

# Feminist Curatorial Interventions in Museums and Organizational Change: Transforming the Museum from a Feminist Perspective

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## Feminist Curatorial Interventions in Museums and Organizational Change: Transforming the Museum from a Feminist Perspective

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This thesis examines the relationship between feminist curatorship and art institutions and explores how feminism challenges and problematizes the museum. This thesis also examines the challenges in changing the structure of institutions: art organizations often respond with resistance to feminism, containing and ghettoizing feminist artists and artworks. This research project proposes that the aim of feminist curatorship is to change institutions, and their structures and hierarchies in a fundamental way.

However, feminism's objective of reorganizing the museum on a structural level has not been sufficiently discussed in feminist scholarship; feminist scholars have not been involved in a critique of art institutions or a theoretical analysis of the museum. On the contrary, feminist scholarship has focused on the criticism of institutions for the underrepresentation of women artists, on the production and display of women's or feminist work and on adding more women artists to the museum.

Thus, in this thesis I propose a redefinition of feminist curatorial practices as a broad strategy and an intervention whose objective is the museum's reform. I propose that feminist curatorship should not simply focus on installing feminist art and curating feminist exhibitions but rather should aim at dismantling museological authority, destabilizing power structures and challenging patriarchy and hierarchy.

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## Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
<b>Preface:</b> My Research Journey.....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	8
<b>Methodology</b> .....	48
<b>Chapter One:</b> Rethinking Feminism and Reinterpreting Collections.....	57
<b>Chapter Two:</b> Collaboration, Leadership and Organizational Change.....	98
<b>Chapter Three:</b> Audience and Community Engagement.....	132
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	190
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	203

## **Preface: My Research Journey**

My research journey started when I undertook my Masters in Cultural and Creative Industries at King's College London in 2008 and 2009. I had always had an interest in alternative ways of presenting works of art and in alternative art histories. However, during the Masters my interest in these topics increased and I wrote a dissertation titled 'The Nature of Display: The Selection and Presentation of Artworks in the Modern Art Museum'. When writing this dissertation, the aspect that I found most interesting was the feminist revisionism of curatorial practices in museums. Consequently, after I finished my Masters I wanted to continue researching this topic and I wrote a research project on 'The Selection and Display of art made by women in United Kingdom institutions', which was accepted at the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester.

The initial research topic on the representation of women artists changed over the months. In order to write my literature review, I did research on feminist criticism of museums, feminist exhibitions and feminist curatorial practices. However, I realised that most of the scholarship was centred on the criticism of institutions for the underrepresentation of women artists, while feminist scholarship had not proposed practical solutions as to how to reorganize the museum on a structural level. Consequently, my research topic evolved: I started investigating organizational change and how to change the structures of the museum from an organizational perspective provided by feminism.

To investigate this research topic, I decided to conduct qualitative interviews with curators and museum staff in three case studies. However, selecting the case studies was a lengthy process in which I considered different options. Additionally, when choosing my case studies, I was interested in finding three institutions that were diverse, ideally a small-scale institution, a contemporary art institution and an encyclopaedic institution. Secondly, I did not want my research to be limited to Europe, as I was interested in feminist institutions across Europe and America.

For my first case study, I decided to look for an alternative grassroots space. I considered a small institution – The Showroom in London – as a potential case study and I interviewed the director Emily Pethick. Unfortunately, there were issues of accessibility and I decided to find an alternative. Then, my supervisor recommended a small institution in Denmark, the Women’s Museum in Aarhus, as a potential pilot study for the thesis. In September 2012 I travelled to Denmark and I interviewed the curator-directors of the museum and other members of staff. Although initially the Museum was going to be a pilot study, I realised that those interviews were fundamental to define my research topic and questions. After interviewing the curator-directors I had a clearer idea of the characteristics of a feminist institutions and of feminist professionalization. Then, the Women’s Museum in Aarhus became a fundamental part of the research and one of my three case studies.

For my second case study, I was looking for a feminist space within an encyclopaedic institution. The Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum was an obvious choice, as it is the only feminist centre within a museum in the world. After gaining access to the Museum and scheduling the interviews, I travelled to New York in February 2013 and interviewed curators, staff and artists at the Brooklyn Museum and the Sackler Center. Finally, for my third case study I was interested in a contemporary art museum. I considered the Tate Modern as a potential case study, but again there were issues of accessibility. However, when I travelled to New York to interview the curators at the Brooklyn Museum I arranged two additional interviews with two MoMA curators, Alexandra Schwartz and Connie Butler. After these two interviews, I realised that the MoMA and its initiative ‘the Modern Women’s Project’ had great potential to be a third case study. Consequently, I travelled to New York again in June 2013 to interview staff at MoMA. After finalising my interviews at MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum I had a better understanding of feminist curatorship, feminism influence in museums and of the tension in the relationship between feminism and professional practice.

Interviewing curators and staff in these institutions was challenging, as I had never interviewed anyone. However, as the research progressed I became more confident with my interviewing skills. Specifically, after my experience at the Women’s Museum Aarhus my data collection strategies and my approach to the interviews changed. For

example, in Aarhus my questions were pre-written, while in the other case studies I was more conversational and the questions were more open-ended and flexible.

After transcribing and analysing these interviews I reflected on the thesis argument and I wrote the main chapters of the thesis. Initially, I had planned to write chapters focused on each of the institutions. However, advised by my supervisor, I decided to write thematic chapters, which would allow me to answer the research questions and be more analytical and less descriptive. In order to write these chapters, I analysed the interviews and I found common themes, which would later become the focus of the three main chapters.

After finalising the main chapters I thought of the thesis as a whole, I wrote the introduction and conclusion and revised the chapters. During this process, it was useful to read literature on feminist curatorship which was not published when I started the thesis in 2011, such as Dimitrakaki's and Perry's *Politics in a Glass Case* or Hedlin Hayden's and Sjoelm Skrubbe's *Feminisms is Still Our Name*. This literature helped me redefine my thesis argument on the tension between feminism and institutions and the challenges of realising institutional change in the museum.

# Introduction

## **Topic and research aims.**

My research seeks to examine the degree to which feminism impacts on the structure and organization of art institutions. The key objective of my research is to analyze whether museums can change from patriarchal to feminist institutions and whether feminist theory can be embedded in these institutions. Central to my research is the study of what constitutes feminist curatorship and the relationship between feminist curatorship, institutions and organizational change. Finally, I will also investigate the tensions between feminist curatorship and organizations, museums' resistance to feminism and how institutions contain, ghettoize and institutionalize feminism.

## **Thesis argument.**

This research project studies the feminist aim to transform the museum as an institution. This aspect has not previously been studied in feminist scholarship, which has mainly focused on the criticism of institutions for their underrepresentation and marginalization of women artists and on feminist curatorial practices in exhibitions. In my thesis I will propose that the museum can change from an organizational or structural perspective provided by feminism; this change will dismantle the structures that produced this marginalization of women and feminist artists in the first place.

Central to my study will be the redefinition of what constitutes feminist curatorship. I propose that feminist curatorship should not focus solely on installing feminist art and curating feminist exhibitions. On the contrary, this thesis redefines feminist curatorship as a broad strategy and an intervention that aims at reconstructing the museum and changing it in a fundamental way. In this thesis I suggest that feminist curatorship aims at changing the museum on three levels: firstly, by rethinking collections, transforming exhibitionary practice through opening up other stories and including other voices;



secondly, by challenging the hierarchies which exist in the museum, destabilizing the institution and making it more collaborative; and finally, by empowering communities the museum serves and engaging audiences.

Moreover, I investigate the challenges of changing the institution from a feminist point of view and I contend that there is a contradiction between feminist values and institutional values. Feminism is understood as constituting the marginal, the periphery and an alternative to mainstream production;<sup>1</sup> the institutions are the centre, the core. It is a challenge to integrate the periphery at the centre as institutions can be resistant to feminism and often see it as a risk. This institutional resistance is evidenced in a lack of embeddedness of feminist values in institutions and in issues of containment or ghettoization of feminist artists and artworks. Finally, I suggest that feminist artists, artworks and values are more easily embedded in small, grassroots or alternative institutions that started at the margins or with the community.

### **Case studies.**

For the purposes of my research I have investigated three case studies: the Women's Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, the Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum in New York and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA). While the Women's Museum in Aarhus is a grassroots institution which started in the community, the Brooklyn Museum and MoMA were founded with a conventional mission and professional practice.

At the Women's Museum in Aarhus I conducted interviews with four members of museum staff: Merete Ipsen, one of the founding members of the museum and a member of the collective directorship; Bodil Olesen, a member of the collective directorship; a member of staff who chose to remain anonymous; and Kristin Taylor, a volunteer at the Museum. The research interviews were carried out at the Museum in September 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, 'Preface', in *Feminisms is still our name*, ed. By Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe, (Newcastle upon Tyne : Cambridge Scholars, 2010), p. xiii; Mira Schor, 'She Demon Spawn from Hell', *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online*, (2005), <[http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-MIra\\_2005.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-MIra_2005.html)>

Additionally, I interviewed Jette Sandahl, founding member of the museum and former member of the collective directorate, in London in October 2012.

At MoMA I interviewed six curators who participated in the initiative *Modern Women's Project*: Roxana Marcoci, Ann Temkin, Cornelia Butler, Alexandra Schwartz, Sally Berger and Barbara London. These interviews were conducted in New York in February 2013 and in June 2013. I also conducted phone interviews with two other MoMA curators, Starr Figura and Juliet Kinchin, and with museum benefactor Sarah Peter.

In February and June 2013, I interviewed two curators from the Brooklyn Museum – Edward Bleiberg and Kevin Stayton – and four members of staff from the Sackler Center: curators Catherine Morris and Saisha Grayson, Program Coordinator Jessica Wilcox and intern Emilie Bouvard. Finally, I interviewed three artists who have exhibited their work at the Brooklyn Museum: an artist who wished to remain anonymous who I interviewed in New York in February 2013; artist Kiki Smith, who I interviewed by phone in July 2013 and artist Ulrike Muller, who I interviewed via skype in August 2013. Finally, I interviewed Emily Pethick, the director of The Showroom Gallery in London, in December 2012.

