**INTRODUCTION: Gutfreund Cornett Art**

Envision, conceive of, imagine . . .In this turbulent time of political changes, women's rights, social, racial, gender and economic inequality, global conflicts, cultural instability, reproductive choice/health care issues, and environmental challenges of overconsumption and resource scarcity - how do we effect positive change through art? How do we listen, speak our minds, include, and act in collaboration or alone across generational differences, races, identities and cultures, to build our future, locally and globally?

With *VISION*, Gutfreund Cornett Art and UniteWomen.org brought self-identified women artists into dialogue, retracing an account of the past manifesting in the present, to address major social themes, to define and bring forth what is important to themselves, their families, their communities, our nation and the world at large with art that reflects complex socio-cultural issues and focuses on a vision for a more positive, empowering future.

We asked self-identified women artists to respond to and take an active role in this conversation to create an exhibition in all mediums and genres. The art ranged from literal to poetic, abstract to representational, and psychological, to social and political commentary and represented the prismatic, collective vision for our future to inspire communities and provide a framework for true innovation in our time.

The call for art for *Vision: An Artist’s Perspective* went out to “self-identified women artists”. This term acknowledges that gender identification is not limited to biology. By sharing our perspectives and experiences, divisiveness can grow into solidarity, understanding and strength amidst all of the myth and muddiness of social policies, press and statements from misogynist organizations. As a whole, this show is underpinned by the feminist principle that believes in political, economic and social equality for all. For this exhibition self-identified female artists from across the U.S. and Canada, representing multiple generations, races and cultural viewpoints, submitted strong and compelling works on the many issues affecting women today.

Violence, the “War on Women” and Reproductive Rights:

Amy Pleasant, *Voices in Her Head #,* retells her story of survival of sexual assault as a child. The young girl’s frank, open gaze foreshadows the destruction of her world as her power and innocence is taken away from her as well as her bike. Sara Cole, *Forgotten Woman 2,* addresses global violence against women and the resulting loss of femininity through a resolute but faceless and hairless woman with red drips running seemingly as tears or blood. SPOOKY BOOBS COLLECTIVE, *You Stupid Cunt,* uses controversial verbiage—commonly used to diminish and minimize women to “keep them in their place”. The brash words are in sharp contrast as they are weaved into the beautifully designed Victorian-like wallpaper in which “cunt” is repeated over and over. Cheri Redlinger with the photograph *Abortions Provided in Back Alleys,* and Sarah Nguyen book-art, *How Does Your Garden Grow,* displaying drawings of plants used to assist in abortions, starkly address what women may need to return to if reproductive rights are rolled back in the current fight to control women’s choice and health. Beth Fein, *Speak Truth to Power,* gives voice in twenty-four languages to the need for us to speak up against aggression and wrong doing and to honor those who have confronted repression and injustice.

Identity and Gender Roles:

Suppositions of identity and gender roles play an integral part in this exhibition with work ranging from conceptual to explosive. *Alabaster*, by Katherine Collins, shows a veiled, wrapped face which overlays concepts of identity and personality in what we choose to conceal or reveal. With *Now You Can Touch My Hair*, Nastassja Swift highlights her experience as a black woman artist exploring feelings of doubt and anxiety and the coping mechanisms to better understanding identity. Lynn Dau’s sculpture *Disorder,* an erupting sink, addresses gender roles and how women's work is considered undervalued, and reminiscent of collective anger women may feel at having to do yet one more load of dishes. With woven, cast aluminum, Victoria Helena Mihatovic ponders the dichotomy of gender roles and choices in regards to maternity and the weight it puts on the female in the sculpture *Maternity Wear.* The installation, *Plumb Boobs* by Sondra Schwetman, weaving across the floor, takes us on the path to understanding feminine identity perspectives and the feminist journey. In Tara Booth’s moving video *In(gest)* a woman is poked, prodded and pinched mercilessly, while the other frame shows the same character ingesting fruits and vegetables until it appears she may vomit. In her statement she wonders, “how much is forced and how much is self-inflicted,” exemplifying the gender roles to which woman are expected to subscribe.

Aging, Illness, Beauty and Sexuality:

Addressing the mind and the body, feminist artists reject the social norm that beauty and worth are only assigned to the young and that “women of a certain age” lose their power and fade away. The gaze is direct and filled with melancholy in Marky Kauffmann’s *Lost Beauty: Burns Facial Wrap*. Her work addresses the concepts of beauty and aging with implications that women are compelled to reverse the effects of aging to remain forever young so as not to disappear. Yolanda Guerra, with *No Strings Attached,* celebrates female sexuality with no constraints and rejects any imposed notions against pleasure through social norms, religion or guilt. Through a classical styled drawing, Janice Whiting, in *Three Ages of Women,* addresses the contradictory message that in order to be desirable, women must be both the virgin and the whore but also young, refuting the idea that a women’s sexuality and beauty vanishes with the passing years, as we all must age. With layered textures and imagery in *Is It Mine?,* Caren Helene Rudman reflects on the disconnect between mind and body while enduring illness and the subsequent powerlessness that ensues, but still persisting to hold onto hope to give strength and power to overcome obstacles.

