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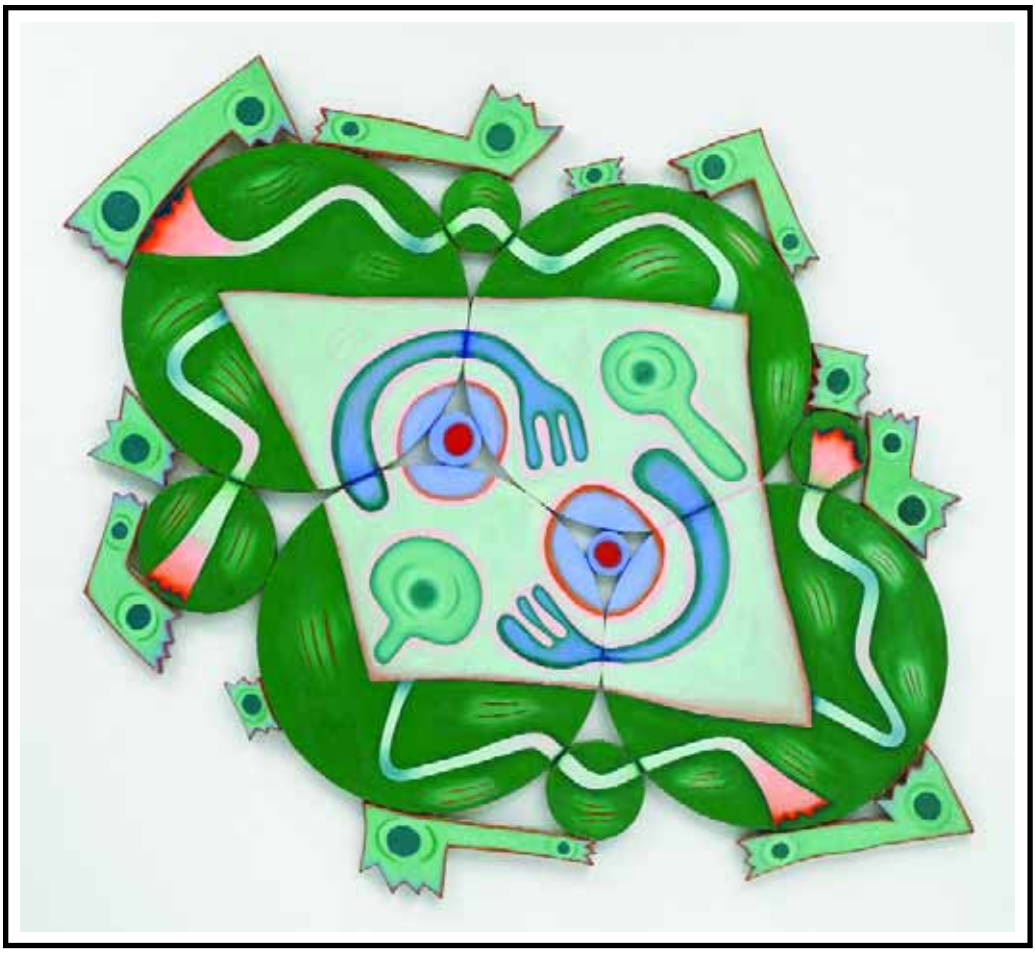


AFTER THE REVOLUTION:
WOMEN WHO TRANSFORMED CONTEMPORARY ART

MARINA ABRAMOVIC, LOUISE BOURGEOIS, ELLEN GALLAGHER, ANN HAMILTON, JENNY HOLZER, ELIZABETH MURRAY, SHIRIN NESHAT, JUDY PFAFF, DANA SCHUTZ, CINDY SHERMAN, KIKI SMITH, NANCY SPERO

Curated by Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal and Sue Scott
April 22 – June 29, 2007

Opening reception: Sunday, April 22, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

This exhibition, like the book of the same title it accompanies, is in part a tribute to Linda Nochlin's landmark essay of 1971, in which she asked the provocative question, "Why have there been no great women artists?"[1] She was not simply questioning the absence of women in the history of art, but also revealing the conceptual inadequacy, in the field of art history, of accepting as "natural" what she termed "the unstated domination of white male subjectivity."[2] Nochlin went on to recast the question as an issue rooted in "the nature of given social institutions and what they forbid or encourage in various classes or groups of individuals."[3] Her essay has rung down through the succeeding decades like a clarion call, challenging each generation to assess the conditions under which women artists work.