### **Literature review.**

In order to understand the relationship between feminism and institutions, I will consider the larger history of feminist exhibitions and critique of institutions. Sources from museology, feminist art history, feminist theory, queer theory, feminist curatorship and organizational change inform my literature review. Based on these sources I shall study feminist perspectives on museums and feminist curatorship and its relationship with institutions. Firstly, I will consider the definition of feminism. Secondly, I will examine the relationship of feminism and institutions; specifically, the criticism of institutions by feminist theory for their underrepresentation of women artists. I will also study literature that has focused on the definition of feminist curatorial practices in exhibitions and on the display of feminist and women's art. Subsequently, I will examine organizational change and feminist literature focused on changing the museum from an organizational

perspective provided by feminism. Finally, I will focus on scholarship which explores the museum's resistance to feminism and on alternative, small-scale institutions.

### **Defining feminism.**

Feminism can be defined as a political revision and a critical interrogation of the patriarchal system, as well as a desire for equality in a world which privileges masculinity. For Peggy Phelan, feminism is the 'conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category in the organization of culture', an organization which usually 'favors men over women'.<sup>2</sup> For Adiche a feminist is a person who 'believes in social, political and economic' equality. According to Griselda Pollock, feminism is a political philosophy whose objective is to transform the lives of men and women<sup>3</sup> and for Eli Zaretsky, feminism aspires to 'revolutionize the deepest and most universal aspects of life, those of personal relations, love, egotism, sexuality and our inner emotional lives'.<sup>4</sup>

However, the history of feminist scholarship is marked by a variety of positions, criticisms, definitions and re-definitions of what feminism is and what feminism can be.<sup>5</sup> Current feminist theory draws from the work of earlier generations, starting with the first-wave of feminist thought, which took place from the 1840s to the 1920s. This first-wave of feminism focused on achieving the right to vote, as well as improving the political, educational and economic conditions of women, especially white middle-class women.

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2 In Cornelia Butler, 'Art and Feminism, an ideology of shifting criteria', in *WACK!, Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. by Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), p. 15.

3 Whitney Chadwick, *Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies*, n.paradoxa, 10

4 In Helen Molesworth, 'How to install art as a feminist', in *Modern Women, Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. by Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 499.

5 Alexandra M. Kokoli, 'Introduction: Looking on, Bouncing back', in *Feminism reframed*, ed. by Alexandra M. Kokoli, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 12.

The second-wave of feminism, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, drew on the language of the civil rights movement and was focused on achieving equal rights.<sup>6</sup> Allison Jaggar, in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* in 1983, identified several second-wave feminist perspectives: liberal, radical, Socialist and Marxist feminism.<sup>7</sup> Liberal feminism, according to Jaggar, is mainly concerned with attaining economic and political equality for women within the context of capitalism, while radical feminism focuses on men and the patriarchy as the main causes of the oppression of women. Both Socialist and Marxists feminisms are critical of capitalism, which is seen as a force against the liberation of women, and reflect on class relations, work and exploitation in capitalist economies. For Jaggar, Marxists feminists use the principles of Marxism to emphasize how capitalism keeps women in the domestic sphere of the family, where their laboring and reproductive work is devalued and unpaid.<sup>8</sup>

Second-wave feminist perspectives were discussed up through the mid-1990s, when the development of other feminisms eclipsed Jaggar's categories of Socialism and Marxism. In the 1980s and 1990s, new feminist perspectives developed and the conceptual focus on capitalism and class divisions was replaced by a focus on plurality, diversity and difference.

A major set of feminist thought and criticism since the 1980s has been on the subject of 'woman'. Second-wave theories were criticized because they had treated concepts such as 'woman' as a stable and universal category. Mainstream feminism had assumed that all women shared identical struggles and only the experiences of middle and upper-middle class white women were taken into consideration.

One of the main challenges to the idea of 'woman' was presented by performative feminisms, which see gender identity as something that is performatively created. Performative feminisms were influenced by Judith Butler's ideas of gender in *Gender Trouble* (1990), an important intervention in queer and feminist debates. For Butler, the

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6 Maura Reilly, 'Curating Transnational Feminisms', *Feminist Studies* 36:1 (Spring 2010), 156–173 (172).

7 Martha E. Gimenez, 'What's Material About Materialist Feminism? A Marxist Feminist Critique', *Radical Philosophy* (May/June 2000), 18-19, <http://www.colorado.edu/Sociology/gimenez/work/rphil.html>

8 Ibid, p.18, 19.

problem in the construction of feminism is that it had assumed a purely feminine woman. In *Gender Trouble*, she exposed the fact that, as she perceived it, the binary categories of sex and gender are culturally constructed; these binary categories produce exclusion and subordination and ignore the richness of human identity.<sup>9</sup> Butler proposed that gender identity is fluid and performative and she examined challenges to the binary, such as transgenderism, genderqueer positions and cyberfeminism.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, French feminism of the 1970s and 1980s, with authors such as Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, also challenged the idea of 'woman' and looked at how the gendered sexual difference is socially constructed. French feminism valued and distinguished women's specific sexual difference from men's. For example, Irigaray holds that in the history of philosophy women have been denied their own essence of identity; they have been positioned as men's mirror negation. Irigaray speaks back to the margins to which women have been confined to claim some kind of 'essence' for women, and a set of rights that are specifically for women.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, starting in the 1960s and continuing throughout the 1980s and 1990s there has been a major set of criticism that came from women of color and non-western women. This criticism draws from theoretical discourses of post-structuralism, post-colonialism, critical race theory and deconstructive theory. According to this criticism, mainstream feminism is based on the standpoint of a particular class of women who mistake their own particular experiences for those of a universal woman.<sup>12</sup> For example, Marsha Meskimmon holds that Anglo-American perspectives have dominated feminist criticism; the author contends that 'vast geographical regions have been ignored in mainstream feminist critical literature'.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York ; London : Routledge, 1999), p. XI.

10 Ibid., p. 6.

11 Diana J. Fuss, 'Essentially Speaking: Luce Irigaray's Language of Essence', *Hypatia*, 3: 3 (Winter 1989), 62-80.

12 Maura Reilly, 'Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms', in *Global Feminisms. New Directions in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London/New York: Merrell Publishers, 2007), p. 28.

13 Marsha Meskimmon, 'Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally', in *WACK!, Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. by Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 2007), p. 326, 329.

As a result of these critical positions, divisions in feminism have multiplied resulting in a proliferation of voices and positions. Among the variety of feminist perspectives, in the twenty-first century, the most significant intellectual formations in women's studies are intersectionality and transnational feminism. Consequently, in the following paragraphs I am going to reflect on the relationship between intersectionality and transnational feminism and to examine their differences.

Intersectionality holds that systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, class exploitation and homophobia do not act independently of each other. On the contrary, these systems of power intersect with one another and mutually construct each other. Moreover, intersectionality does not understand the category 'woman' solely through the lens of gender, but it considers other categories such as race, class, and nation.

The concept of intersectionality appeared in the late 1960s, developed in the 1980s, and has gained visibility within the early twenty-first century academy. It emerged in the United States from African American women's experiences, who saw how racism worked to economically exploit African Americans, while at the same time sexism influenced their experiences as women. Moreover, African American women denounced that mainstream feminism had failed to acknowledge the white, middle-class biases implicated in their model.

*Ain't I a Woman*, published by bell hooks in 1982, was the starting point to analyze the intersection of racism and sexism. According to hooks, black women were dually victimized as black and women. Additionally, she denounced mainstream feminism for pretending to speak for all women while excluding non-white and non-middle class women's experiences and concerns in favor of a universal womanhood.<sup>14</sup>

In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the term 'intersectionality' in her paper *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. For Crenshaw, patterns of oppression such as race, gender, class, ability and ethnicity are interrelated. Moreover, black women are excluded from feminist theories and anti-racist theories because these theories do not

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14 Bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman* (London, Pluto Press, 1982), p.12.

reflect the intersections of race and gender.<sup>15</sup> According to Crenshaw, anti-racist theories must include an analysis of sexism while feminism theory must include an analysis of race if it hopes to address the particular manner in which black women are subordinated.<sup>16</sup>

For authors such as Crenshaw and hooks, intersectionality referred primarily to the discrimination faced by black women. However, during the same period, Native Americans, Chicana and Chinese Americans scholars and activists began to examine their specific experiences at the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality. Since then, intersectionality has been expanded to include the analysis of discrimination faced by anyone whose sexuality, nationality or race is not favored in the patriarchal, capitalist society. For example, in *Intersectionality and Feminist Politics*, Nira Yuval-Davis holds that intersectional analysis is for the full diversity of women's experiences to be considered, and must examine the interrelations of gender, class, race, ethnicity and other social divisions.<sup>17</sup>

Transnational feminism is a movement for the social, political and economic equality of women across national boundaries. It argues for a broader examination of feminism within and between cultures, addressing the discrimination, oppression and violence experienced by women around the world. It is also involved in activist movements and in creating solidarity, international alliances and networks across race, class and national boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

Transnational feminist theorizing started in the 1990s and marks its roots in postcolonial theory, women of color and indigenous feminist critiques. It was first discussed by Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan in 1995 in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity*

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15 Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989: 1

16 Ibid., p.166

17 Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13: 3 (2006), p. 204.

18 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Chandra, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *boundary 2*, 12: 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism. (Spring - Autumn, 1984), p. 334; Valentine Moghadam, 'Transnational Feminism', in *Women Worldwide: Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Women*, ed. by Janet Lee and Susan Shaw (New York: McGraw Hill 2010), p. 44.

*and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Soon after, Jacqui M. Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty published *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* in 1997, an essential book in defining transnationality.

Transnationality evolved as a response to the discrimination of women worldwide and to the Eurocentric, colonialist perspective.<sup>19</sup> According to this feminist theory, neocolonialism, imperialism and economic globalization have created relations of exploitation and inequality around the world, which have affected people across nations, race, gender, classes and sexuality.

