

RISE

Empower,
Change, and
Action!



WHITNEY
MODERN

CONTEMPORARY FINE ART

Beyond Hegemony by Sherri Cornett

“Two things have always ruptured up and through hegemony: art and bodies. That is how art has preserved its toehold in our universe. Where there was poverty, there was also a painting someone stared at until it filled them with tears. Where there was genocide, there was a song that refused to be quiet. Where a planet was forsaken, there was someone telling a story with their last breath.”

— Lidia Yuknavitch, *The Book of Joan: A Novel*ⁱ

I admit to a fascination with word play, linguistics, and derivations and that the upswelling of terminology that is aimed at moving us beyond our past—as with post-colonialism, post-capitalism, post-feminism, postmodernism, post-identity, post-heteronormativity—sends me down lengthy rabbit holes of investigation. While I do believe such exercises can expand one’s understanding, the most powerful and empowering actions and interactions come when we take the “Think Globally, Act Locally” motto to the intimate scale— sharing our personal stories and our art and in face-to-face communication.

We have seen this over and over in our Gutfreund Cornett Art projects. These are always a weaving of the art (which brings visitors closer), the statements (which add layers to the visual messages), and the communication (whether spontaneous or within the structure of our community programming). We **empower** by taking a “relational approach” in creating such “exhibitions-as-polylogue” ...terms Maura Reilly discusses in her book *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*. “A relational approach highlights cultural differences by presenting a collection of voices, as [Chandra Talpade] Mohanty suggests, [to] ‘tell alternate stories of difference, culture, power and agency’.”ⁱⁱ

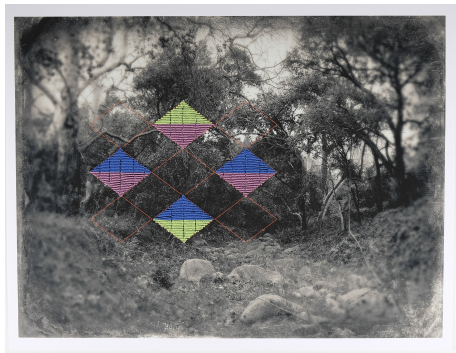
Though *RISE: Empower, Change and Action!* is based on the feminist principle of social, economic, and political equality for all, this exhibition is not a Women Artists-only show. Our artists, some self-identified as male, look at the polysemic nature of feminisms, through lenses of race, gender, nationality, and spirituality and how these perspectives provide insight, encouragement, and solutions, beyond the prevalent hegemony or dominance of one social group over another.

The works of the international artists in our *Beyond Borders: Stories of im/Migration*, which exhibited at Santa Clara University in 2018, shared personal and observed narratives surrounding the struggles of flight, immigration, assimilation and deportation and acknowledged the dignity, dreams and sacrifices of those facing these challenges and fears.ⁱⁱⁱ In our *Social Justice: It Happens to One, It Happen to All*, artworks and a community conversation with seventeen of the artists brought forth sincere, difficult and heart-breaking dialogue about race, power, education, prisons, shelter, safe food and water, criminal injustice, women’s rights and gender identity.^{iv}

It is our ethical responsibility to seek fresh answers about how to best support those experiencing

injustice. We frequently **change** how we look at our curatorial work, our methods and the language we use and, more recently, how we publicly identify ourselves. “As the feminist critic and philosopher Gaytri Spivak constantly reminds us, we must always acknowledge not only who we are, but where we are, that is where we are positioned in relation to hierarchies, and to question of authority and privilege.”^v To that end...the four curators of *RISE* are white, cis women, three of whom are based in California. I live in Montana and am of German heritage. My focus on advocacy and community building are underscored by my degrees in political science and art and by my genuine pleasure in hearing people’s stories. More recently I have aimed to be more aware of decentering my own perspectives, to listen more and to be more open to those who generously point out my ignorance.

