buy and exhibit art. They are influenced by what the galleries show and vice versa. Museums exhibit even fewer artists than galleries do. Critics fuel the process by judging your work. It is a challenge to get their attention, because there are many more shows than reviews. Art collectors buy from galleries and also sit on the boards and committees at museums, advising them (and being advised by them) on what to collect. To make a living from her art, an artist has to crack this system.

**Diane Arbus:** Museums and galleries tend to exhibit the same few artists, who are overwhelmingly white and male.

#### NEWER MATH

My non-GG self was having lunch with the male chief curator and his female assistant at a museum where I was about to have an exhibit. We were discussing women and art. The chief curator turned to me and said of his colleague, "You know, I think she's a Guerrilla Girl." "Really?" I asked, "Why?" "Because every time we propose a group show, or get an announcement from another museum, she always counts the number of women artists. Don't you think that's ridiculous?" "Not at all," I answered. "All women count."

—Käthe Kollwitz

**Q. But isn't judging art an issue of quality? If women and artists of color were really good, wouldn't they make it on their own?**

**Lee Krasner:** The world of high art, the kind that gets into museums and history books, is run by a very small group of people. Our posters have proved over and over again that these people, no matter how smart or good intentioned, have been biased against women and artists of color.

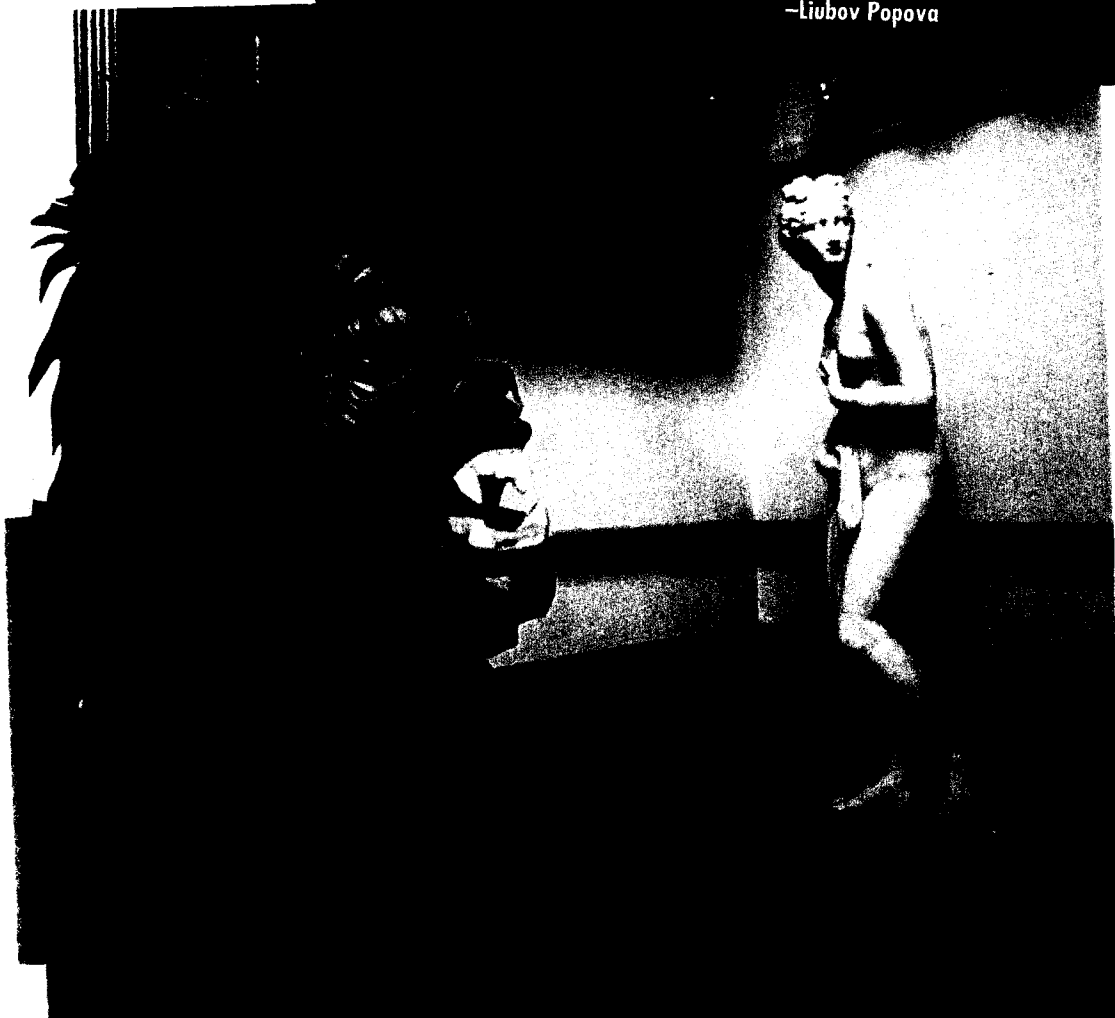
#### ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WHITE MALE ARTIST