Additionally, transnational positions challenge the western women's movement, criticizing its Eurocentrism and Americanism. Transnationality recognizes inequalities and differences across various groups of women and rejects the idea that people from different nations have the same subjectivities and experiences with gender inequality. For example, according to Talpade Mohanty, western feminism has assumed that 'women' is a coherent group with identical interests, desires and experiences, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location.<sup>20</sup> For Ella Shohat, mainstream feminism sees Europe as the unique reality to the rest of the world and is devoid of all dialogue with anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the challenge for transnational feminism is to produce solidarity within a variety of communities and identities without suggesting that their positions are identical.<sup>22</sup>

In 2007, the debates around feminism were brought into focus in the exhibition *Global Feminisms* at the Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum. In this exhibition, the curators Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly adopted a post-colonial strategy by attempting to keep the definitions of feminism as open as possible and accommodating as many cross-cultural women artists as possible.<sup>23</sup> *Global Feminisms* challenged the foundational Western Eurocentrism of feminism, offering a broader definition of feminist artistic

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19 Valentine Moghadam, 'Transnational Feminism', p. 1.

20 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Chandra, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', p. 337.

21 Ella Shohat, 'Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge', *Social Text*, 20: 3 (2002), p. 72.

22 Ibid., p. 69.

23 Hershman, 'Transcript of interview with Maura Reilly', <https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>; Reilly, 'Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms', pp. 15, 16.



production; for Reilly and Nochlin, in the exhibition ‘they had to (...) keep rethinking what it means to be a feminist in radically different socio-cultural, political, racial and class situations’.<sup>24</sup>

This research project is therefore grounded in the views of authors such as Butler and Reilly, who define an inclusive, broader and flexible examination of feminism which favors diversity over sameness. According to Catherine Morris, it is important to be as expansive as possible about what feminism is, and to be inclusive and pluralistic.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons, Nochlin and Reilly contend that it is not possible to talk about feminism but rather ‘feminisms’ in the plural, as the term is now irreducible to one definition.<sup>26</sup> This idea of feminism also challenges the binaries of mainstream feminism, such as masculine/feminine, white/black, center/periphery and us/them. This thesis is based on a definition of feminism as a transnational movement intertwined with intersectional feminism and queer activism. It is a concept of feminism that rejects restrictive categories and that destabilizes definitions of masculinity, femininity, hetero- and homosexuality and which does not position Europe and North America as the privileged centre.

### **Feminism and the criticism of institutions.**

Since the 1970s, feminist scholarship and activism have been centered on the criticism of institutions for the underrepresentation of women artists. In the late 1960s and 1970s, feminist literature analyzed patriarchal art history and museums. This scholarship focused on the absence of women artists in art institutions, raised questions about how this marginalization had occurred, researched women artists of the past and reclaimed centrality for women artists in the museum. For example, in her landmark essay ‘Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?’, published in 1971, Nochlin exposed the idea that greatness had been defined since antiquity as white, Western, privileged and

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24 Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, ‘Curators’ preface’, in *Global Feminisms*, ed. by Reilly and Nochlin, p. 13.

25 Catherine Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

26 Linda Nochlin, ‘Where the Great Women Artists are Now’, *Art News*, 2 January 2007, <<http://www.artnews.com/2007/02/01/where-the-great-women-artists-are-now/>> ; Reilly, ‘Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms’, p. 16

male, and wondered how to redefine it to include non-white and non-Western artists, the unprivileged and women.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, feminist activism made the public art museum a visible target for its demands for gender equality. In 1970s New York women artists and critics, organized in groups such as WAR (Women Artists in Revolution) WSABAL (Women, Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation) and the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Artists, gathered in front of museums like MoMA and the Whitney Museum to protest the lack of inclusion of women artists in male-dominated exhibitions. During the 1980s, this activist practice continued with feminist groups such as the Guerrilla Girls and the Women's Art Coalition.<sup>28</sup>

In the forty-five years since Nochlin published her essay there have been important advances; for example, women artists now make up to sixty percent of students in graduate programs in the US and are featured in important museums and private collections.<sup>29</sup> There has been an effort to integrate women into major group exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale in 2005, which featured more women artists than any previous Biennale. Additionally, over the last ten years, hundreds of women have received grants from the Guggenheim and MacArthur Foundation; several women artists, like Gillian Wearing and Laure Prouvost, have been awarded the Turner Prize at Tate Britain, and artists such as Marlene Dumas and Yayoi Kusama have achieved record high prices for their works at auction.<sup>30</sup>

However, according to Reilly, women artists are still underrepresented and have not achieved gender equality in terms of the number of exhibitions, displays or works collected in any museum. For the curator, the system is still racist, classist, heteronormative and Eurocentric. The mainstream master narrative of art history has not

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27 Nochlin, 'From 1971: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists', *ArtNews*, 30 May 2015, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/30/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists/>

28 Juli Carson, 'On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics', in *Museums After Modernism: Strategies of Engagement*, ed. by Griselda Pollock (New York: Blackwell Press, 2005), p. 202; Griselda Pollock, 'The Missing Future: MoMA and Modern Women', in *Modern Women*, ed. by Butler and Schwartz, p. 29; Joanne Heath, 'Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Blockbuster Retrospective', in *Feminism Reframed*, ed. by Kokoli, p. 20.

29 Hershman, <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

30 Reilly, 'Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms', in *Global Feminisms*, ed. by Reilly and Nochlin, p.18.

changed and continues to privilege white male creativity. The art world has not accepted works by minority, postcolonial and other voices except in special and separated exhibitions.<sup>31</sup> According to Amelia Jones, institutional displays and exhibitions do not address gender, sexual and social inequalities and demonstrate little interest in shows devoted to work by women or feminist works.<sup>32</sup> In addition, women are equally underrepresented in the art market, in commercial galleries and in auction houses which privilege work by artists who are part of the mainstream. For example, in the case of the Turner Prize, the ratio of female to male recipients is two to nineteen.<sup>33</sup>

In the last ten years feminist theorists have regularly revisited the question of equality in museums. For example, in 2006 Jerry Saltz published 'Where the Girls Aren't'; in this article he denounced the programmatic exclusion of women in the art world. Saltz looked at the Autumn schedules of the 125 top New York galleries and revealed that just twenty-three percent of solo shows in those galleries were by women.<sup>34</sup> Also Saltz reported that MoMA was practicing a "gender-based" apartheid: after the reopening of the Museum in 2004, only five percent of nearly four hundred objects in the galleries in the permanent collection from 1879 to 1969 were by women.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, from 2000 to 2005 the Tate Modern in London and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presented solo shows of women artists less than two percent of the time, and since 2000 only fourteen percent of the Guggenheim solo shows of living artists were devoted to women, while only twenty-three percent of the artists in the Whitney Museum of American Art's collection are women.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, for Hoban and Reilly women who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s had internalized a two-decade long, culture-wide backlash against feminism. The authors

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31 Ibid., pp. 18, 19.

32 Amelia Jones, 'On Sexism in the Art World', in *Women in the Art World*, *Art News*, 26 May 2015, <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/on-sexism-in-the-art-world/>>

33 Reilly, 'Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms', in *Global Feminisms*, ed. by Reilly and Nochlin, p. 18; Reilly, 'Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes', in *Women in the Art World*, *Art News*, 26 May 2015, <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>>

34 Jerry Saltz, 'Where the Girls Aren't', *Village Voice*, 19 September 2016, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/where-the-girls-arent-7159899>>

35 in, Phoebe Hoban, 'The Feminist Evolution', *Art News*, 12 January 2009, <<http://www.artnews.com/2009/12/01/the-feminist-evolution/>>

36 Saltz, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/where-the-girls-arent-7159899>>

denounced the fact that emerging artists and young women who do not identify as feminists are the ones selected to present their work in institutions, while feminist artists from previous generations are not selected as frequently.<sup>37</sup> For Mira Schor, young women artists are often reluctant to be associated with the word ‘feminism’ because they desire institutional recognition and they do not want to be marginalized by the label, as public identification with the word carries a risk.<sup>38</sup>

However, from 2006 to 2009 there was a moment of optimism as it seemed that the attitude toward feminism in institutions had changed.<sup>39</sup> After a decade and a half of “rhetoric about the death of feminism”, the international art world started to embrace feminism with enthusiasm.<sup>40</sup> During those years major museums in Europe and North programmed exhibitions related to feminism, and at the same time there was widespread interest in the subject, as evidenced by the number of conferences, publications and symposia. In Europe there were exhibitions such as *It's Time for Action* at the Migros Museum in Zurich (2006), *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (2007), *Gender Battle* at the Contemporary Art Centre in Santiago de Compostela (2007), *Rebelle: Art & Feminism, 1969-2009* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Arnhem (2009) and *elles:@centrepompidou* at the Centre Pompidou (2009), in which the museum rehung its permanent collections to show only works by women.

In the United States, 2007 was the year of institutional consciousness-raising with three major centres – The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA), MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum in New York – scheduling events devoted to the impact of feminism in art history: the symposium *The Feminist Future* at MoMA, the exhibition WACK! at the MOCA and the opening of the Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum with the exhibition *Global Feminisms*.<sup>41</sup> At the same time there were other exhibitions

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37Phebe Hoban, ‘We’re Finally Infiltrating’, *Art News*, 2 January, 2007, <http://www.artnews.com/2007/02/01/were-finally-infiltrating/>; Hershman, <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

38 Schor, ‘She Demon Spawn from Hell’, <[http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira\\_2005.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira_2005.html)> ; Mira Schor, ‘The ism that dare not speak its name’, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G Online*, (1999), <[http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira\\_2005.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira_2005.html)>

39 Josephine Withers, ‘All Representation is Political: Feminist Art Past and Present’, *Feminist Studies*, 34: 3 (2008), 456-475, (p. 456).

40 Jones, ‘1970/2007: The Return of Feminsit Art’ <http://x-traonline.org/article/19702007-the-return-of-feminist-art/>.

41 Phebe Hoban, ‘We’re Finally Infiltrating’, <http://www.artnews.com/2007/02/01/were-finally-infiltrating/>;

and events such as *Claiming Space: Some American Feminist Originators* at the American University, Washington, and *The Feminist Art Project*, coordinated by Rutgers University, and initiated by Chicago and Arlene Raven in 2005. Additionally, the Whitney Museum mounted retrospectives of women artists such as Kiki Smith (2006-2007), Lorna Simpson (2007), Kara Walker (2007-2008) and Jenny Holzer (2009) and MoMA organized important exhibitions by women artists such as Marlene Dumas (2008-2009), Marina Abramovic (2010) and Joan Braderman (2009).