Empowerment and the Human Condition:

With *Cleanse and Exfoliate,* Emily Dvorin creates a whimsical but intricately structured textural, sculptural basket using re-purposed, re-contextualized materials that speak to environmental concerns of our tendency of over-consumption of commercial goods and societal excess. Resigned but with trepidation, *Rickety Lawn Chair and Happy Gardens* by Beth Lakamp reflects on the disproportionate insecurity women face in retirement. Surreal and dreamlike, *Intuition of Home* by Cynthia Tom tells lucid stories envisioning a future world with more empowerment for women. In *American Woman,* Blonde Jenny creates an alternative universe for her character to represent an American women having equality in society and the freedom to become whatever she wishes. In a precarious situation of uncertainty – is she sinking or is she rising? J Howard’s *Drowning in Emotions* represents self-awareness and victory over adversity and conflict. With *Try to See,* Remedios Rapoport encourages and supports self-awareness and creating positive change and global interconnection.

Why do we think “women-only” shows are still relevant and important? Art representation and exposure for women artists is changing, but much still needs to be done. There has been more focus on women artists and feminist art history since [Linda Nochlin](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/fineart/people/faculty/nochlin.htm) asked "Why have there been no great women artists?" in 1971, but the number of women represented in the current edition of Janson’s “History of Art” has risen from none, in the 1980s, to only twenty-seven today. Maura Reilly referenced the famous Guerilla Girls 1986 Report Card and Pussy Galore’s 2015 update showing the still disturbing lack of gallery representation for women artists, despite some inroads, in her *ARTNews* article *Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes*. “The more closely one examines art-world statistics, the more glaringly obvious it becomes that, despite decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist, and queer activism and theorizing, the majority continues to be defined as white, Euro-American, heterosexual, privileged, and, above all, male.” (Reilly)

Begun as an informal statistical research project to create dialogue about underrepresentation and undervaluing of women’s art, Micol Hebron’s 2013 *(En)Gendered (In)Equity: The Gallery Tally Poster Project*, became the unique and quickly growing socially-engaged art project *Gallery Tally.* Through crowdsourcing, this project has brought together over 2000 artists from around the world to collect and organize data from the top contemporary art galleries. Recent estimates show an average representation of thirty percent female artists to male artists’ seventy percent. “There is still a real problem with who’s getting opportunities, who’s getting shown, who’s getting collected, who’s getting promoted, and who’s getting written about,” Hebron says. (Reilly)

All female shows increase the opportunity for promotion and display of the work of established women artists and help us discover emerging ones. Jonathan Jones, art critic for the Guardian, wrote, in his review of the all women exhibition *Champagne Life* at the Saatchi Gallery, “The real reason women need to be represented properly in the art world is so the world can be fully represented in art.” (Jones) This is in sharp contrast to the statement by the late, but hugely popular, Guardian art critic Brian Sewell, “There has never been a first-rank woman artist. Only men are capable of aesthetic greatness.” (Gunter) Much work still needs to be done to break free from the common vernacular surrounding and defining women’s art.

Hilarie M. Sheets, in her New York Times article *Female Artists Are (Finally) Getting Their Turn*, highlighted the works of and renewed attention toward “artist forerunners”. She applauded the recent and upcoming women-only group shows, including [Hauser Wirth & Schimmel](http://www.hauserwirth.com/exhibitions/2712/revolution-in-the-making-br-abstract-sculpture-by-women-1947-y-2016/view/?version=meter+at+1&module=meter-Links&pgtype=article&contentId=&mediaId=bar1_digihd_BAU_mtr_v2_fonts_https_64RWJ&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&priority=true&action=click&contentCollection=meter-links-click)’s *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women* and Denver Art Museum’s *Women of Abstract Expressionism*. Within the last ten years, we have seen the Rubell Family Collection, *No Man’s Land*, in Miami, which showcased over 100 women artists, *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution* at MoCA in Los Angeles (2007) and *Elles* at the Pompidou Center (2009).

As the former National Exhibitions Director (Karen Gutfreund) and International Caucus Director (Sherri Cornett) for the Women’s Caucus for Art*,* we created multiple exhibition opportunities for women artists, some highlights which are: *Who’s Afraid of Feminism?* at A.I.R. Gallery (2015), *Half the Sky: Intersections in Social Practice Art* at Luxun Academy of Fine Arts/Shenyang, China (2014), *Identity* at gallery nine5 (2014), *Equilibrium, Art for A Changing World* at Woman Made Gallery (2014), *Stories We Tell* at the Phoenix Gallery/NYC (2013), *Honoring Women’s Rights* at the National Steinbeck Museum (2013), *Women + Body* in Seoul & Gwangju, South Korea (2012), and *Man as Object: Reversing the Gaze*, which showed at the Kinsey Institute Gallery (2012) and at SOMArts/SF (2011) and *CONTROL* at SOMArts/SF and Ceres Gallery/NYC (2009). In reference to all women exhibitions, “They are curatorial correctives,” said Maura Reilly, the founding curator of the Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum and now interim director of the National Academy Museum, who advocates for these exhibitions “to counterpoint the looked-overness.” (Sheets)