Some years ago, I was doing an artists' residency, along with three male colleagues, in the Midwest.

All of us were middle-aged (between forty and sixty) and married. Each of the three men had brought along his smartest, most beautiful (female) undergraduate student as playmate and free studio assistant. During those four months, I went from a slow burn to a raging fever, thinking about how younger women are exploited and harassed, older women devalued and ignored.

When I returned to New York, I suggested we do a poster about it. After much discussion, haggling, and divine inspiration, the result was "The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist" (see page 53).

—Liubov Popova



RICHARD ROSS

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**Romaine Brooks:** Success in art is a matter of luck and timing as well as being good or having talent. Why do white men seem to have all the luck? It's not just a happy accident. Thus far, and throughout history, the system has been set up to support and promote the work of white male artists. That is their luck. In the old days of Western culture, it was patronage and the atelier system. It's not that different now, though patronage doesn't come in the form of royal courts and the Roman Catholic Church, but in the form of gallery owners, collectors, critics and museums who back certain artists. Once enough money has been invested in a certain artist, everyone mobilizes to keep that artist's name out front and consequently in history. The artists who make it in this way begin to define quality.

**Alma Thomas:** "Quality" has always been used to keep women and artists of color out.

**Q. Is art by women and artists of color different from art by white men?**

**Alice Neel:** If art is the expression of experience and everyone admits that gender and race affect experience, then it stands to reason that their work could be different.

**Ana Mendieta:** That's another thing that we're fighting for. We think the art that's in the museums and galleries should tell the whole story of our culture—our real culture—not just the white male part.

**Q. Is the art world like the rest of society in its treatment of women and artists of color, or is it a special case?**

**Rosalba Carriera:** Many people believe that art is special and exempt from conventional scrutiny. While art may be transcendent, the art world should be subject to the same standards as anywhere else. We think there's a civil rights issue here.

**Zora Neale Hurston:** Women and men of color have been denied equal access to becoming artists in our culture for centuries. But there have been many stunning exceptions, and even they are neglected by museums and written out of history books!

**Paula Modersohn-Becker:** Janson's *History of Art*, the most widely used textbook, didn't mention a single woman artist until Janson died. Then his son revised it, including a big 19 out of 2,300.

**Gertrude Stein:** There's a popular misconception that the world of high art is ahead of mass culture, but everything in our research shows that, instead of being avant garde, it's derri re. Look at our poster that compares the number of women in jobs traditionally held by men to the number of women showing in major art galleries ("Bus Companies Are More Enlightened Than NYC Art Galleries"). The art world is a lot more macho than the post office. (See page 62.)

**Q. So you can't just stay in your studios, work really hard and hope that you'll get noticed?**

**Meta Fuller:** Of course not. Any



BARBEL HOGNER

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### MARILYN MONROE ANNOUNCES DRASTIC NEA CUTS

(In a soft, sexy voice) "Hi there, we're the Guerrilla Girls and we are here tonight to tell you boys, yes, BOYS, that this NEA censorship business is all your fault! After all, our tits and asses have been plastered all over every art museum for centuries, and no one said a word about it. Then we get a couple pictures of dicks and the whole house of cards comes tumbling down!

So, since you guys got us into this mess, we've figured out a way for you to get us out of it. Tomorrow morning, real early, just wrap up your schlongs real pretty and send them to Senator Helms, with a note attached, saying, 'Dear Jesse: There won't be any more of these in our art because there are no more left in the art world!' Yes, we want to see every prick in the audience in the senator's office in the morning. Fuck faxing a protest letter, send the real thing!

