

BEWARE OF THE WOMAN ARTIST

Laure Adler & Camille Viéville

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ETERNAL RENEWAL

Laure Adler

Women's lives are in eternal renewal. Every day they must prove the legitimacy of their very existence to the opposite sex. Every morning they are called upon to be at once mothers, lovers and labourers, shouldering the mental burden necessitated by this triple personality and enduring the physical and psychological strain caused by the tasks assigned to them. Every day men say to women, "Things are better than before, aren't they? So what are you complaining about?" They are, however, only partially correct. Since more than a century, although women's rights and achievements have undeniably made a tremendous leap forward in the West, and even though it is incontestable that the struggle for women's rights has gained further momentum since the Me Too movement, attracting new followers and establishing a new frame of mind in society, the struggle for female-male equality has never been a path strewn with roses along which the most fundamental rights have been won and set in stone forever, as cruelly seen in the recent ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States dealing a blow to the right to abortion. The cause of women is not a story of constant progress enabling us to believe necessarily in an easier, more joyful future. Everything may be jeopardized by questions of economics or politics. Female-male parity unfortunately remains on a sliding scale for many decision-makers when it should be considered the principal cornerstone of democracy.

This book continues the desire for recognition by women artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in this twenty-first century already so promising for them. It is a desire to rehabilitate still little-known female figures but also to shine a light on young women bringing hope and promise to future generations. Today, art is no longer forbidden for those who identify as female, but this does not mean that all obstacles have been cleared. As we will see on this journey, the fruit of an active dialogue with Camille Viéville, who belongs to another generation than mine but is as committed as I am to this struggle begun a decade ago by female curators – such as Camille Morineau, cofounder of AWARE (Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions) – intent on highlighting, preserving and passing on this female artistic heritage.

As you will see, the destinies of most of these women are extraordinary, each of which would merit its own monograph. One cannot help but admire the moral and mental strength they have shown in continuing to create despite trials and tribulations and the fact that they did not use their energy in the service of making themselves famous but rather in persevering – to persevere even when their belief faltered in their own talent or when accepting a mindset whereby men have long exercised their dominance in the choice of artists and their position on the art market. Even today, a female artist is worth less than an equally famous male artist.

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**JACQUELINE
FAHEY**
*Georgie Pies
for Lunch,*
detail, 1977,
Collection of
Philippa Howden-
Chapman and
Ralph Chapman,
Wellington,
see p. 65

**ANNETTE
MESSENGER**
Installation at
the Hamburger
Kunsthalle,
Hamburg

In this respect, the place of women artists in the public sphere today, and what society permits us to understand of their vision of the world, is a question of principle, in both the real and symbolic sense because it allows us again to measure the freedoms they enjoy and the belief we have in their power to fire our imagination. Clearly, even if there have been notable steps forward – the result, as always, of protests by female art-

ists no longer willing to tolerate their quasi-invisibility, particularly in museums – to be recognized as an artist is still an uphill battle. It is not so much that men are preventing this recognition but rather that traditions, education and societal clichés lead us, more or less consciously, to believe and think that since antiquity male artists alone have defined the rules of and criteria for beauty, and to such an extent that we often still believe that they are their perpetual heirs.

This is undoubtedly the reason why, because we were born female, we were barred from attending art schools before the 1880s, where men shared among themselves their knowledge and way of seeing the world and their *and our* gender. It was not for want of trying – women have never ceased trying and the force of this prohibition only spurred them on – but that their creations were never truly regarded as art in its own right. Take, for example, medieval illuminated manuscripts. We now know that although women were responsible for many such marvels, they were regarded merely as copyists, whereas men were championed as the creators. Consider also all the masterpieces of embroidery, lace, needlepoint, spinning, knitting and weaving, all considered “craft”, mundane and manual, so-called “women’s work”, and therefore inferior and unworthy of being seen as works of art. I am delighted to see female artists now proudly asserting such creative output, including their forerunner, the mischievous, brilliant Annette Messenger, who more than forty years ago embarked on her artistic journey alone. Annette says she is an artist who also happens to be a woman. She never tried to work like a man or as if she were not a woman, so she began work as an apprentice seamstress – a *petite main*, or “little hand”, in French. She asserted what women know how to do and the singularities of these skills. She protested against certain representations relegating women to a secondary status. She did so by making fun of them with puns and devilish drawings, deconstructing female clichés with a poetic, sexual alphabet. For a long time she was called a witch as, alas, all creative women are. If they create then something must not be right, something