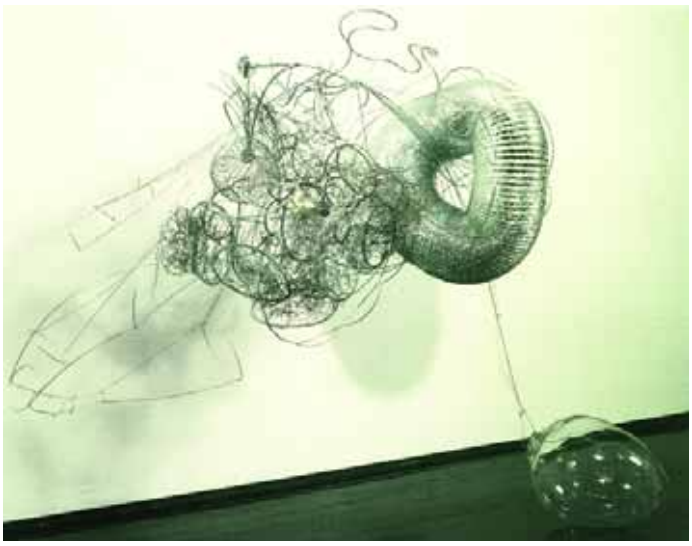
The situation of women artists was changing decisively in the late 1960s and early '70s, when the feminist movement helped set off a social revolution with repercussions that are still being felt. Feminism challenged assumptions about women's proper roles that had been put back in place in the postwar years, after the workplace gains made by women during World War II. This "second wave" of feminism (the "first wave" was the women's suffrage movement) rose in tandem with social liberation movements—especially the civil rights movement—as marginalized groups demanded equal rights and opportunities. Support for women artists was being demanded of the art establishment, with some success, by the artists themselves. Women artists formed cooperative galleries, organized exhibitions of women's work, and generally saw their art as a form of consciousness raising. One of the most influential of these enterprises was the short-lived Womanhouse, a women-only installation and performance space in Los Angeles that was the brainchild of critic Arlene Raven and artist Judy Chicago.

Along with institutional resistance, women artists faced the need to balance artistic ambitions and the responsibilities of home and family. For such senior artists as Louise Bourgeois and Nancy Spero, art-world recognition came only after many years of working in relative anonymity, with scant opportunities to exhibit. And both spent decades juggling artistic practices with the demands of motherhood (each had three sons) and marriage to prominent art-world figures. In the early 1970s Spero created the *Codex Artaud*, paintings on paper that incorporate the "ferocious language" of the French writer Antonin Artaud, which can be understood on one level as expressing her fury at being silenced.[4] Like many of her contemporaries, she also marched, demonstrated, wrote, and organized to further the recognition of women in art. These activities culminated in her participation in the founding of A.I.R., the first cooperative gallery dedicated to exhibiting women's art. Bourgeois also actively participated in feminist meetings, protests, and exhibitions, but responded differently to her marginalization. In 1992 she stated, "I worked in peace for forty years," a situation that gave her the privacy she required to create a deeply self-reflective body of work.[5]

The ardent, focused feminism of the early political phase soon became more complicated. While most women artists recognized the benefits of entering a more open art world, others distanced themselves from the movement for fear of being ghettoized. As Elizabeth Murray, who exuberantly reinvented the traditionally male domain of formalist painting, said in 1984, "I don't believe there's such a thing as 'women's art.' It's a distasteful

Nancy Spero *The Crowd*, 2001

Louise Bourgeois *Untitled*, 1996



Judy Pfaff *Milagro*, 1991

phrase, like any categorization…I see my own work as androgynous."[6] Yet she freely introduced more conventionally female, domestic imagery into her painting and she has spoken openly about her warm family life, something that would have been unacceptable for the senior generation of women trying to make it in a man's world.

