

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 *Transcommunitality: 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” transcommunitality.^{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'kmaw, “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. *Transcommunalism: 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).

Copyright 2018 by Gutfreund Cornett Art. The book author and each artist here retains sole copyright to their contributions to this book. This catalog is documentation of *RISE: Empower, Change and Action!*, an exhibition created by Gutfreund Cornett Art, www.GutfreundCornettArt.com, and shown at The Whitney Modern Gallery, Los Gatos, CA, July 18 to August 31, 2018. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means without prior permission in writing from Gutfreund Cornett Art.

Catalog designed and edited by Gutfreund Cornett Art

Cover Design by:
Rozanne Hermelyn, Arc and Line Communication and Design.
www.arcandline.com