We see major museums, their boards and their donors working toward rectifying this lack. According to Museum Director Lisa Phillips, *Artemis*, a new program by The New Museum in New York, works towards “funding exhibitions and new commissions by female artists” and “represents a new generation of donors who are more activist patrons”. MoMA now has the *Women’s Project* (MWP), which focuses on research in the museum’s collection and the *Modern Women’s Fund*, which also funds major solo exhibitions, acquisitions and educational and public programs by and about women artists. Women are becoming museum directors and are moving into board leadership. And this, according to Jill Medvedow, Director of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), Boston, changes the statistics. ICA board member Barbara Lee has gifted the museum with work by women artists from her collection and, through her foundation, funds exhibitions for women artists. (Harris, Halperin, Pees)

So what can be done to further promote equal representation in the art world? Linda Nochlin, urges women to “be fearless, speak up, work together, and consistently make trouble.” Reilly in her ARTnews piece added, “Let’s not just talk about feminism—let’s live it. Don’t wait for change to come—be proactive. Let’s call out institutions, critics, curators, collectors, and gallerists for sexist practices.” (Reilly).

We encourage artists and art patrons to practice and put into effect her additional suggestions:

 Create feminist and women’s art shows

 Organize conferences, launch feminist magazines and blogs

 Establish and participate in feminist coalitions, collectives and direct-action groups fighting discrimination against women

 Offer women’s and feminist art courses and teach from a feminist perspective

 Hold collectors and museum boards accountable

We would add that we should look at the gray areas, the overlapping, nuanced and complex and changing definitions and experiences of female identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw, the executive director of the African American Policy Forum and a professor of law at Columbia University and the University of California, Los Angeles law schools originally coined the term “intersectionality” about how race and gender could intersect as forms of oppression. Its use has broadened to help us look at a larger variety and layered social situations, backgrounds and identities and how we can encourage, support, learn from, listen to, advocate for each other and the whole spectrum of female identity. (Crenshaw).

We are very pleased to have collaborated with UniteWomen.org and its President Karen Teegarden for this thought-provoking exhibition and opportunity for self-identified women artists, *Vision: An Artist’s Perspective*.

Works for this exhibition were selected from an impressive collection of submissions, by Sherri Cornett, Karen Gutfreund, Renee Phillips and Karen Teegarden. Suzanne Gray of Seager Gray Gallery and Michelle Nye of SFMoMA Artists Gallery then each selected three pieces, which they considered impactful and representative of the theme.

In order to accommodate as many viewpoints as possible and expand the conversation beyond the physical limitations of the museum, works were selected both for installation in the gallery and a looped slideshow shown in the gallery. Thank you to all of the artists who added their vision to this exhibition: Diyar Al Jazzi, Salma Arastu, Lynn Arnold, Joanne Beaule Ruggles, Tara Booth, Andrea Borsuk, Nellien Brewer, Andrea Broyles, Carolyn Cohen, Sara Cole, Katherine Collins, Lynn Dau, Emily Dvorin, Beth Fein, Linda King Ferguson, Anitra Frazier, Sara Friedlander, Sara Gallo, Lindsay Garcia, Caryl Gaubatz ,Linda Gleitz, Tricia Grame, Yolanda Guerra, J Howard, Georgie Humphries, Uma Rani Iyli, Olivia Jane, Blond Jenny, Kathryn Jill Johnson, Jennifer Jones, Mevi Juliet, Thuy Linh Kang, Joanna L. Kao, Marky Kauffmann, Kristin Kempa, Sameh Khalatbari, J. L. King, Epiphany Knedler, Susan Kraft, Eileen Kressel, Biljana Kroll, Beth Lakamp, Mido Lee, Rebecca Levine, Krista Machovina, Stela Mandel, Kathryn McDonnell, Victoria Helena Mihatovic, Beverly Mills, Jennifer Mondfrans, Shabnam Mottaghi, Sarah Nguyen, Min Kim Park, Jelisa Peterson, Sara Petitt, Amy Pleasant, Michele Poindexter, Lorena Pugh, Remedios Rapoport, Cherie Redlinger, Trix Rosen, Caren Helene Rudman, Gerri Russell, Sondra Schwetman, Pallavi Sharma, Marlene Siff, SPOOKY BOOBS COLLECTIVE, Sean Sterzer, Elka Stevens, Nastassja Swift, Kim Tepe, Cynthia Tom, Diana Tremaine, Natalie Waldburger, Ruth Waters, Corinne Whitaker, Janice Whiting, Jennifer Weigel with Laurel Luckey and Tina Ybarra.

We would like to thank the UniteWomen.org, Kaleid Gallery, Suzanne Gray, Michelle Nye, and our participating artists for their parts in broadening the conversation about issues affecting women.

Art can be a powerful, productive force instrumental in sparking change or critical thinking. Gutfreund Cornett Art is committed to supporting local, national, and global art activism to help us to understand what is happening in our society, who we are, where we come from and where we’re going. We specialize in creating exhibition opportunities for artists to stimulate dialog, raise consciousness and create social change.

***Karen Gutfreund and Sherri Cornett***

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