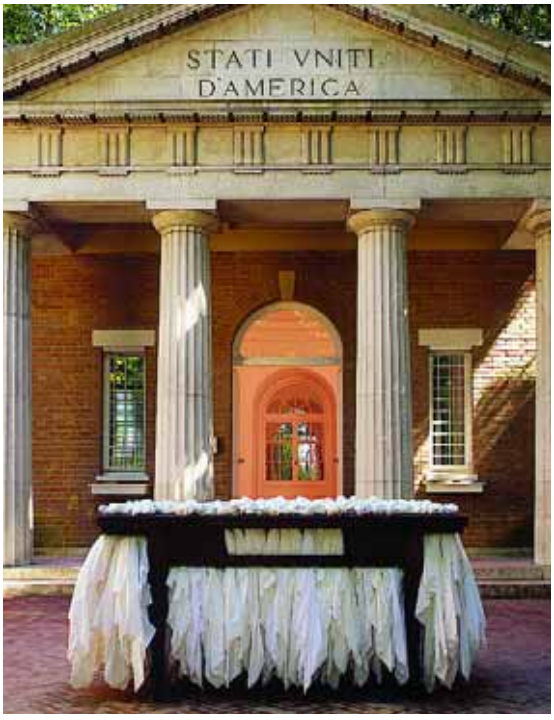
As the work of Spero, Bourgeois and Murray all demonstrate, feminism did more than provide professional support. It also opened space for subject matter, materials, and approaches that had been dismissed because of their association with female experience and forms of expression. In 1975 feminist critic Lucy Lippard had listed some of the recurring motifs that she believed suggested a female sensibility, including circles, domes, eggs, spheres, boxes, and biomorphic shapes; a preoccupation with body and bodylike materials; and a fragmentary, nonlinear approach.[7] Lippard argued that "the overwhelming fact remains that a woman's experience in this society—social and biological—is simply not like that of a man. If art comes from inside, as it must, then the art of men and women must be different too. And if this factor does not show up in women's work, only repression can be to blame."[8]

Lippard's writing reflected—and helped shape—a very diverse set of practices. Some artists defiantly resuscitated crafts and applied arts that had traditionally been dismissed as "women's work." Others explored the traditional identification of women with nature, bringing their art into the landscape, or the landscape into their art, in a way that contrasted sharply with the more monumental and objectified expressions of male figurative artists. Judy Pfaff's pioneering installations can be seen in these terms. The performances that Marina Abramovic, in partnership with artist Ulay beginning in 1975 and on her own since 1989, has created using her body as the primary subject and medium extend preoccupations described by Lippard. Ann Hamilton's room-sized, immersive environments activate the senses and encourage the viewer to experience more holistic ways of knowing, through the body as well as the mind. Kiki Smith has long depicted the female form not as the idealized object of male desire but as the site of women's lived experience. (And her commitment to feminism remains clear: "I came of age in the sixties and seventies," she has said, "and that I exist is a result of feminism."[9])

While feminism offered women—and men—a new creative vocabulary, it also challenged the idea that there are universal criteria for judging art's quality. In their attack on the "quality issue," as it came to be called, feminists asserted that determinations of value were based on a tradition of Western taste grounded in the assumptions of a patriarchal culture. In this respect, feminism contributed significantly to a larger turn toward postmodernism and its critique of the modernist faith in authenticity and originality. The postmodern shift from expressing personal experience to analyzing the imagery that shapes our sense of reality offered feminist artists tools for critiquing the representations of women in art and popular culture.

At the same time, it undermined some first-generation feminist artists by suggesting that they were guilty of essentialism—that is, of perpetuating the search for a mythical female essence. Postmodern feminists have sought to reveal that our ideas of womanhood and femininity are socially constructed, that femininity is a masquerade. In its strictest form, postmodern feminist theory, following up on ideas put forth in a classic essay by Laura Mulvey, took issue with art's traditional concern with visual pleasure itself.