According to Jones, with these events feminism underwent a transformation; going from being a practice of fringe artists and critics into a subject for institutional attention; that is, it moved from the margins to the centre.<sup>42</sup> For Chicago, Reilly and Hoban, the confluence of these shows was due to a generation of women who were radicalized in the 1970s and who had ascended to positions of power in major cultural institutions.<sup>43</sup> It was this generation of female curators, art historians, patrons, scholars and donors like Elizabeth A. Sackler and Sarah Peter who organized or funded the events and worked to change art institutions from the inside. However, for other authors like Aruna D'Souza, Rosalyn Deutsche, Ulrike Muller and Jones, the sudden enthusiasm for feminism was a reaction to the conservative tide in the United States and part of a broader interest in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the countercultural, anti-war and civil rights movements that characterized those decades.<sup>44</sup>

Two of my case studies – the Sackler Center and MoMA – were part of this renewed interest in feminist art in 2007. The Sackler Center opened in 2007 with the inaugural exhibition *Global Feminisms*. The Center has a permanent gallery devoted to *The Dinner Party* by Chicago and a gallery space for the exhibition of feminist art. According to Reilly, curator of the Center from 2007 to 2009, the Sackler was a unique place,

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42 Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, 'How to be seen: an introduction to feminist politics, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions', in *Politics in a Glass Case*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 2.

43 Amelia Jones, 'On feminist art history and curatorial practice: An interview with Maura Reilly, Connie Butler and Amelia Jones', in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, revised edition, ed. by Amelia Jones (New York/London: Routledge, 2009), p. 33; Hershman, 'Transcript of Interview with Maura Reilly' <https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly/>; Hoban, 'We're Finally Infiltrating', <http://www.artnews.com/2007/02/01/were-finally-infiltrating/>;

44 Rosalyn Deutsche, Aruna d'Souza, Miwon Kwon, Ulrike Muller, Mignon Dixon and Senam Okudzeto, 'Feminist Time: A Conversation', *Grey Room*, 31 (2008), 32-67 (p. 51); Jones, '1970/2007: The Return of Feminist Art' <<http://x-traonline.org/article/19702007-the-return-of-feminist-art/>>

‘groundbreaking’, as it was the first centre dedicated exclusively to feminist art.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the Center is housed permanently in the Brooklyn Museum and thus it constitutes an important intervention and critique of the institution. According to Reilly, it was essential that feminism was now housed within an institution; with the Center feminism was ‘here to stay’ and was not ‘going anywhere’.<sup>46</sup>

The Modern Women’s Project at MoMA began with the philanthropy of Sarah Peter, who approached the museum in 2006 with the intention of “doing something for women”.<sup>47</sup> After Peter approached the Museum, there were important cross-departmental discussions to decide what to do with the fund. Finally, the curators decided to publish a book, (*Modern Women*), to host a large-scale symposium (*The Feminist Future*), to program a number of exhibitions and ultimately to acquire more artworks by women artists, as the goal of the Project was to foster more representation of women at the Museum.

According to Pollock, there was a positive change at MoMA as the museum opened itself to different models of understanding modernist culture such as feminist, postcolonial and critical museological perspectives.<sup>48</sup> In addition, MoMA was the first major North American museum to examine its collections by highlighting the work of women. The changes at the Museum had an important repercussion as the institution is regarded by other modern art museums as a paradigm of excellence. When MoMA organized the important symposium *The Feminist Future*, it was the first time that feminism had been given ‘full-dress museum survey treatment’ in a major American institution.<sup>49</sup>

However, for Reilly the institutional interest in feminism was short-lived. After 2009, most museums were still reluctant to acknowledge the feminist art movement and to embrace the critical questions posed by revisionist art history and feminism. In the article ‘Women in the Art World’, published in *ArtNews* in June 2015, Reilly denounced the

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45 Hershman, ‘Transcript of Interview with Maura Reilly’, <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

46 Ibid.

47 Sarah Peter, Personal Interview, 15 July 2013.

48 Pollock, ‘The Missing Future’, in *Modern Women*, ed. by Butler and Schwartz, p. 51

49 Holland Cotter, ‘Feminist Art Finally Takes Central Stage’, *The New York Times*, 29 January 2017, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html>>

fact that discrimination had not stopped and that there were systemic problems which prevented women from being included in the institution. According to Reilly, the more closely one examines art world statistics the more obvious it becomes that ‘sexism and racism are insidiously woven into the institutional fabric’ of the art world.<sup>50</sup> For the author, ‘it never ceases to amaze me that despite the decades of postcolonial, feminist, anti-racist and queer activism and theorizing, the art world majority continues to be defined as white, Euro-American, heterosexual, privileged, and, above all, male’.<sup>51</sup> Reilly explained that the signs of discrimination against women in the art world are present in gallery representation, auction price differentials, press coverage of exhibitions and exclusion from permanent collection displays, from solo exhibition programs, exhibition biennials and *documentas*.<sup>52</sup>

After 2009, the special exhibition schedules and permanent collections at major art institutions revealed the prevalence of gender disparity. For example, the National Museum of Women in the Arts estimates that just five percent of art currently on display in United States museums is made by women.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, of all the solo exhibitions since 2007 at the Whitney Museum, just twenty-nine percent went to women artists, and just fourteen percent of the solo exhibitions at the Guggenheim were by women. The *elles* initiative at the Centre Pompidou did not last: in the subsequent post-*elles* rehang of the permanent collection, only ten percent of the works on view were by women, exactly the same as it was pre-*elles*. Finally, in the Guerrilla Girls’ last count, in 2011, only four percent of artists on display at the contemporary section of the Metropolitan Museum were women, less than in 1989.<sup>54</sup>

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50 Reilly, ‘Taking the Measure of Sexism’, in *Women in the Art World*, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>; Reilly, ‘Toward a Curatorial Activism’ *Cairns Indigenous Art Fair* (Brisbane, Arts Queensland, 2011), p. 10

51 Reilly, ‘Taking the Measure of Sexism’, in *Women in the Art World*, <http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>

52 Ibid.

53 Eleanor J. Bader, ‘Women Artists Still Face Discrimination’, *Truthout*, 10 May 2012, <<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/8971-women-artists-still-face-discrimination>>

54 Reilly, ‘Taking the Measure of Sexism’, in *Women in the Art World*, <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>>

According to Reilly, in order to achieve gender equality the museum has to tackle institutional sexism from the inside out.<sup>55</sup> For Reilly, the solution is being proactive and calling out institutions, critics, curators and collectors for sexist practices, promoting fair representation in the art world and above all ‘keep crunching the numbers and counting’ the number of women artists in institutions. Also, for the curator, demands for the equal representation of women cannot be limited to museums, but have to affect art galleries, the art market and the press coverage of exhibitions.<sup>56</sup>

According to Butler, there must be equality in acquisitions in the art market, apart from equality in real estate or exhibition space in the institutions. For Butler, there is still a discrepancy between the entry level prices for works by women artists and those of their male colleagues. Consequently, the situation will not change until acquisition committees are willing to spend significant amounts of money on the work of women artists, and museums begin to look at how curatorial decisions are made and how funds are allocated.<sup>57</sup>

### **Defining feminist curatorial practices in exhibitions.**

In this section of my literature review I will focus on the definition of feminist curatorial practices in exhibitions. I will determine what distinguishes feminist curatorial projects from non-feminist curatorial projects and how feminist theory can be applied to exhibitions. There is an emerging field of publications on feminist curatorship in which feminist curators and theorists have re-evaluated museological methods and have offered alternative ways of structuring exhibitions. The recent historiography on feminist curatorial practices started with Katy Deepwell’s collection of essays *New Feminist Art Criticism* (1995), which included a section on curatorship and the art world. In 2006, a special issue of *n.paradoxa* focusing on curatorial strategies was guest edited by curator Renee Baert. In this issue Baert argued that to speak of feminist curatorship was to speak

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55 Hershman, ‘Transcript of Interview with Maura Reilly’, <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

56 Reilly, ‘Taking the Measure of Sexism, in *Women in the Art World*, <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>>

57 Cornelia Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February, 2013.



of something new that needed to be understood as a new research object.<sup>58</sup> Baert explained that ‘there is not a single volume dedicated to the issues of how women are represented in museums within the context of feminist exhibitions’.<sup>59</sup> However, the *n.paradoxa* issue marked the beginning of an expansion in the literature on feminist curatorship, which continued with the publication of keynote papers from the Stockholm conference *Feminisms, Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2008) in *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2010), as well as other publications on feminism including Alexandra Kokoli’s *Reframing Feminism* (2008), Deepwell’s chapter ‘Feminist Curatorial Strategies’ in *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006), Pollock’s *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007), Jones’ *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2010), Katrin Kivimaa’s *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2012), Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki’s *Politics in a Glass Case* (2013) and the catalogues of *Global Feminisms* (2007) and *WACK!* (2007).

In these volumes feminist curators and authors have criticized museums’ categories and hierarchies and have tried to determine what the challenges of displaying feminist artworks are. They have discussed what conditions of exhibition the museum needs to establish to install art by women and feminist artists, and proposed different curatorial strategies for organizing feminist exhibitions. In the following paragraphs I will consider feminist criticism of museological methods and categories, the different definitions of feminist curatorial practices in exhibitions and how these theories have been put into practice in feminist exhibitions since the 1970s.

Feminist scholarship has proposed different definitions for feminist curatorial practices in exhibitions. For Deepwell, a feminist curatorial project is related to ‘the programming of feminist and women’s art exhibitions in an institutional space and the creative work of organizing such an exhibition’.<sup>60</sup> However, for authors like Pollock and Hein, feminist curatorial practices in the museum are not just related to counting the numbers of women

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58 Renee Baert, ‘Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies’, *n.paradoxa*, 12 (March 2000), 6-9 (p. 6).