A Northern Cheyenne and artist friend, Bently Spang, suggested I read John Brown Childs’s book *Transcommunitary: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect* as a way to learn more about collaborating with indigenous people. Childs uses his own heritage as Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy or People of the Longhouse) as his base of reference. To lessen hostilities between the five nations living around, in what is now known as, the upper New York area, each nation of the Haudenosaunee came together to develop coalitions, to learn how to become connected in respectful dialogue about justice, between sometimes conflicting ways of thinking, and without losing each nation’s autonomy. The Haudenosaunee invited refugees from other indigenous nations, who fled colonial invasions, into their Longhouse. More than an act of tolerance, they welcomed the different outlooks that were then enfolded into and enriched the larger community. This 16th century example is relevant guidance for us today and provides us another framework within which to dismantle white dominance. Childs calls this process of “constructive and developmental interaction among distinct autonomy-oriented communities and organizations” transcommunitary.^{vi}



Carolyn Doucette
Makumegawiktoogwaal



Marisa Govin
Ñust'as



Gina Herrera
Jaunting for Restitution

Childs' writing also helped me further understand the indigenous belief integral to navigating the world and relationships—that there is little separation between people, land, spirit and nation. Several of our *RISE* artists reference this connection. For her works titled *Makumegawiktoogwaal (Towards The Earth) #1 and #2*, Carolyn Doucette states: “We have a saying in Mi'kmaq, “Msit No'kmaq,” which means, ‘All My Relations.’ Everything is connected and has a spirit, even the plants, rocks and water; therefore, everything of the Earth is a part of us.” Marisa Goven's work alludes to the Andean *Ñust'as* or earth keepers who assist people in forming connections between each other, the sacred feminine and Pachamama or Mother Earth. As with her *Jaunting for Restitution*, Gina Herrera's sculptures comes from a combination of her Tesuque Pueblo and Costa Rican heritage and her rapport with nature.^{vii}

Activist artists ask viewers to question their existing beliefs, to consider previously unknown and perhaps initially uncomfortable perspectives. In our curatorial work, this becomes, as Childs would say, a transcommunal layering of the artists' distinct backgrounds, identities, their choices of themes and media, and those experiencing the art—all within a mutually respectful, dialogical space. The artist statements in *RISE: Empower, Change, Act!* provide starting points for conversations about identifying as a woman of color, viewing the other as oneself, vulnerability as critical to personal and societal change, gender based violence on campus, children fighting for sensible gun laws, the defiance of the Women's March, finding points of agreement, more complete expression as human beings, education, strength, courage, curiosity, and more. We take **action** when we choose to be open to and incorporate this multiplicity of information, identities, viewpoints, and stories into our *Weltanschauung* so that they influence and support our responses to injustice and efforts toward equality.

For more information about curatorial activism and its history, I encourage you to look up, on Vimeo, Dr. Maura Reilly's lecture and conversation with Linda Nochlin at the University of Sydney's Curating Feminism conference in 2014 and read their publications: *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* by Maura Reilly and “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” by Linda Nochlin, published in *ArtNews* in 1971.^{viii}

ⁱ Lidia Yuknavitch, *The Book of Joan: A Novel* (New York: Harper, 2017), Kindle edition, 97.

ⁱⁱ Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 29- 33.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gutfreund Cornett Art, “Beyond Borders: Stories of im/Migration.” GutfreundCornettArt.com. <https://www.gutfreundcornettart.com/info-beyond-borders.html> (accessed June 16, 2018)

^{iv} Gutfreund Cornett Art, “Social Justice: It Happens to One, It Happens to All.” GutfreundCornettArt.com. <https://www.gutfreundcornettart.com/info-social-justice.html> (accessed June 16, 2018).

^v Reilly, 215. vi John Brown Childs, and Guillermo Delgado-P., Arif Dirlik, Stefano Varese, Renate Holub, Jeremy Brecher, Hayden White, Andrea Smith, David Welchman Gegeo, Herman Gray, Sofia Quintero, John D. Brewer, and Bettina Aptheker. *Transcommunitary: From The Politics Of Conversion*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003). 10.

^{vii} Gutfreund Cornett Art, “RISE: Empower, Change, Action!” GutfreundCornettArt.com. <https://www.gutfreundcornettart.com/gallery-rise.html>. (accessed June 16, 2018).