The postmodern dematerialization of feminist art was countered by several impulses. For one thing, by the late



Ann Hamilton *(myein • table)*, 1999

'80s the notion of the body as an abstract social construct ran counter to the experience of very real bodies subject to the ravages of the AIDS epidemic. While some artists attempted to expose and dismantle the traditional identification of women with nature, others chose to embrace and redefine these associations in more positive terms. At the same time, art of the late 1980s and 1990s became more engaged with questions of violence than the work of the 1960s had been.

Cindy Sherman's photographic tableaux dissecting the cultural constructions of femininity, and Jenny Holzer's posters, electronic signboards, and monumental light projections examining social injustice and political and sexual violence, both helped articulate the concerns of a qualified postmodernism. Iranian artist Shirin Neshat has made photographs and, more recently, video works that examine divisions between the Islamic and Western worlds, male and female, and tradition and modernity. Her work is a paradigm for attempts to forge a hybrid cultural identity, which she achieves through a sophisticated use of new media. In collaged paintings, film and other mediums, Ellen Gallagher has explored the intersection of popular culture, advertising, modernism and race.

Finally, in recent work the return of the body as the subject of art has served as an alternative to the growing reach of disembodied virtual experience provided by the electronic revolution. For all these reasons (and others), art grounded in the body and its experiences is now widely embraced by male and female artists alike—a signal that the feminist revolution had made significant inroads into the social consciousness. Male artists such as Robert Gober, Paul McCarthy, and Mike Kelley make work that celebrates the body in all its messy physicality.

It has been argued that feminism has become so well integrated into the fabric of women's lives that rights and privileges which seemed unavailable only a few decades ago can today be taken for granted. The success achieved by younger women artists has often been accompanied by a sense of disconnection and even discomfort with both feminism generally and the feminist art movement in particular. When they hear the "f-word," this generation of women artists tends to think of the early stages of activism, which some reject for its associations with anger, or for its focus on victimization. Similarly, some younger women are averse to associations with essentialism, and with what they see as art devoted to simplistic, retrograde representations of the female body.

The discomfort runs both ways. Older feminist artists sometimes look askance at the "bad girls"—Kara Walker, Lisa Yuskavage, Cecily Brown—who ironically employ sexist (or racist) clichés in their work, often to undercut male prerogatives or assumptions. But where older artists see backsliding, younger women may see such work as defending against the creeping puritanism of contemporary culture. They may point to the practices of such pioneers as Hannah Wilke and Carolee Schneemann to reinforce the notion that beauty, pleasure, and the raucous celebration of female sexuality are not alien to feminism. Such minor internal skirmishes, however, cannot obscure how significantly feminism has expanded the possibilities for women artists.

But how far have we really come? As curators and critics with at least twenty-five years of experience each, we are aware of the strides made by women artists since the advent of the feminist movement and the resulting growth of support on the part of museums, galleries, and educational institutions. We were uncertain, however, whether those strides are measurably significant. We wondered, for example, what percentage of solo exhibitions featured women artists over the course of the past thirty-five years, and did some research to find out.

Kiki Smith *Sleeping Girl*, 2004

Shirin Neshat *Women without Men (Woman Knitting)*, 2004

Because certain women artists–from 30 year-old Dana Schutz to nonagenarian Louise Bourgeois—currently have high profiles in galleries, major private collections, museums, and the marketplace, it may be perceived that the situation for women artists has improved significantly over the part thirty-five years. But by examining the number of solo exhibitions by women artists presented from the mid-seventies until the present, through a representative sampling of influential galleries, we can see that while the situation did improve until the 1990s, it

appears to have reached a plateau. In the 1970s, women accounted for only 11.6 percent of solo gallery exhibitions. In the 1980s, the percentage of solo exhibitions by women crept up to 14.8 percent, and in the 1990s the number increased to 23.9 percent, but the percentage has dropped slightly, to 21.5 percent, in the first half decade of the 21st century. The current number of solo gallery exhibitions by women artists is not notably better than the average of women's exhibitions for the entire period under consideration, 18.7 percent. While the number of women artists' exhibitions has doubled since the early seventies, it has really only kept pace with an expanded market: women still have roughly one opportunity for every four of the opportunities open to men. Museums have only slightly better track record. During the thirty-five years we surveyed, 27 percent of solo museum exhibitions presented the work of women artists.