We know it makes you uncomfortable. It's not easy handing your reproductive organ over to the federal government. But take it from us girls, you'll get used to it. Besides, you don't need that particular instrument to make great art. You can have seminal thoughts without the semen!

Thank you for taking the time to listen to us, and, for once, we hope you'll take our advice seriously."

—Audiotape played at a New York benefit against censorship in the arts, later heard at GG gigs around the world

veteran of the civil rights, women's, or gay rights movement knows that progress is the result of pressure, protest and struggle.

**Q. Do you really want to rewrite art history and cancel out all the white male artists we know and love?**

**Georgia O'Keeffe:** Yes and no. History isn't a fixed, static thing. It always needs adjustments and revisions. The tendency to reduce the art of an era to a few 'geniuses' and their masterpieces is myopic. It has been a huge mistake. There are many, many significant artists.



We're not going to forget Rembrandt and Michelangelo. We just want to move them over to make room for the rest of us!

**Q. Hilton Kramer called you "Quota Queens." Do you really think that all shows must be 50 percent women and artists of color?**

**Zora Neale Hurston:** We've never, ever mentioned quotas. We've never attacked an institution for not showing 50 percent women and artists of color. But we have humiliated them for showing less than 10 percent.

**Georgia O'Keeffe:** To make up for what's happened so far in art history, every show should be 99 percent women and artists of color, but only for the next four hundred years.

**Q. You hate the language that's used to describe art. What's wrong with words like "masterpiece," "seminal," and "genius"?**

**Frida Kahlo:** If a masterpiece can be made only by a master and a master is defined as "a man having control or authority," you can see what we're up against. Considering the history of slavery, we suggest changing the words to "massa" and "massa's piece."

**Lee Krasner:** "Seminal"—an adjective for "semen"—is completely overused to describe creative achievement and originality. Yuk. Just thinking about it brings a bad taste to my mouth.

**Tina Modotti:** Next time anyone feels the urge to use the word "seminal," try "germinal" instead.

**Anaïs Nin:** The word "genius" is related to the Latin word for testicles. Maybe that explains why it's so rarely used to describe a woman.

**Q. If the art world is so corrupt and disgusting, why do you want to be part of it?**

**Käthe Kollwitz:** We don't all want a piece of the pie. We are a diverse group—different ages, different races, different sexual orientations and different levels of art world success. Some of us want to blow up SoHo, some have already had museum retrospectives. What we do agree on unanimously is that women and artists of color deserve

#### COLOR BLIND

On my first gig, at Northwestern University, I was put completely off balance when a white woman in the last row questioned my right to speak for artists of color. I was baffled by her criticism... after all, I am an African American. I hesitated... and then I realized, she didn't see that I was black! The gorilla mask concealed most of the things that mark me as an African American such as my facial features and my hair. The limited assumptions she had of Guerrilla Girls made her read my light brown skin as white. A mask having such an effect really makes you think, about race and about assumptions.

—Alma Thomas



a piece of the pie and shouldn't be prevented from getting a big piece, if that's what they're after.

**Violette LeDuc:** People who attack us for wanting a piece of the pie usually have most of it. Would they attack a woman in another field—like a law graduate who wants to be a partner in a firm or a Supreme Court judge?