^{viii} Linda Nochlin, “From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *ArtNews*.com <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/> (accessed June 16, 2018).

Sunny Came Home...
By Karen Gutfreund

“Sunny came home to her favorite room
Sunny sat down in the kitchen
She opened a book and a box of tools
Sunny came home with a mission”
—Shawn Colvin

Art, creative expression and muses don't always make clear linear sense. They shouldn't and in that you can find great, nuanced beauty. The song “Sunny Came Home” has been fixated in my mind as I worked on this exhibition and has always been an inspiration. It is about a woman named Sunny who burns her house down to escape her past. To me, it exemplifies the strength and resilience of women, and the lengths they will go to in order to effect change. With *RISE: Empower, Change and Action* we asked for work in all media that reflect and addresses complex socio-cultural issues.

Creating exhibitions on themes of social justice and feminism has been my passion for over a decade. This is about my 30th exhibition I've worked on...I've lost count. And I have a number of shows that I'm working on—the culture of violence in the USA, and the demise of the American Dream—who it still stands for when so many people are considered “other”. With *RISE*, I was awestruck by the poignant, strong, beautiful work that submitted for consideration. The hardest job of the curator is the task of making the final choices of what will go into the gallery. With the number of impressive works that spoke to the theme, and in order to honor these artists, we added additional works that would be shown in the gallery on a monitor in a continuous, looping slideshow and of course, have their work online and in this catalog.

Polarized, political times call for political, activist art. We need this now more than ever. From the Women's March held in Washington D.C., and around the world the day after the inauguration of #45, and subsequent marches/protests, have shown that women's voices will not be silenced. “She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.” The patriarchy is desperately trying to hold their ground in an effort to keep the power structure of the dominance of the white male in place. Grab a megaphone, grab a pen, or grab a paintbrush and raise your voice! Artists have heard the call to speak up against injustice, violence and oppression. *RISE: Empower, Change and Action!* and many other similar exhibitions around the country reflect this important cultural moment with art that states enough is enough, and it's time for a change. This is in line with the #MeToo and “Time's Up” movement; and quoting from their website: “The clock has run out on sexual assault, harassment, and inequality in the workplace. It's time to do something about it.” Yes, it is.

And talking about inequality, let's not even get started on the under-representation of women, people

of color and LGBTQ in the artworld. That will be saved for another essay, another day, but is one of the reasons we create exhibitions such as *RISE*—to give women artists exhibition opportunities.

But if we want to create a more just world, we must first solve issues of inequality. These power imbalances with systemic inequality and a systemic pattern of exclusion for women, for people of color, and a lack of equilibrium in the power and equality distribution in society are the root of the problems facing the disenfranchised. This is why the focus of the work chosen for this exhibition spoke not only to the issues but to resolutions and ways to solve the problems in a positive way.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, Founding Pastor for the House for All Sinners and Saints is calling the #MeToo movement the “apocalypse”—but in a good way. “Apocalyptical works were meant to proclaim a big, hope filled idea. Dominant powers are not ultimate powers. Empires fall, tyrant fade, systems die, God is still around. In Greek, the word apocalyptical means to uncover, to peel away, to show what’s underneath. That is what this country has been experiencing in recent months...The #MeToo and Time’s UP movements are simply exposing what was already there. The male domination at the center of the issues is being revealed apocalyptically and in prime time. “Wokeness” and policy change are a start but not enough to dig out the full infection. We need to see how deep the heresy of domination runs and then remind one another that dominant powers are not ultimate powers. So if those that came before look to the bible to justify their dominance then let’s look to it to justify our dignity.”

Strength and dignity is portrayed in *Tani, Survivor Love Letter*, by Chloe Allred. This piece, from a series, is a visual response to surviving assault with text that is a love letter to herself. If it happened to me, I’m afraid I might be silenced by shame and victim’s guilt. I greatly admire her courage and bravery. *Todas Trabajamos, Hasta Las Ninas* by Mague Calanche and *Mother Courage* by Cathy Weaver, show the plight of undervalued and unappreciated mothers who sacrifice everything for their children with dignity as champions of survival rather than victimhood as they persist and endure.