Dana Schutz *Happy*, 2004

As its title suggests, our project was undertaken in a cultural moment heavily colored by a complicated kind of nostalgia. The post-ness of all things is now much remarked upon, not least in the terminology of cultural categorization: post-modernism has bred, conspicuously, both post-blackness and, no less nebulously, or contentiously, post-feminism. But we hardly believe the story to be over. Another way of looking at our title's implications is to note that this is not an exhibition about a finished narrative, but a hopeful beginning. If it is a little wistful (the revolution, however it is defined, is a historical episode, not a living event), it is meant to be more optimistic than elegiac, celebrating an expanded approach to viewing and judging art as well as making it. The battles may not all have been won, and equality of opportunity across gender (and race and class) remains an elusive goal, but the barricades are down, and work proceeds on all fronts in glorious profusion. □

— Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal and Sue Scott

This essay was adapted from the introduction to *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* published by Prestel in 2007, and appears with their permission.

1. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" (1971) in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 145-78.
2. Nochlin, p. 146
3. Nochlin, p. 158
4. Quoted in Katy Kline and Helaine Posner, "A Conversation with Leon Golub and Nancy Spero," in *Leon Golub and Nancy Spero: War and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass,: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1994), p. 39.
5. Quoted in Charlotta Kotik, "The Locus of Memory: An Introduction to the Work of Louise Bourgeois," in *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994) p. 16. Originally quoted in "Louise Bourgeois in Conversation with Christiane Meyer-Thoss," in Christiane Meyer-Thoss, *Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall* (Zurich: Ammann Verlag, 1992) p.139.
6. Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," *Art News*, September 1984, p. 55.
7. Lucy Lippard, "What is Female Imagery?" in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976) pp. 81-82.
8. Lucy Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogues," in *From the Center*, p. 49.
9. Dierdre Summerbell, "Marrying Your Own Personal Nutty Trips with the Outside World: A Conversation with Kiki Smith," *Trans>arts.cultures.media*, 9/10 2001, p. 208.

BIOGRAPHIES

Eleanor Heartney is a New York based art writer and cultural critic. She is Contributing Editor to Art in America *and* Artpress *and has written extensively on contemporary art issues for such other magazines as* Artnews, Art and Auction, The New Art Examiner, *the* Washington Post *and the* New York Times. *Her books include:* Postmodernism *published in 2001 by the Tate Gallery Publishers and* Defending Complexity: Art Politics and the New World Order, *published in 2006 by hard Press Editions. She is currently President of AICA-USA, the American section of the International Art Critics Association.*

Helaine Posner is an independent curator and writer living in New York. From 1991-98, she was curator at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1999, she was U. S. Co-commissioner for the Venice Biennale where she organized a site-specific installation by Ann Hamilton. Posner is the author of a monograph on Kiki Smith published in 2005 by Monacelli Press. She is the curator of a mid-career survey of the work of Lorna Simpson, organized by the American Federation of Arts, and on view at Whitney Museum of American Art this spring.

Nancy Princenthal is Senior Editor at Art in America, *where she has been a regular contributor since 1985. Princenthal has written extensively for many other publications, including the* New York Times, Art on Paper, Bookforum, *and* Parkett. *The monographs and catalogues she has contributed to include* Robert Mangold *and* Doris Salcedo *(both Phaidon) and* Alfredo Jaar: The Fire This Time *(Charta). She was a Lecturer in the Visual Arts Program at Princeton University for eleven years, starting in 1994, and has also taught at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, as well as at Yale, RISD, and other colleges.*

Sue Scott is a New York based independent curator and writer. She is adjunct curator of contemporary art at the Orlando Museum of Art where she has organized exhibitions of the work of Jane Hammond, Suzanne McClelland, Lesley Dill, Kerry James Marshall, and Jim Sanborn. Her other exhibitions include: Proof Positive: Forty Years of American Printmaking at Universal Limited Art Editions *at the Corcoran Gallery of Art (guest co-curator);* Witness: Theories of Seduction *at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs; and, at the Orlando Museum of Art;* Washington Color Painters: The First Generation; Alex Katz New Work; and Jennifer Bartlett Print Retrospective.