59 Renee Baert, ‘Editorial’, *n. paradoxa. Curatorial Strategies*, 18 (July 2006), p. 4.

60 Katy Deepwell, ‘Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s’, in *New museum theory and practice: an introduction* ed. by Janet Marstine (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006)

artists and asserting their visibility.<sup>61</sup> The problem of the lack of inclusion of feminism in the museum concerns ‘more than numbers’<sup>62</sup> and cannot be solved by the addition of more women to the collections.<sup>63</sup> According to Helen Molesworth, there is a difficulty in displaying feminist work in museums when art made by women and feminist artists has been absent.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, for Pollock, feminist curatorial practices should challenge existing museum practices.<sup>65</sup> It is necessary to revise the curatorial strategies adopted in traditional museums, rejecting canonicity, hierarchy and classification and to establish what characterizes the planning of feminist curatorial projects.<sup>66</sup>

### **Criticism of exhibition methods.**

For scholars like Gaby Porter<sup>67</sup> and Carol Duncan<sup>68</sup> museums are gendered institutions based on the oppositional relationship between the object presented (feminine) and the subject, creator or viewer (masculine).<sup>69</sup> For example, in *Civilizing Rituals*, Duncan explains that the content of MoMA was characterized by its address to male spectators though the images of women it presented: the predominance of male artists and female nudes in the museum created a gendered space and a subject who was generally masculine. The gaze is associated with the male viewer, while the object seen is associated with the female; in this relationship femininity is always in a subordinate position to masculinity. In this narrative created by the museum the acknowledgement of women as creators is difficult to integrate.<sup>70</sup>

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61Hein, Hein, ‘Redressing the museum in Feminist Theory’, in *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22:1 (2007), pp. 29-42.

62Duncan, 1995, p. 128.

63Griselda Pollock, *Vision and difference: femininity, feminism and histories of art*, (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

64Molesworth, ‘How to install art as a feminist’, in *Modern Women*, p. 504

65Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: time, space and the archive*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.10.

66Katy Deepwell, ‘Feminist curatorial strategies since the 1970s’, in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. by Janet Marstine (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 65.

67Gaby Porter, ‘Seeing through solidity. A feminist perspective on museums’ in *Museum studies: an anthology of contexts*, ed. by Bettina Messias Carbonell, (Malden, Mass.; Oxford : Blackwell Pub., 2004) pp. 105-125.

68Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*, (London: Routledge, 1995)

69 Porter, ‘Seeing Through Solidity’, *Museum studies: an anthology of contexts*, p. 106.

70 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums*, (London: Routledge, 1995)

In her article 'Redressing the Museum in Feminist Theory' (2007), Hein seeks a revision of the opposition of subject and object in museums. For the author, a feminist perspective should question not only the inferior position occupied by women but also the subject-object opposition itself. Feminist theory should create strategies to subvert the dualism of subject and object and the distant aesthetic contemplation of the object. Then, when the dominance-subordination relationship disappears the viewer (subject) can interact with the viewed (object) as an equal.<sup>71</sup>

Secondly, critics like Hein and Pollock have called into question the basis upon which museums prioritize some objects over others, as well as the narrative of art history presented in museums and the hierarchies, classifications and the chronological arrangement in the organization of museums' contents.<sup>72</sup> Also, for Deepwell and Hein, feminism challenges and analyses the selection criteria for 'masterpieces' and the concept of 'genius' as predominantly masculine, white and Euro-American.<sup>73</sup>

Feminist curatorial projects should challenge existing models of exhibitions, question museums' roles and categories and break exhibition rules. Feminist interventions in the museum should seek to elaborate other kinds of relations and connections between artworks outside restrictive categories.<sup>74</sup> According to curator Stella Rollig feminist curatorship should be related to 'working experimentally' and to 'breaking the exhibition mould'<sup>75</sup> as prescribed formats do not have to be accepted. For curator Maria Lind, feminist curatorship means 'questioning existing structures'<sup>76</sup> and 'challenging the status quo'.<sup>77</sup>

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71Hilde Hein, 'Redressing the Museum in Feminist Theory', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22: 1, (2007) 29-42.

72 Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: time, space and the archive*, (London : Routledge, 2007), p. 10; Hilde Hein, 'Looking at Museums from a feminist perspective', in *Gender, sexuality and museums*, ed. by A. K. Levin, (London : Routledge, 2010), p. 56

73 Hilde Hein, 'Redressing the museum in Feminist Theory', in *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22: 1

(2007), p.35; Katy Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s', in *New museum theory and practice: an introduction*, ed. by Janet Marstine, (Malden, MA : Blackwell, 2006), p. 67.

74Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, p. 10.

75Stella Rollig, 'Working on Rafts', *n. paradoxa. Curatorial Strategies*, 18 (July 2006), p. 86.

76Katy Deepwell, 'Curatorial Strategies and Feminist politics. An Interview with Maria Lind', in *n. paradoxa. Curatorial Strategies*, 18 (July 2006), p. 13

77M. Lind, 'Selected nodes in a network of thoughts on curating' in *Words of wisdom, : a curator's vade mecum on contemporary art*, ed. by C. Kuoni, (New York: Independent Curators International, 2001), p. 100

For example, one of the methods proposed by scholars such as Robert Mills is the reinterpretation of objects the museum already has. This method is consistent with proposals from queer theory, which has focused on the marginalization and lack of visibility of LGBTQ groups in museums, and which challenges the conventional representations of sexuality and gender in museums. Feminist and queer approaches on the reinterpretation of objects are particularly valuable in offering a creative reflection on permanent collections, as most museums do not have enough artefacts or artworks directly related to women and feminism. According to Mills, the problem is not the lack of potentially relevant objects, but the lack of reinterpretation of the objects museums already have, which can be reinterpreted queerly. Thus, queer theory and feminist theory encourage flexibility in the interpretation of objects, rejecting the single dominant point of view.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, feminist theorists like Pollock, Jennifer Fisher and Molesworth have proposed models of feminist exhibitions which are anti-canonical and consistent with feminist theory. In *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, Pollock proposed an imaginary counter-museum, the Virtual Feminist Museum (VFM). For Pollock the VFM should be articulated in dialogues or encounters between artworks, which would be assembled in unexpected and contradictory juxtapositions. However, Pollock's museum is virtual: it could never be actual and take place in the real world. For Pollock, no corporation would ever sponsor a feminist intervention that challenges the assumptions of class, race and gender.<sup>79</sup>

In *Exhibitionary Affect*, Fisher proposed a non-patriarchal curatorial practice based on the aesthetic of affects, on emotions and sensitivity, as well as in engaging other senses, such as 'tactile, visual and acoustic stimuli'.<sup>80</sup> Fisher's curatorial model stands against the traditional oppositions and dualities of mind and body, reason and feelings, object and subject, as this duality is based on ocularcentrism and a patriarchal point of view.

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78 R. Mills, 'Queer is Here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture', in *Gender, sexuality and museums*, ed. by A. K. Levin, (London : Routledge, 2010), p. 85.

79 Griselda Pollock, *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum*, (London: Routledge, 2007)

80 Jennifer Fisher, 'Exhibitionary Affect', *n. paradoxa. Curatorial Strategies*, 18 (July 2006), 27-33 (p. 29)

The affect model seeks to ‘expand the discipline of art history’ beyond its concerns with artists, objects and meaning to examine art events and exhibitions as energetically charged contexts. The curatorial practice proposed highlights the ‘sensibility’ of the exhibition site, its ambiance and its auratic qualities.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, Molesworth has proposed a generational model as an alternative to the chronological installation or the thematic exhibition. The author argues for a historical model of influence based on the idea that women artists have sought attachment rather than separation. Molesworth envisions a fantasy room with works by Joan Snyder, Cindy Sherman, Amy Stillman, Wangechi Mutu and Dana Schutz. In this model, Molesworth proposes a mother-daughter relationship, establishing Snyder as the elective mother and then creating feminist genealogies with her ‘daughters’. Her model allows the audience to think about artworks that are organized horizontally, through attachment and alliances, as opposed to a vertical model of history characterized with narratives of exclusion, rejection and triumph over another.<sup>82</sup>

### **What to include and what to exclude.**

Thirdly, one of the main issues in feminist curatorship is to decide what to include and what to exclude; that is, whose and which artworks to present in exhibitions. The choice of artistic content in feminist exhibitions is related to the question of what is feminist art and what is not feminist art. Is all art by women artists feminist art? Is art which precedes feminism, or art by women who claim not to be feminists, feminist art? Can men produce feminist art? For Deepwell, it is difficult to define what feminist art is; for the author, it is not clear whether the “feminist identity” is located in the work of art itself, in the artists or in the effects the work of art has in its viewers.<sup>83</sup> According to Pollock, the feminist character of an artwork is not related to the gender of the artists or their political identity but on its effect upon the beholder.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, feminist curatorship is not

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Molesworth, p. 508

<sup>83</sup>Katy Deepwell, ‘Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s’, p. 76.

<sup>84</sup>G. Pollock, ‘Feminism and Modernism’, in R. Parker and G. Pollock (ed.), *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985*, London: Pandora Press, 1987, p. 93.

necessarily linked to the gender of the artists presented and it is possible to find latent feminism in works of art that were not created as intentionally feminists.

For authors like Hein or Pollock, a show can be considered feminist because of the curatorial thesis rather than being due the gender of the artists and whether they are feminists or not, and it can, therefore, include male artists and artists whose work precedes feminism. For example, in the exhibition <*Hers*>, curated by Rolig in 2001, there were twenty-two women artists – some of them feminists and others not – and three men. The show was a feminist project because the curatorial thesis for the exhibition was feminist.<sup>85</sup>

Also, according to Schor, it is important to include different generations of feminists; that is, to accommodate feminism's past while at the same time incorporating contemporary feminisms. For Schor, the issue of generations is complicated by the fact that younger artists who do not want to be identified as feminists can be more commercially successful.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, for Irina Costache and Maiko Tanaka, when presenting these earlier generations there is a risk of historicizing feminism and presenting it through a nostalgic lens, forgetting its activism and its potential political force.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, the selection of artworks in a feminist project is related to the question of canonicity. For Kobolt, feminist curators are always in a relationship with the canon through the process of selecting artists; curators are inspired by the canon even when they oppose or ignore it.<sup>88</sup> However, one of the subjects of the feminist agenda is to constantly interrogate, extend, rethink and reinterpret the mainstream male-dominated canon. In this revision of the canon, feminist curators reclaim what has been forgotten and draw attention to the overlooked, including ethnicity, race, class, gender, and geo- and bio-political power divisions. Therefore, feminist exhibitions should integrate issues

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85 Rolig, 'Working on Rafts', p. 87.