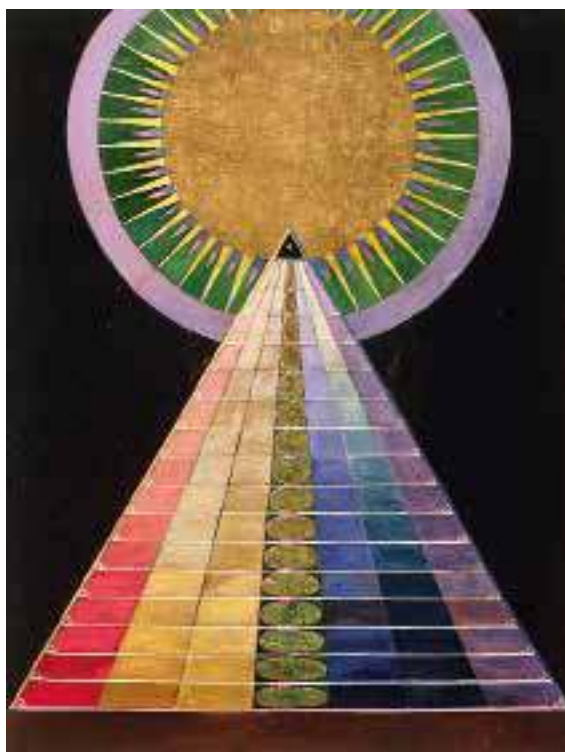


HILMA AF KLINT

(1862–1944)

Hilma af Klint's extraordinary artistic trajectory began at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm, one of the first art schools to admit women, where she acquired the technical mastery she would employ to express her esoteric inspirations, first beginning in 1906. Frequenting theosophical circles, during a spiritism séance she was instructed by a spirit to create a temple and undertake its decoration. She immediately abandoned traditional landscape painting and portraiture and began a vast series of mediumistic pictures, *The Paintings for the Temple*. Painted from 1906 to 1908 and from 1912 to 1915, this series eventually comprised a breathtaking 193 works. Af Klint also began designing the sacred edifice destined to house these paintings, an almost round building on three levels linked by a spiral staircase, that was never built.

The Paintings for the Temple, characterized by their non-figurative iconography and richly coloured palette, established Hilma af Klint as one of the first artists to explore abstraction, before Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian and František Kupka, those long regarded by art historians as the forefathers of abstraction. The relationships between her geometric or organic forms and colour were guided by the key theosophical principles of harmony, the links between the visible and the invisible and the male and the female. The series is structured by sub-series,



such as *The Ten Largest*. In September 1907, af Klint had a vision of ten large paintings of a “heavenly beauty” depicting the ages of life, which she then painted in forty days. These botanical and biomorphic compositions rendered in vivid colours symbolize humanity's relationship to nature.

Aware that she was ahead of her time, af Klint stipulated that *The Paintings for the Temple* should not be exhibited until twenty years after her death. They were not rediscovered until 1986 and then more widely in 2018 at the major retrospective of her work at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

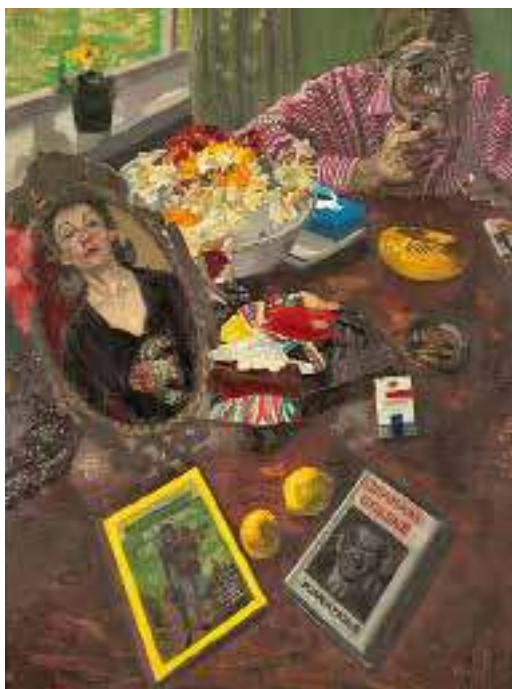
Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 7, Adulthood, 1907, Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm

↑ *Group X, No. 1, Altarpiece, 1915, Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm*



JACQUELINE FAHEY

(born 1929)



In her youth, Jacqueline Fahey's multilingual grandmother and professional pianist mother were important female role models. At the Canterbury College School of Art in Christchurch, she trained with Russell Clark, Bill Sutton and Colin Lovell-Smith and was one of the first women artists in New Zealand to have a professional career. Intent on seeing women better represented in the art world, in 1964 she and Rita Angus organized an exhibition in Wellington in which artists of both genders were equally represented. During a stay in the United States in 1980, she became acquainted with the A.I.R.