CHECKLIST

MARINA ABRAMOVIC

BALKAN EROTIC EPIC: BANGING THE SKULL, 2005
Chromogenic print, #1 of 7
50 1/4 x 50 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

LOUISE BOURGEOIS

FEMME MAISON, 1945-47
Etching
19 x 15 inches
Private collection, New York

UNTITLED, 1996
Fabric
9 x 24 x 12 inches
Wood and glass vitrine
71 x 24 x 36 inches
Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York
Photograph Allan Finkelman

ELLEN GALLAGHER

UNTITLED, 1998
Ink and pencil on paper on canvas
84 x 72 inches
Private collection, New York

ECLIPSE, 1999
Oil, ink, and pencil on Japanese
Okawara paper
17 x 12 1/4 inches
Private collection, New York

ANN HAMILTON

(myein • table), 1999
Wood and cotton
36 x 72 x 42 inches
Private collection, New York

JENNY HOLZER

THE AMBIGUITIES OF MY OWN DESIRES, 2005
Pigment print, #6 of 10
55 x 41 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Cheim & Read, New York

TO ACQUIRE, 2006
Pigment print, #4 of 10
43 3/4 x 55 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Cheim & Read, New York

ELIZABETH MURRAY

PLAN 9, 2001
Oil on canvas
90 x 72 inches
© Elizabeth Murray / Courtesy
PaceWildenstein, New York
Photograph Kerry Ryan McFate /
Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York

SHIRIN NESHAT

WOMEN WITHOUT MEN (WOMAN KNITTING), 2004
C-print
42 1/2 x 98 inches
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York

JUDY PFAFF

MILAGRO, 1991
Wire, aluminum duct, plastic
and blown glass
78 x 60 x 102 inches
Courtesy Ameringer & Yohe Fine Art

DANA SCHUTZ

HAPPY, 2004
Oil on canvas
43 x 29 inches
Collection of Alice Kosmin

CINDY SHERMAN

UNTITLED #58, 1978
Gelatin siver print
27 5/8 x 38 3/4 inches
Private collection, New York

KIKI SMITH

SLEEPING GIRL, 2004
Bronze
44 x 55 x 2 inches, dimensions variable
Private collection, New York
© Kiki Smith/Courtesy
PaceWildenstein, New York
Photograph Kerry Ryan McFate/
Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York

NANCY SPERO

CUMULUS, 2000
Handprinting and printed collage
on paper
97 1/2 x 20 inches
Collection of the artist, courtesy
Galerie Lelong, New York

THE CROWD, 2001
Handprinting and printed collage
on paper
99 x 19 1/2 inches
Collection of the artist, courtesy
Galerie Lelong, New York

Cover: **Elizabeth Murray**, *Plan 9*, 2001

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to offer our deepest thanks to David Dorsky for giving us the opportunity to present the exhibition *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* in conjunction with the release of our book of the same title. We truly appreciate his constant and enthusiastic support for all aspects of this project. We are also grateful to Noah Dorsky for carefully editing the brochure text, to Karen Dorsky for organizing the related panel discussion, and to Bea Blondo for efficiently coordinating the shipment of works in the exhibition. Christopher Lyon, Executive Editor at Prestel, graciously permitted us to include an adapted version of the introduction to our book in this brochure which was handsomely designed by Deborah Rising. Our colleagues Stuart Stelzer, Mary Delle Stelzer, and Rachel Cohn skillfully compiled and organized the statistics on women's representation in museums and galleries that accompany this exhibition. We also wish to thank the lenders to this exhibition for their generosity; they include James Yohe at Ameringer & Yohe Fine Art, Adam Sheffer at Cheim & Read, Adam Ottavi-Schiesl at Gladstone Gallery, Cecile Panzieri and Sean Kelly at Sean Kelly Gallery, Mary Sabbatino at Galerie Lelong, Douglas Baxter at PaceWildenstein, Alice Kosmin and the other private collectors. Finally, we are most grateful to the participating artists whose remarkable bodies of work continue to inspire.

This publication is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

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