86 Mira Schor, 'She Demon Spawn from Hell', <[http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira\\_2005.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira_2005.html)>

87 Irina Costache and , Dancing with Emma Goldman, an Investigation in Contemporary Feminist Curatorial Methodologies,

[https://www.academia.edu/1496148/Dancing\\_with\\_Emma\\_Goldman\\_an\\_investigation\\_in\\_contemporary\\_feminist\\_curatorial\\_methodologies](https://www.academia.edu/1496148/Dancing_with_Emma_Goldman_an_investigation_in_contemporary_feminist_curatorial_methodologies)>, p. 3.

88 Katja Kobolt, 'Feminist curating beyond, in and against or for the canon', in *Working with feminism. curating in eastern Europe*, p. 24.

related to race, sexuality, gender and class into the programme<sup>89</sup> as well as artworks outside Europe and North America.<sup>90</sup> For example, according to Lisa Corrin, ‘feminism means to me that in all the work that I do – and that does not mean just showing women artists – I ask questions about who has been left out’.<sup>91</sup>

However, according to Helena Reckitt the objective of the deconstruction and expansion of the canon is not to substitute it with an alternative feminist canon.<sup>92</sup> Feminist discourse rejects canonicity altogether; for Kobolt, the canon is an obsolete idea connected to power, and the only politically acceptable position would be to leave the idea of the mainstream canon behind.<sup>93</sup> In fact, for Reilly, the ultimate goal of feminist curatorship would be a critique of canonicity itself.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, feminist exhibitions should be characterized by their anti-canoncity as a feminist canon would be ‘antithetical to strong curating’.<sup>95</sup>

### **Models of feminist curatorial practice.**

Finally, part of feminist historiography and research has been concerned with how curatorial practices have been put into practice within feminist art shows from the 1970s to the present. Based on issue 18 of *n.paradoxa*, ‘Curatorial Strategies’, Deepwell’s *Feminist Curatorial Strategies*, Irina Costache’s and Maiko Tanaka’s *Dancing with Emma Goldman: An Investigation In Contemporary Feminist Curatorial Methodologies* and the

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89 ‘Lisa Corrin and Jon Bewley in conversation’ in *The producers: contemporary curators in conversation* (3), ed. by Susan Hiller, (Gateshead: BALTIC, 2001), p. 113; Amelia Jones, ‘On feminist art history and curatorial practice: An interview with Maura Reilly, Connie Butler and Amelia Jones’, p. 38.

90 Reilly, ‘Introduction. Toward Transnational Feminisms’, p.15; Helena Reckitt, ‘Unusual Suspects: Global Feminisms and WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution’, in *n.paradoxa. Curatorial Strategies*, 18, (July 2006), 34-42, p. 37.

91 Fisher, p. 29.

92 Helena Reckitt, ‘Unusual Suspects: Global Feminisms and WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution’, in *n.paradoxa. Curatorial Strategies*, 18, (July 2006), 34-42, p. 36.

93 Katja Kobolt, ‘Feminist curating beyond, in, against or for the canon’, in *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Katrin Kivimaa, (Tallin: Tallin University Press, 2013), p. 20.

94 Reckitt, p. 36.

95 Reckitt, p. 36.

catalogues of *Global Feminisms* and *WACK!*, it is possible to structure feminist exhibitions around four categories: 1) feminist blockbuster and historical survey exhibitions, 2) thematic exhibitions and 3) photo, video and medium-specific curatorial projects.

#### Feminist blockbusters and historical survey exhibitions

Survey exhibitions, such as *Women Artists, 1550- 1950* at the LACMA or MoMA's *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties* in 1994, are generally chronological shows that tend to take place in well-established institutions of art. Survey exhibitions and monographs have been criticized by feminist authors such as Reilly: they are seen as curatorial correctives to the exclusion of women from the history of art with the political aim of recovering under-represented women artists and reinserting them into the standard narrative of art history.<sup>96</sup> These shows often use biographical and chronological details to explain the artworks and have the effect of canonizing them. Moreover, some of these exhibitions have been blockbuster retrospectives about popular women artists like Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti. However, for Deepwell, feminism should be against such celebratory practices and the need to prove that there have been 'great women artists', which are viewed in isolation from other women and from the history of art.<sup>97</sup>

#### Thematic exhibitions

In thematic displays there is a juxtaposition of works from different historical periods or different styles, thus challenging chronology, hierarchy and classification by material and style. The juxtapositions and aesthetic affinities between artworks permit new interpretations of the collections and new relationships between artworks. Thematic hangings have been put into practice in several feminist exhibitions, all of which are characterized by their anti-canoncity. Examples of these exhibitions are *Inside the Visible*, *WACK!* and *Global Feminisms*, among others. For example, in *WACK!* there was 'no intention to present a feminist canon'.<sup>98</sup> *Inside the Visible*, curated by Catherine de

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96 Reilly, 'Introduction: Toward Transnational Feminisms', p. 24.

97 Katy Deepwell, 'n.paradoxa's 12 Step Guide to Feminist Art, Art History and Criticism', *n.paradoxa*, 21 (September 2010), p. 6.

98 Reckitt, p. 36.



Zegher at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (1996), was another anti-canonical exhibition in which the works were grouped and organized within themes. According to Baert, it was not an exhibition constructed ‘in order to correct an existing canon, not to accumulate great women but to identify and articulate a body of practice that does not fit past histories and current debates’.<sup>99</sup> Finally, in *Global Feminisms* there was no chronology: only themes, such as Life Cycles, Emotions, Identities and Politics, that provided a frame for the juxtaposition of the work of artists from very diverse backgrounds.

#### Photo, video and medium-specific curatorial projects.

Finally, a third category of feminist exhibitions are photo-video, performance and new art media curatorial projects. These exhibitions, such as <Hers>, generally take place in alternative spaces which challenge the idea that the only place for exhibitions is the gallery or the museum. Additionally, there have been projects that explored the possibilities offered by another medium, the cyberworld. These exhibitions – such as *Cyberfem. Feminisms on the electronic landscape*, curated by Ana Martinez-Collado at Espai d’art contemporani de Castello (2006-2007) or *HACKFemEAST* at Kunstraum Kreuzberg, Bethanien Berlin (2008) – are feminist curatorial projects that combined live performances and online presentations on issues of cyberfeminism and activism.<sup>100</sup>

#### **Changing the museum from an organizational and ethical perspective provided by feminism.**

In this research project I propose that the aim of feminist curatorship is not only to present feminist exhibitions or exhibitions of works by women artists; the ultimate goal of feminism is to change institutions on a structural or organizational level.

According to Nancy Proctor, museum workers need to undertake the ‘much harder but more enduring and productive task of radically structuring and organizing’ the

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<sup>99</sup> Renee Baert, ‘Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies’, *n.paradoxa*, 12 (March 2000), 6-9 (p. 8).

<sup>100</sup> Costache and Tanaka, ‘Dancing with Emma Goldman’, p. 7.

institution.<sup>101</sup> For Molesworth, it is not enough to insert women artists or feminist artists into rooms that have been structured by their very absence.<sup>102</sup> When this happens, the galleries or exhibitions dedicated to art made by women or feminist artists are inevitably ghettoized, because women's works or feminist works are at odds with the narrative unfolding in the rest of the institution. For D'Souza, the museum does not just have to make space physically for feminist art, but it should also make space for feminism conceptually.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, Molesworth explains that the part of feminism that interests her the most is the 'reorganization of the institutions that govern us, as well as those that we govern';<sup>104</sup> for D'Souza, there is a need to reorient and 'reimagine the institution' according to the political imperatives of feminism.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, I suggest that changing the structure of a museum is also related to changing it from an ethical point of view. According to Hein, changing the museum on an organizational level could be based on an ethical and theoretical feminist perspective. The development of a feminist theory within the museum would enable it to fulfill an ethical function in society and to speak of social issues such as gender and race equality.<sup>106</sup> For Hein, feminist theory is an appropriate theory to harness in reconstructing the museum because feminist ideas are compatible with modifications suggested to museums by other theories such as post-colonial and queer theory.<sup>107</sup>

However, feminist scholarship has not proposed practical solutions as to how to change the museum from an organizational point of view. Most feminist literature has instead focused on increasing the number of museum directors, senior curators and changing the constitution of museum boards. For Reilly,<sup>108</sup> it is essential to have more women in positions of power in order to change the museum. Other scholars such as Hilarie M. Sheets have denounced the gender imbalance in the number of museum directors and

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101 Nancy Proctor, 'Feminism, Participation and Matrixial Encounters: Towards a Radical, Sustainable Museum (Practice)', in *Politics in a Glass Case*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 49.

102 In Aruna D'Souza, 'Float the Boat!: finding a place for feminism in the museum', in *Modern Women, Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. by Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 59.

103 Ibid. p. 57.

104 Molesworth, p. 499.

105 D'Souza, p. 59.

106 Hein, 'Redressing the Museum in Feminist Theory', p 39.

107 Ibid. p. 29.

108 Reilly, 'Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes'

senior managers. For Sheets, there is a gender gap in museum directorship positions while generally women earn less than their male counterparts.<sup>109</sup> Although women have a strong presence as museum professionals, they are disadvantaged in the decision-making process and this has consequences for curatorial decisions.<sup>110</sup>

According to Guerrilla Girls artist 'Frida Kahlo' the majority of museums' governing bodies and boards are composed of male members. These boards have acquisition committees to whom curators present objects for possible purchase; consequently, board members influence what the museum buys and displays.<sup>111</sup> According to Reilly, these boards of directors need to change, so that women on them will ensure that more works by women are purchased and displayed.<sup>112</sup>

However, it is not clear whether women in positions of power will facilitate change by linking their curatorial activities to feminist issues. Simply increasing the number of women directors and changing the constitution of museum boards does not mean that institutions are going to increase their support for feminist artists and favour feminist projects.<sup>113</sup> For Elizabeth MacGregor, change only happens when such women consciously question the status quo.<sup>114</sup> Even when women have a feminist agenda, they can face difficulties in converting their institutions and can experience pressures regarding money and attendance rates. For example, Rollig, director of Lentos, the Museum of Modern Art in Linz since 2004, had a feminist agenda, but she experienced concerns about power, money and administration being under 'permanent pressure' from politicians and the media.<sup>115</sup> Thus, changing the museum and embedding feminist theory is not only related to women in positions of power and changing the constitution of museum boards.