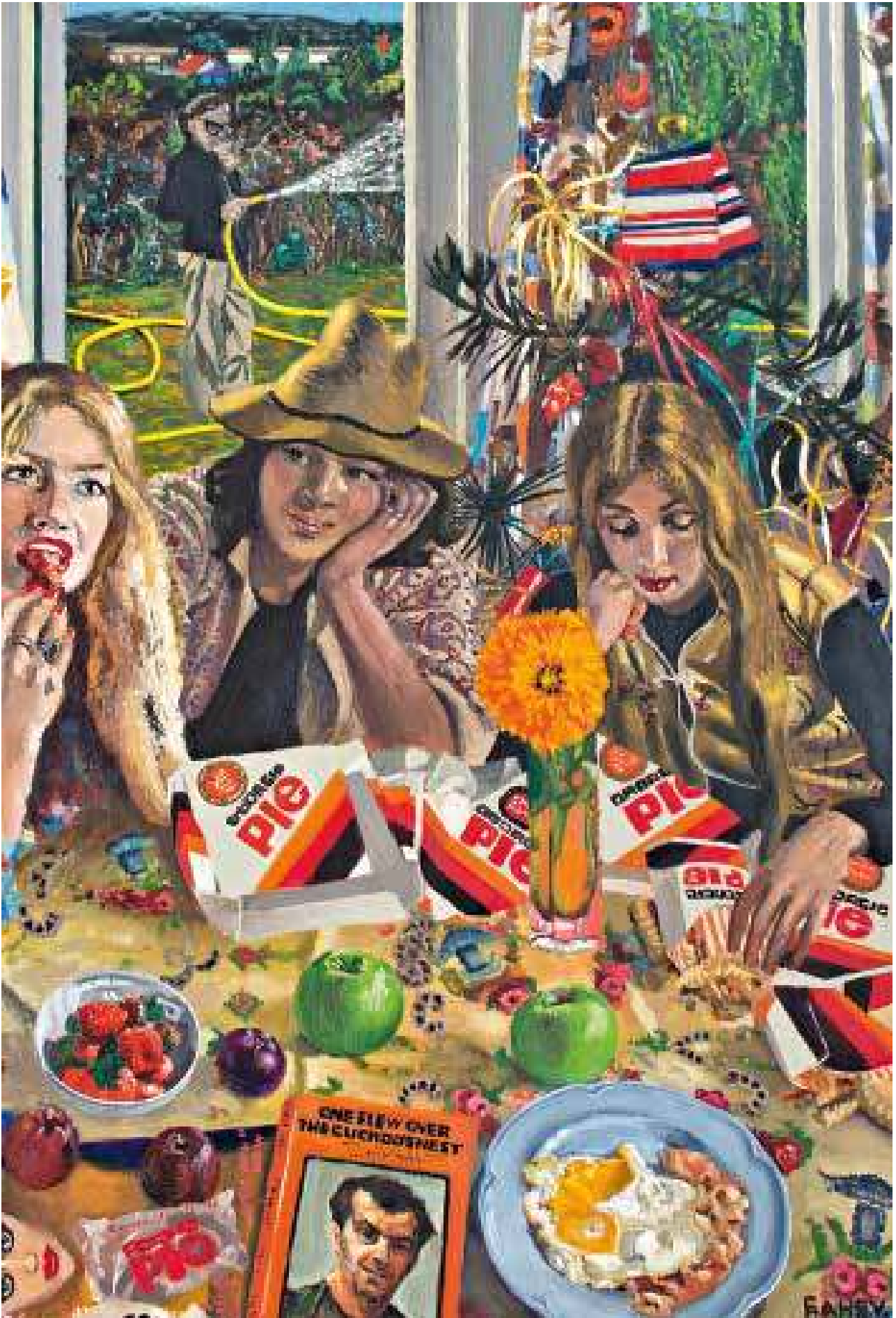
Gallery (Artists in Residence), the first cooperative women's art gallery in the United States, cofounded by Nancy Spero. Fahey herself benefited from the support of the Women's Gallery in Wellington.

Fahey seeks to convey the female experience and its specificities, often painting themes from the everyday with critical realism, working not in a studio but at home. Unsurprisingly, the quotidian duties of a housewife formed one of her favourite subjects. Influenced by the golden age of Flemish painting, she fills her pictures with details and decorative motifs suggesting domestic alienation; washing up, laundry, teas for the children and mother-daughter arguments, or those between sisters, become compositional subjects.

In *Fraser sees me, I see myself* (1975), Fahey focusses on the gaze: her own gaze on herself and the gaze of her husband, the famous psychiatrist Fraser McDonald, on her. The artist is looking at herself in a small mirror – we see only her reflection – while in the background, her husband's eye, enormously enlarged by a magnifying glass, examines her with scientific precision. On the right, before McDonald, there is a biography of the novelist Graham Greene by John Atkins, and next to Fahey's reflection on the left there is the October 1975 issue of *National Geographic*, on the cover of which we can see a young woman with orangutans. According to the art critic Bronwyn Lloyd, this is an allusion to the persistent stereotype associating men with culture and women with nature.