**Q. What's your position on pornography?**

**Anaïs Nin:** We plan to have a position on it as soon as we can agree on what it is.

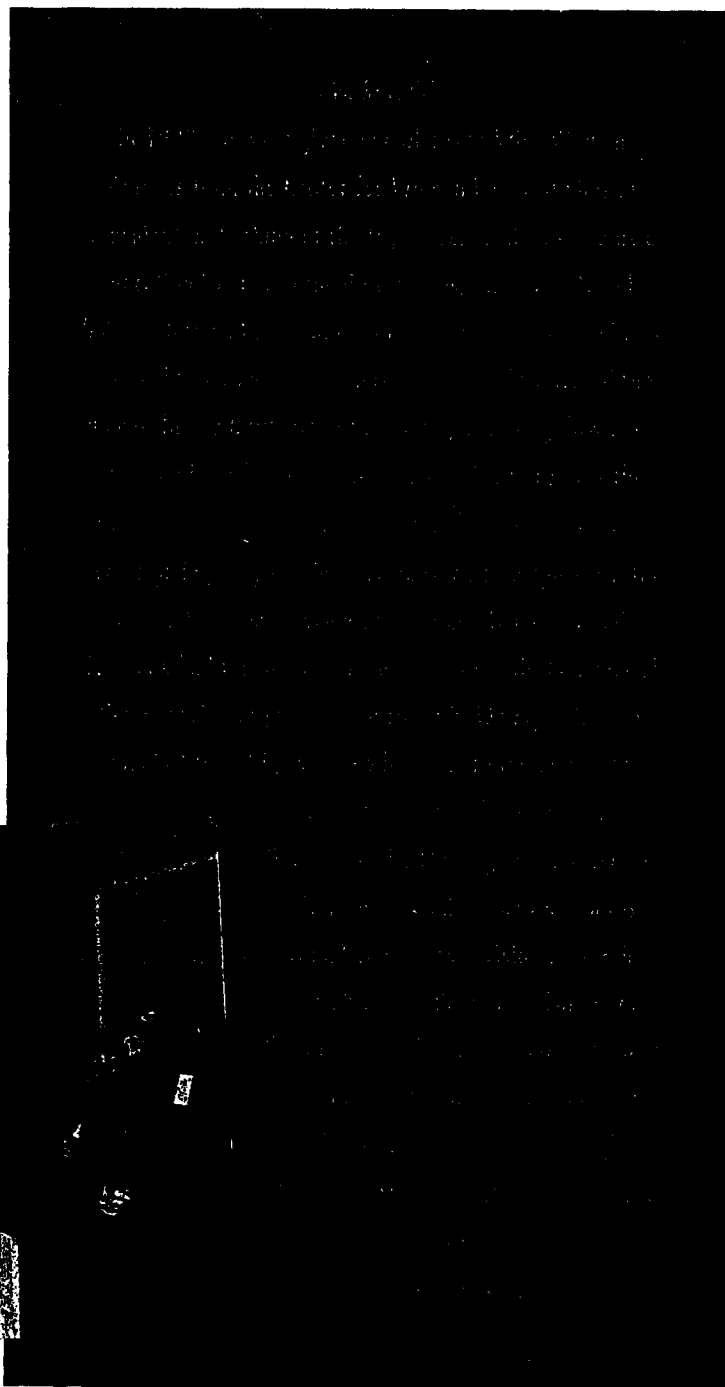
**Q. What about censorship?  
Should museums show  
obscene and offensive art?**

**Rosalba Carriera:** Sure, as long as some of it is made by women and artists of color.

**Q. What about lesbian and  
gay issues?**

**Romaine Brooks:** We support lesbian and gay rights and some of us are queer.

**Gertrude Stein:** We've covered lesbian and gay issues in a number of posters. For example, we called for the far right to undergo psychoanalysis to determine the source of its interest in Robert Mapplethorpe (see page 65).





# HAVE MASK, WILL TRAVEL



The Girls have appeared in  
the following cities:

Adelaide, Australia  
Amherst, Massachusetts

Austin, Texas  
Baltimore, Maryland

Barcelona, Spain

Basel, Switzerland

Beaverton, Oregon

Bennington, Vermont

Berlin, Germany

Boulder, Colorado

Buffalo, New York

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Cincinnati, Ohio

Curitiba, Brazil

Davenport, Iowa

Davis, California

Detroit, Michigan

Dublin, Ireland

Easthampton, New York

Evanston, Illinois

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Granville, Ohio

Graz, Austria

Hartford, Connecticut

Helsinki, Finland

Indianapolis, Indiana

Las Cruces, New Mexico

Los Angeles, California

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Montgomery, Alabama

Montreal, Canada

New Haven, Connecticut

New York, New York

Northampton, Massachusetts

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Portland, Oregon

Princeton, New Jersey

Providence, Rhode Island

Oslo, Norway

San Francisco, California

San Jose, California

San Rafael, California

Santa Cruz, California

Saskatchewan, Canada

Sonoma, California

Stockholm, Sweden

Stony Brook, New York

Syracuse, New York

Tampa, Florida

Terre Haute, Indiana

Ulm, Germany

Valencia, California

Vienna, Austria

Williamstown,

Massachusetts;

and

many

more.



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## THE L WORD

When we spoke at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art in Alabama, I identified myself as Romaine Brooks, lesbian artist. Later the chief curator excitedly told me it was the first time the L word had ever been heard at the museum.