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109 Hilarie M. Sheets, 'Study Finds a Gender Gap at the Top Museums', *The New York Times*, 7 March 2014.

110 M. Blake, 'Why Are There Not More Women Museum Directors', in *Management in Museums*, ed. by K. Moore, (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p. 187.

111 In Eleanor J. Bader, 'Women Artists Still Face Discrimination' <<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/8971-women-artists-still-face-discrimination>>

112 Reilly, 'Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes', <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>>

113 Deepwell, 'Feminist curatorial strategies since the 1970s', p. 66. .

114 Elisabeth. A. MacGregor, 'The situation of women curators, New feminist art criticism' in *New feminist art criticism: critical strategies*, ed. by Katy Deepwell, (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 74.

115 Stella Rollig, 'Working on Rafts', p. 85.

I content that the change in museum has to be structural and affect the whole institution. For example, organizational change literature has proposed practical solutions to change the museum which can be applied to patriarchal institutions. Authors such as Gail Lord and Barry Lord have focused on changing the museum's mission statement, a document which clarifies the objectives of the museum and the essential purpose for which it exists. For these authors, in order to change the museum on an organizational level it is necessary to amend the mission statement or to formulate a new one.<sup>116</sup> The museum's new mission statement will clarify the direction in which the organization needs to move and will help identify strategies to fulfill this mission.

Although organizational change literature is market-driven and focused on making the museum economically successful,<sup>117</sup> for authors such as Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell it is possible to apply organizational change strategies to an ethical institution's purpose and values.<sup>118</sup> In my thesis I will consider whether it is possible to change the museum's mission statement so that feminist values can be incorporated into the museum's core mission and purpose. As a result, the museum can be transformed into an ethical institution where both feminist and gender equality values are present.

However, the task of reorganizing the museum on a structural level has not been sufficiently discussed in feminist scholarship. For Dimitrakaki, feminist criticism has not involved itself in a critique of the capitalist art institution or in a theoretical analysis of the museum focusing on the political, social and economic implications of the curatorial act as a feminist intervention.<sup>119</sup> The discussions regarding feminist curating have tended to focus on the production and display of feminist and women's work and on adding more women artists or feminist artists to the museum.<sup>120</sup> For Dimitrakaki, feminist and international critique is not preoccupied with transforming the institution

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116 Gail Lord and Barry Lord, *The manual of museum planning*, (London : Stationery Office, 1999), p. 46.

117 N. Kotler and P. Kotler, *Museum strategy and marketing : designing missions, buildings, audiences, generating revenue and resources*, (San Francisco, Calif. : Jossey Bass, 1998), p. 59.

118 R. R. Janes, 'Embracing organizational change in museums. A work in Progress', in *Museum management and marketing* , ed. by R. R. Janes and R. Sandell, (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 68.

119 Dimitrakaki, 'Feminist Politics and Institutional Critiques: Imagining a Curatorial Commons', in *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Katrin Kivimaa, (Tallin: Tallin University Press, 2013), p. 10

120 Ibid., p. 8.

and it is now ‘at risk of being contained within the past of feminism (...) squeezed into a plea for reinstalling women artists of long gone times’.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, the reorganization of the museum on a structural level has not been put into practice in feminist art institutions. According to Marcia Tucker, feminism has not succeeded in penetrating the actual structure of art institutions.<sup>122</sup> For Dimitrakaki and Perry, feminism has been borrowed by and added to the museum for its novelty but has not realized structural change.<sup>123</sup> In fact, for these authors, the institution has managed to include women artists and exclude feminist politics.<sup>124</sup>

In my thesis I will therefore rethink feminist curatorship based on the analysis of the case study institutions and the interviews I conducted at each. I will redefine feminist curatorship as a practice whose objective is the museum’s reform and a strategy which dismantles museological authority, challenges the structures of institutions and breaks down the rules of the establishment and of patriarchal culture.

The component of feminist curatorship that aims to change institutions is consequently related to power and politics. According to Dimitrakaki, the objective is to curate ‘politically’ as a feminist; that is, to curate so that oppressive power structures become exposed and contested.<sup>125</sup> Also, according to Saisha Grayson, feminist curatorship is about ‘bringing access to the political into the discussion of contemporary art’, as well going ‘against power structures, about the dispersal of authority and about collaborative work’.<sup>126</sup> Finally, for Emilie Bouvard having a feminist curatorial strategy is about putting into practice ‘your ideas as a feminist’.<sup>127</sup> For her, feminist curatorship is a broad strategy which consists of bringing into the museum what feminist theory is about: changing the mainstream history of art, including the presence of the marginalized, deconstructing and destabilizing the structures of society, involving audiences in the

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121 Ibid., p.10.

122 In Juli Carson, ‘On Discourse as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics’, p. 209.

123 Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, ‘How to be seen: an introduction to feminist politics, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions’, p. 8.

124 Ibid., p. 20.

125 Dimitrakaki, ‘Feminist Politics and Institutional Critiques: Imagining a Curatorial Commons’, p. 12.

126 Saisha Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

127 Emilie Bouvard, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

museum and focusing on education.<sup>128</sup> Finally, Pethick defines feminist curatorship as bringing feminist values to and embedding them within the museum and breaking down structures for normative values and behaviours that exist in society.<sup>129</sup>

To sum up, based on my interviews and the study of my three case studies, I define feminist curatorship as a broad strategy and an intervention that takes place in institutions to restructure the museum. In my thesis I will take a multi-layered approach to understanding how feminism aims to restructure the museum. I contend that feminist curatorship is about changing the institution at three levels:

- a) Changing acquisition policies, reinterpreting collection and changing exhibitions
- b) Favours collaboration and changing working relationships by subverting the notions of authority, power and hierarchy. Collaboration is a feminist feature because it involves a relationship in which a degree of power-sharing must take place;<sup>130</sup> there must be consensus and dialogue and working across differences. Organizations are by definition hierarchical and feminism aims at destabilizing the institution, challenging hierarchies and power structures.
- c) Changing the relationship with the museum's audiences. The criticism of and reflection upon deconstructing the structures of society is a feature of feminism. Therefore, feminist curatorship is interested in community involvement and in finding ways of including audiences in museums, and consequently changing society and heightening people's awareness of political and social issues.

### **Institutions' resistance to change and to feminism.**

Finally, in this research project I suggest that changing the structure of institutions and embedding feminism is an important challenge, and that institutions are often resistant to change and to feminism. According to Elaine Heumann Gurian, there is institutional resistance to change among the majority of the world's museum professionals.<sup>131</sup> The

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128 Emilie Bouvard, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

129 Emily Pethick, Personal Interview, 17 January 2013.

130 Gill Coleman and Ann Rippin, 'Putting Feminist Theory to Work: Collaboration as a Means towards Organizational Change', *Organization*, 7 (November 2000), 573-587, (p. 586)

131 E. Heumann Gurian, 'Celebrating those who Create Change' in *Hot topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed by F. Cameron and L. Kelly, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), p. XI.

author distinguishes between the ‘classicist’, object-oriented museum and the ‘inclusionist’ museum, committed to wide accessibility and more able to experiment with interactivity and controversial subject matters. For Heumann Gurian, many museums, especially those aligned with the social elite, resist change because they aspire to remain in the ‘classic camp’.<sup>132</sup> For Heumann Gurian, superficial change happens when ‘classicist’ museums develop activities that might be seen as gestures in response to external pressures while the museum’s core remains untouched; in these cases the structure of the museum is not affected.<sup>133</sup> Also Hein explains that superficial change happens when programmes and practices in the museum are changed without any appeal to theory.<sup>134</sup> Superficial change is generally based on concepts copied from other institutions and success is measured in terms of popular appeal and marketability but the institution’s core does not change.

In my thesis I contend that there is a fundamental contradiction between feminist values and institutional values, which is the reason behind the lack of embeddedness of feminism in the museum and institutional resistance to change. According to Aruna D’Souza, institutional structures, and not individuals, are the ‘main enemies’ of feminism. For this reason, changing institutional structures is a challenge, even when the people who constitute the institution are willing to change. According to D’Souza, in 1971 Nancy Spero wrote a letter to Lucy Lippard in which she stated that ‘Dear Lucy, the enemies of women’s liberation in the arts will be crushed. Love, Nancy’. For D’Souza, ‘Spero may have imagined those enemies to be a set of individuals resistant to feminist artists’. However, ‘it is clear that now, almost forty years later, the resistances are more likely to be those of institutional protocols and realities’.<sup>135</sup>

According to Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe<sup>136</sup>, feminism is an alternative and is situated at the margins or the periphery. Both in historical research and in exhibitions informed by feminist theory, there is an understanding of art production by female artists that remains preoccupied with the idea that these artists and works present an alternative to the production of male artists. For Schor, the resistance of institutions to feminism

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132 Ibid., p. XIV.

133 Ibid., p. XIV

134 Hein, Redressing the Museum in Feminist Theory’, p. 39.

135 D’Souza, ‘Float the Boat!: Finding a Place for Feminism in the Museum’, p. 69.

136 Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe, ‘Preface’, in *Feminisms is still our name*, p. xiii.

happens because by definition feminism is at the margins and for the margins and will always be considered a risk. The institutions are the core, the centre, which is by definition not feminist and will not reward overt demonstrations of feminism.<sup>137</sup> In addition, for Maria Fernandez, the core results from the creation of margins: institutions owe their position in the centre to the marginalization of other spaces and other alternatives such as feminism.<sup>138</sup>

For Dimitrakaki and Perry there is a danger in the institutional assimilation of feminism. According to these authors, feminism's preservation in the museum neutralizes its politics and when radical feminist ideas become part of the institutions they become tamed.<sup>139</sup> For example, the Guerrilla Girls were embraced by the very institutions they critiqued, contributing to the Venice Biennale in 2005 and to an exhibition of their work at Tate Modern in 2006.<sup>140</sup> For Dimitrakaki and Perry, there is always a contradiction between 'the subversion of power relations promised by feminism and the regulation of the subversive performed by the art institution'.<sup>141</sup> Whenever feminist art is institutionalized, there is a process of consolidation, classification and categorization that reduces the artworks to mere objects.<sup>142</sup> For example, for Jones, when an iconic work like *The Dinner Party* is institutionalized it no longer has the political efficacy it had when it was an 'underground presence'. Installed in the Sackler Center, it does not have the capacity to challenge the institution any more.<sup>143</sup>

Despite the positive changes at the Brooklyn Museum and at MoMA, the *Modern Women's Project* at the Sackler Center was criticized by various feminist authors who accused both institutions of 'institutionalizing', containing and not embedding

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137 Schor, 'She Demon Spawn from Hell', <[http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira\\_2005.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/pepc/meaning/03/Schor-Mira_2005.html)>

138 Mira Schor, Emma Amos, Susan Bee, Johanna Drucker, Maria Fernandez, Amelia Jones, Shriley Kaneda, Helen Molesworth, Howardena Pindell, Collier Schorr, Faith Wilding, 'Contemporary Feminisms: art practice, theory and activism – an intergenerational perspective', *Art Journal*, 58: 4 (Winter 1999), 9-29, (p. 16)

139 Dimitrakaki and Perry, 'How to be seen: an introduction to feminist politics, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions', p. 1.

