

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE



Guerrilla Girls, (American, founded 1985), *Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?*, 1989/90, Color offset lithograph on white wove paper, ed. of 50, Museum purchase with funds donated by Martha and Jim Sweeny

Wild Creations Digital Access – Workshop 1:

Guerrilla Girls with Katherine Pill, MFA Curator of Contemporary Art

Deemed the “conscience of the art world,” the Guerrilla Girls collective was founded in 1985 to protest the inequalities faced by women artists (and later all underrepresented minorities) from museums, galleries, critics, and scholars. Members use pseudonyms based on the names of noted late female artists like Käthe Kollwitz, Frida Kahlo, and Alice Neel, and wear gorilla masks in their protest appearances to keep the focus on the issues rather than their personal identities.

The Guerrilla Girls wield a deft blend of statistics and snark. Beginning with posters, they humorously and creatively present the gender disparities of the art world using the seemingly simple means of numbers. As stated by founding member Käthe Kollwitz, they wanted to find “a better way, a more contemporary way, an in-your-face way, of breaking through people’s preconceived notions and changing their minds.” Numbers are powerful, but

unfortunately some of the statistics that the Guerrilla Girls brought to light in the mid-1980s haven't changed as much as perhaps one might hope.

DID YOU KNOW?



According to a 2019 study by the National Endowment for the Arts, women artists make 74 cents to the dollar as compared to male artists.



Sales of artworks by women between 2008 and the beginning of 2019 account for only 2% of total auction sales.



The Art Newspaper has reported that of 590 large-scale exhibitions by approximately 79 American institutions between 2007 and 2013, just 27% were devoted to women artists.



Gallery rosters fluctuate, but one study by economist Claire McAndrew shows that of 3,050 galleries on the website Artsy, 10% have no women artists, and only 8% show more women than men (certainly not yet the norm).

Although their membership fluctuates and changes, the influence the Guerrilla Girls wield on the art world remains strong. They have organized mass protests and public actions, and have participated in numerous museum exhibitions, as well as protests.

While there are further changes to be made to ensure equity in the art world, their campaigns have resulted in curatorial correctives worldwide, and museums, galleries, and the media have, in recent years, begun to address the disparities the Guerrilla Girls have fought against. Examples include the Baltimore Museum of Art, which vowed to only acquire art by women identified artists in 2020, and institutions such as the Denver Museum, that have mounted women-only exhibitions.

In recent years, the Museum of Fine Arts has presented a number of shows prominently featuring women artists:

- [*Marks Made: Prints by American Women Artists from the 1960s to the Present*](#) (2015–16)
- [*Reading Women by Carrie Schneider*](#) (2015–2016)
- [*Shana Moulton: Journeys Out of the Body*](#) (2016)
- [*Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today*](#) (2018)
- [*'The Grasshopper and the Ant' and other stories, as told by Jennifer Angus*](#) (2019)
- [*Color Riot! How Color Changed Navajo Textiles*](#) (coming 2021)

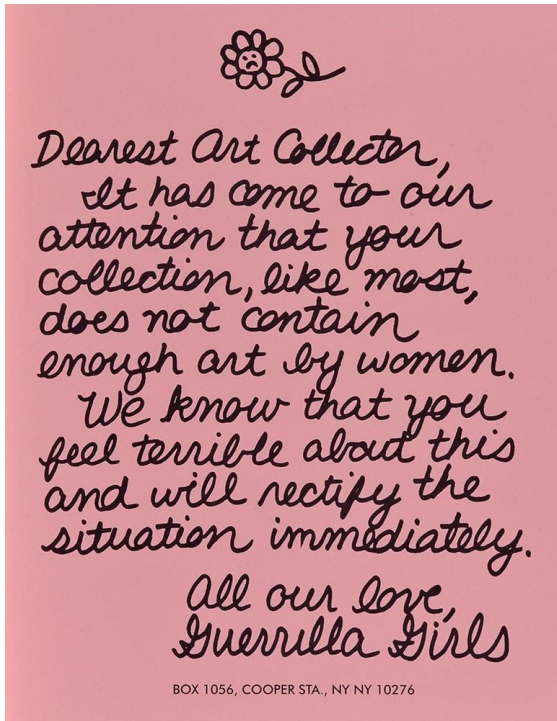
With enthusiasm, energy, and wit, the Guerrilla Girls successfully have tackled the challenge of making feminism funny and fashionable, all while operating within a model of intersectional feminism to address discrimination and supporting the rights of all people and all genders.

VIDEO BREAK



Check out this 2016 video created by the Guerrilla Girls: [*The Guerrilla Girls Guide to Behaving Badly Which You Have To Do Most of the Time In The World As We Know It*](#). In the video, they present some of the basic tenets to achieving change. After watching the video, please take the short quiz on the next page, and submit your answers to our [*Wild Creations team*](#). Check out the MFA's social media to see some of your responses posted!

QUIZ



1. If you were to become a Guerrilla Girl, which female artist would you name yourself after, and why? Feel free to assume the identity of an artist already used by the Guerrilla Girls, if you'd like. Looking for inspiration? Check out this [list of women artists](#), compiled to address the gender disparity of artists listed on Wikipedia.

2. The museum world has recently undergone sweeping changes, addressing gender and racial disparity both in exhibitions and behind the scenes. What further change would you like to see in the art and museum world?

3. What role do you think artists can, or should, play in ushering in social change?

[Submit your quiz answers to be eligible for prizes.](#)

Image credit: Guerrilla Girls, (American, founded 1985), *Dearest Art Collector*, 1986 from Portfolio Complet, 1985–2012, Color offset lithograph on wove paper, ed. of 50, Museum purchase with funds donated by Martha and Jim Sweeny

EXTRA CREDIT

[Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes](#), ARTnews, May 2015

[An Illustrated Guide to Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"](#) Hyperallergic, May 2017 (originally published in ARTnews in 1971)

[!Women Art Revolution](#) film by Lynn Hersham Leeson; Available on iTunes and Amazon Prime.

[National Museum of Women in the Art](#), the only major museum in the world solely dedicated to celebrating women's achievements in the visual, performing, and literary art.



Guerrilla Girls, (American, founded 1985), *When racism and sexism are no longer fashionable, how much will your art collection be worth?*, 1989, Color offset lithograph on white wove paper, ed. of 50, Museum purchase with funds donated by Martha and Jim Sweeny

In this piece above, also in the MFA Collection, the Guerrilla Girls highlight notable artists. Below is a selection of artists either in our collection, or that we have exhibited at the MFA.

- Elaine de Kooning
- Anni Albers
- Natalia Goncharova
- Angelica Kauffman
- Berthe Morisot
- Alice Neel
- Alma Thomas
- Louise Nevelson
- Georgia O'Keeffe
- Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun

For our next Wild Creations installment, please check the [MFA From Home](#) page on mfastpete.org.