—Romaine Brooks

**Violette LeDuc:** We proclaimed that Clarence Thomas would extend the same right to privacy he demanded for himself to homosexuals (see page 77).

**Alice Neel:** We ridiculed homophobic AIDS paranoia in our explanation of Natural Law (see pages 82-83).

**Vanessa Bell:** The first *Hot Flashes* poked fun at the *New York Times*'s puritanical language when covering lesbian and gay issues.

**Georgia O'Keeffe:** We would like to see art about lesbian sexuality taken as seriously as art about gay male sexuality. And it's happening.

**Q. Doesn't the mask keep you from taking responsibility for the charges you make? Isn't that cowardly?**

**Rosalba Carriera:** Actually, what started off as a lark, as a way of doing something constructive with our anger, has become a big responsibility to a huge audience. We didn't ask for it, but we're trying to live up to it. None of us has ever profited from being a Girl.

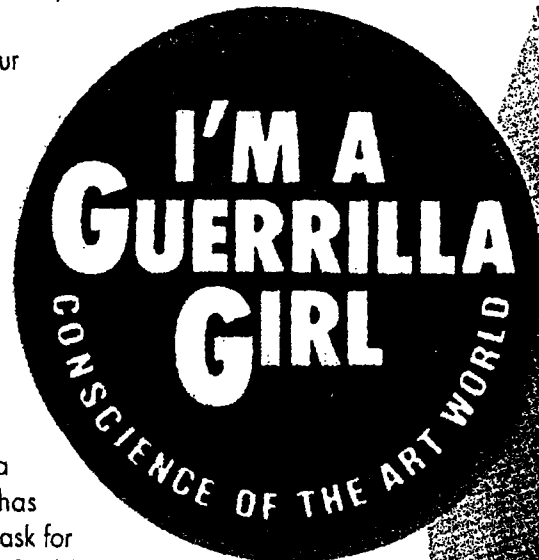
**Ana Mendieta:** Give us a break. Was the Lone Ranger a coward?

**Q. Has anyone ever tried to expose who you really are?**

**Paula Modersohn-Becker:** One guy threatened us. But the thought of millions of angry, spear-carrying feminists on his case was more than he could bear.

**Liubov Popova:**

A number of years ago, two guys put up a poster with their photos, claiming to be the Guerrilla Girls. Some weird career strategy!



## SWISS MISS

Three of us were on a gig in Basel, Switzerland. After a standing-room-only talk and poster review (the biggest honor was given to "It's Even Worse in Europe"), we were happy to dine with singer Diamanda Galas and writer Kathy Acker. We got a laugh out of Galas and Acker's wrong guess that I, the thirty-years' married mother of four, was the dyke of the three because my menopausal voice was so deep and my power-shouldered jacket and shiny black boots were so... huh? Anyway, they loved us to the tune of springing for dinner on playing on a big bunch of expense money.

—Zina Hede Hurston

**Q. Have you made a difference?**

**Emily Carr:** We've made dealers, curators, critics and collectors accountable. And things have actually gotten better for women and artists of color. With lots of backsliding.

**Frida Kahlo:** Just last year, Robert Hughes, who in the mid '80s claimed that gender was no longer a limiting factor in the art world, reviewed a show of American art in London for *Time* and said, "You don't have to be a Guerrilla Girl to know that there weren't enough women in the show." That's progress, even though Hughes reneged on a promise to apologize in this book for his past insensitivity.

**Paula Modersohn-Becker:** Mary Boone is too macho to admit we influenced her in any way, but she never represented any women until we targeted her.

**Käthe Kollwitz:** Museum curators feel compelled to suck up to us on camera. They used to ignore us and hope we'd just go away.

**Gertrude Stein:** The situation was pathetic. It had to change. And we were a part of that change.

**Q. Has success ruined you?**

**33.3 percent:** Yes.

**33.3 percent:** No.

**The rest:** Undecided.

**Q. Where do you go from here?**

**All:** Back to that jungle out there. Back to work.

**Q. One last thing. How can you stand wearing those masks all day?**

**Emily Carr:** It's hot.

**Paula Modersohn-Becker:** Not as hot as we make it out there.

**Alma Thomas:** But we look so beautiful, it's hard to complain.