Taking charge and creating change are demonstrated in Sally Edelstein, *Women’s Lib-A Storms Approaching*, and Sarupa Sidaarth, *Shh*. Yes, we have first amendment rights but so often women’s voices are silenced, not heard or spoken over. I think that is going to change in the mid-term elections and in the future. Women have taken the microphone and will not back down. Beth Lakamp, *she told them so*, says “The women in my paintings have something to say and the timing is just right. There is a rare incredible confluence of audience and spirit. Egos fall silent as spirits rise in unanimity. She leads in this moment, fittingly. Progress unfolds as great ideas are given life. Listen or else.”

The power of conviction for women’s rights and equality for race, gender, religion and sexual orientation is loud and clear with Irene Carvajal’s *Future Gains: the dollar is rising* and Indira Cesarine with her neon light sculpture, *Equal Means Equal*. Cesarine says this work “emphasizes the importance of equal rights for all humans, regardless of gender, which should be guaranteed in our constitution.

Enough is enough. It is time for discrimination and the abuse of power to end. I see this work and symbol it displays as a powerful beacon of hope, lighting a path for the future of equality.” But if equal is supposed to mean equal, why do women still make \$.79 on the dollar that white males make, and women of color are even lower with \$.63 for black women and \$.54 for Hispanic women? Carvajal’s response with her work is “Equality benefits everyone. If value could be blind to race, gender, religion and sexual orientation our whole society would benefit...A future in the hands of young people who reject old labels and are full of passion, strength and desire to make this a world where we are all valued equally. The bills are installed inside a plexiglass container with a constant fan. The dollar rises when we all work together, so does the (e)quality of life.” Rising tides lift all boats.

Who would have thought that hashtags or a pink knitted hat would start such a revolution? The #MeToo, #TimesUp and “pussyhats” gave voice and wings to a movement that once started, could not be stopped. The women in Vanessa Filley portraits, *#MeToo*, *Minerva Looking*, *Assata Toward*, *Gabriela The Future*, are not victims. In their steely, direct gaze, you will see that this will not happen again on their watch. Marie Cameron says of her painting, *In the Pink*, “Who would have guessed that pink knitwear could be the symbol of protest, resistance and empowerment? How perfect though, all those little stitches coming together to create something bigger than themselves, crafted with love, largely by women, for women, speaking volumes about who we are, and how we will be heard.”

It’s time for recognition for women leaders, who I am hopeful will make America the land of true equality for all. Priscilla Otani, *Political Action Group* and Rozanne Hermelyn Di Silvestro, *In a Constant State of Rising and Falling* both created powerful mixed media works honoring these women leaders both in politics and business. Rozanne is hopeful, saying “The Forbes 100 most powerful women list presented in my pieces is proof that women can rise and break through the intangible glass ceiling, overcome barriers and obtain positions they are well qualified for.” Otani has a more cautionary tale with her work, “The braille book format punctuates the danger of turning a blind eye to politics and allowing extremists to move our nation in the wrong direction. The women painted on these pages are current and future politicians.” We need more female politicians to take over and talk over the primarily white male system. Again with the battle cry “Nevertheless, She Persisted”, I am confident that things are going to change, the future is female, and we will not go quietly into the good night.

Although 18 months in the making, this exhibition is very timely. Sherri Cornett and I were so pleased to partner with Suzanne Whitney-Smedt, Marianne McGrath, our guest jurors and of course, the wonderful, gifted artists. In closing, I am filled with gratitude for the powerful and empowering voices of this group. Collectively, as a society we need to understand the interconnectedness of humanity—we are one race, the human race. We send a call out to embrace empowerment over traditional male systems of dominant power, where all people regardless of race, religion, gender or class will benefit and rise! *RISE: Empower, Change and Action!* is a reflection of women’s voices around the world that demonstrates true feminist power, and that it is most definitely, here to stay.

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