Georgie Pies for Lunch, 1977,
Collection of Philippa Howden-
Chapman and Ralph Chapman,
Wellington

↖ *Fraser sees me, I see myself*, 1975,
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa
Tongarewa, Wellington



GUERRILLA GIRLS

(collective formed in 1985)

The aim of this feminist artists' collective, formed in 1985, is to denounce misogyny and racism in the art world – whether on the art market or in institutions or among collectors, the public or artists – with the purpose of reflecting and bringing recognition to women and, more widely, to minorities. The Guerrilla Girls combine popular media (posters, leaflets, advertising inserts, video, actions, stickers and books), factual and statistical data, an outlook of sarcasm and wit and an aesthetic inherited from graphic design (e.g., the legibility of the modernist typeface Futura) and the conceptual art of the 1970s (e.g., Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger) to expose the subtext of the dominant culture. With their acute sense of irony, they have created a series of posters in which they directly confront the public, as well as artists, gallery owners and museum curators: *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?* (1989). This procedure borrowed from advertising implicates the viewer and incites us to adopt a position.

The seven founders of Guerrilla Girls and the fifty-odd members since 1985 have decided to remain anonymous, in their view the best way of defending their cause.

Their pseudonyms, the names of female artists of the past, give these forebears the renewed recognition they deserve (e.g., Käthe Kollwitz, Alice Neel, et al.). The radicality of the term “Guerrilla”, implying clandestinity, is deliberately provocatively combined with “Girls”, an overused pejorative term to label women. A fortuitous spelling mistake by a meeting's secretary prompted the Guerrilla Girls to adopt *gorilla* masks to hide their faces. Until 2000, they had produced some seventy posters and stickers, published several books and organized numerous events. However, at the turn of the millennium the group split into three distinct factions still active today: Guerrilla Girls, Guerrilla Girls BroadBand and Guerrilla Girls on Tour.

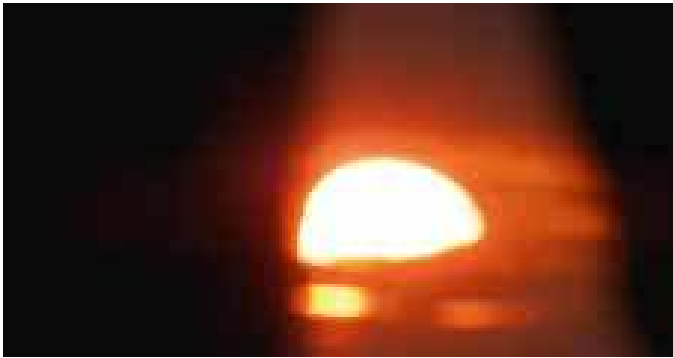
A woman wearing a gorilla mask is reclining on a red fabric. She is nude, with her legs crossed and arms resting on her lap. The background is a solid yellow color.

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

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

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



ANNE IMHOF

(born 1978)

Anne Imhof, who was a master student at the Städelschule, Frankfurt's academy of fine arts, from 2008 to 2012, defines herself as a painter, musician and performance artist. Her work is protean, powerful and often immersive, at the intersection of performance, video, photography and sculpture. Her performances in the mid-2010s won her international acclaim. Each of them begins with drawing, the medium she has practiced passionately since adolescence. These images enable her then to imagine the performance structure, to which numerous participants make their personal contribution. The participation of the audience, who often record the event with their mobiles and even broadcast it live on social media, also plays an important role.

Imhof is interested in the contemporary malaise. Inspired by art history and also musical countercultures, she reflects on neoliberal power and the communal through intense shared emotions such as fear, guilt, desire and solitude. In 2017, she was awarded the prestigious Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale for her performance *Faust*, the fruit of a close collaboration with performers, dancers, musicians and photographers, whose intense, crepuscular



staging aroused mixed sentiments in its audience regarding the themes of control, transparency, youth and its cult. In her later performances (e.g., *Sex*, 2019), the language of the body continues to play a central role and is at the heart of the images she produces. In *Natures mortes* (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2021), she showed an exhibition of her works and also those of some thirty artists she admires, ranging from Théodore Géricault and Eugène Delacroix to David Hammons and Sigmar Polke, and she staged a particularly complex performance lasting four hours.

In *Untitled (Wave)* (2021), filmed on the coast of Normandy, Imhof's artistic collaborator Eliza Douglas whips the waves in a long improvisation as the sun gradually sets, the tide comes in and the sea becomes rough: a human being trying in vain to tame nature, to dominate reality.

Untitled (Wave), 2021

↗ *Portrait of Anne Imhof* by
Nadine Fraczkowski, 2010