140 Heath, 'Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Blockbuster Retrospective', p. 21.

141 Dimitrakaki and Perry, 'How to be seen: an introduction to feminist politics, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions', p. 1.

142 Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe and Malin Hedlin Hayden, 'A Serious Suggestion: Give up the Goat Art Collections and Feminist Critique in Sweden', in *Politics in a Glass Case*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press), p. 78.

143 Amelia Jones, 'History Makers', *Frieze Magazine*, 105, (March 2007), 134-139, (p. 136).



feminism. For Jones, the opening of the Sackler Center and the *Feminist Future* symposium at MoMA in 2007 were a manifestation of an institutionalization or containment of feminism. According to Jones, the institutionalization of feminism at the Sackler Center and at MoMA was dominated by a middle-class version of feminism while other versions, such as the highly activist feminism of the 1970s, were excluded.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, for Rosalyn Deutsche and Miwon Kwon, the art market was the key motivator of those exhibitions and events and was a crucial element in explaining them.<sup>145</sup> The artworks presented in *Global Feminisms* – as well as in *WACK!* – were viable in the market, while works that were not so easily marketable, such as photographic, object-based and activist-driven feminist practices were left out of these exhibitions.<sup>146</sup> In *Feminist Time*, Aruna D’Souza, Miwon Kwon and Deutsche criticized the institutional legitimization and ghettoization of feminism at the Sackler Center. For Deutsche, even the fact that the Center was labelled ‘feminist’ was isolating and restricting as the category ‘feminist art’ was an instrument of ‘containment’ at the Center.<sup>147</sup>

For Muller, there had not been a real embeddedness of feminism at the Brooklyn Museum. For the artist, the Museum is an encyclopedic institution, in which there are important omissions and exclusions of what is worth presenting. Feminism was missing in an encyclopedic institution like the Brooklyn Museum and was only added to it. Transformative, real embeddedness did not take place; the museum did not aim toward changing structures or rethinking the institution.<sup>148</sup>

According to Reilly in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (2009), the Brooklyn Museum was not prepared for a feminist centre and added feminism without truly embedding it. Although the Museum had publicly announced its initiative to support feminist art, both the institution and its curators were particularly challenged by the concept of feminism and feminist art. The staff struggled ‘enormously’ with the

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144 Ibid. p. 137.

145 Rosalyn Deutsche, Aruna d’Souza, Miwon Kwon, Ulrike Muller, Mignon Dixon and Senam Okudzeto, ‘Feminist Time: A Conversation’, p. 52.

146 Amelia Jones, ‘1970/2007: The Return of Feminist Art’, <<http://x-traonline.org/article/19702007-the-return-of-feminist-art/>>

147 Rosalyn Deutsche, Aruna d’Souza, Miwon Kwon, Ulrike Muller, Mignon Dixon and Senam Okudzeto, ‘Feminist Time: A Conversation’, p. 61

148 Ulrike Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

implications of housing a dedicated space for feminist art, perceived by many as separatist. According to Reilly, the staff challenged her again and again, with questions such as ‘What was feminist art? What does it look like?’ Reilly had to repeatedly explain what feminism meant for her: that feminism was a ‘subjective, context-related term’, that ‘feminism to one is not necessarily feminism to another’ and that feminism should not be perceived as a threat in the Museum.<sup>149</sup>

Similarly, the Modern Women’s Project at MoMA met with criticism and skepticism. Various authors and even MoMA curators such as Roxana Marcoci considered that feminism had been ‘inevitably’ institutionalized at the Museum.<sup>150</sup> Saltz denounced the fact that there were signs of ghettoization, that the change at the museum was superficial and that he did not believe in hanging works in museums according to the artists’ gender. However, for Saltz the museum had been so negligent in this area that any effort to redress this welcomed.<sup>151</sup>

Seven years after the beginning of the Modern Women’s Project, it is still unclear whether there has been structural change and whether the Project has had a significant impact on the Museum. Additionally, there was a change in the curatorial guard that made the *Modern Women’s Project* possible. Butler, who was chief curator of drawings and instrumental in ensuring the success of the Project left the Museum in 2013 for the Hammer Museum. At the present time, just one of the curators who made the Modern Women’s Project possible, Ann Temkin, is still head of a department. Finally, in June 2015, in *Women in the Art World*, Reilly reported that just seven percent of the works on display at MoMA were by women. However, the Museum is still featuring exhibitions by women artists; for example, there were three major solo shows in the spring and summer 2015, by Bjork, Yoko Ono and Zoe Leonard.<sup>152</sup>

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149 In Jones, ‘On feminist art history and curatorial practice: An interview with Maura Reilly, Connie Butler and Amelia Jones’, pp. 34, 35.

150 Roxana Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

151 in Judith Dobrynski, ‘Women Artists in Museums: Take a Clue from an NGA Show’, *Art Journal*, 10 June 2009, [http://www.artsjournal.com/realcleararts/2009/06/women\\_artists\\_museums.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/realcleararts/2009/06/women_artists_museums.html)

152 Reilly, ‘Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures and Fixes’, in *Women in the Art World*, <<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>>

### **Working at the margins: Feminism in alternative spaces.**

Finally, this thesis explores whether feminist values can be more efficiently embedded in counter-institutions or institutions located at the margins. According to Jones, feminism cannot change established institutions; it should focus on alternative spaces and venues, places that are ‘minor’ in scale but major in their capacity to affect the art world and broader audiences. These places can take more risks and work with feminist and transgressive artists.<sup>153</sup>

Alternative spaces were popular in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. These venues were conceived as challenges to the museum and to normative art history. Examples of these spaces are the Feminist Studio Workshop and The Woman’s Building in Los Angeles, both founded in 1970 by Chicago, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and Arlene Raven and closed in 1991; the project Womanhouse, a feminist installation organized by Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in 1972 in an abandoned Hollywood house; the New Museum, founded by Marcia Tucker in New York in 1977, and the A.I.R. gallery founded by a women artists’ collective to exhibit their work.

However, many alternative spaces slowly disappeared in the 1980s and 1990s, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the large cutback for the arts that followed.<sup>154</sup> However, nowadays there are still alternative spaces and venues such as A.I.R. and the New Museum, as well as ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California, the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn and the Blk Grrrl Book Fair in Los Angeles.

Additionally, there are around fifty women’s museums around the world, most of them established in the 1980s and associated with second-wave feminism. These museums are alternative non-profit organizations whose fundamental goal is to research and exhibit the lives, history and artistic expressions of women. Most of them are also community centres and are focused on networking and collaborating with similar-sized

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<sup>153</sup>Amelia Jones, ‘On Sexism in the Art World’, in *Women in the Art World*,  
<<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/on-sexism-in-the-art-world/>>

<sup>154</sup> Jenni Sorkin, ‘The Feminist Nomad: The All-Woman Group Show’, in *WACK!, Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. by Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 2007, p. 459.

institutions.<sup>155</sup> The first women's museum was established by Marianne Pitzen in Bonn, Germany, in 1981. In 1982, a women's museum was established in Aarhus, in 1986 the Hidden Museum was founded in Berlin and in 1988 the Museo Delle Donne in Merano, Italy, was founded as a private initiative of the collector Evelyn Ortner.

Feminist scholarship on women's museums is scarce: some perspectives on women's museums were offered in the issue *Gender Perspectives on Cultural Heritage and Museums* in *Museum International*, published in 1991; also, in 2013 Elke Krasny published *Women's: Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminist, Education, History and Art*. However, there is a need for further research on the relationship between women's museums and feminist curatorial practices. For example, Krasny's publication was the only one which brought together voices from different fields of feminist curatorship and women's museums. According to Krasny, there has not been a comprehensive analysis or critical historiography on women's museums and their curatorial strategies, especially in relation to feminist curatorship.<sup>156</sup>

With my third case study, the Women's Museum in Aarhus, I will study a small-scale, alternative institution where feminism has been embedded since its foundation. The Women's Museum in Aarhus is a grassroots institution founded in 1982 by a group of women active in the feminist movement. The Museum is a small-scale institution which has experienced the problems and advantages of being at the margins. For example, over the years the Museum has had little resources and, consequently, has experienced issues of sustainability, but it is also more involved with the community and has experimented with non-hierarchical forms of management and collective leadership. However, the Museum gained official state recognition in the mid-1990s and became part of the established museum world. It then grew in terms of exhibition space and programming, had an increasing budget and became more professionalized and specialized with a gradual division of labour. As a consequence, the Museum underwent major changes in its organizational structure which demonstrated the challenges of maintaining a commitment to feminist values while being more professionalized and institutionalized.

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<sup>155</sup>Elke Krasny, *Women's: Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History and Art*, (Vienna, Locker Verlag, 2013), p. 12.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

## Chapters.

In the following chapters I will focus on how feminist curatorship can affect and change the structures of art institutions. I will also explore the resistance to feminism in these institutions and whether feminist values can be more efficiently embedded in alternative institutions such as the Women's Museum in Aarhus.

In the methodology chapter I will focus on the process of designing my fieldwork phase and my data collection strategies, and how and why I adopted a feminist approach to examine how feminist theory can contribute to organizational change and art institutions.

### Chapter 2. *Rethinking feminism and reinterpreting collections.*

In this chapter I will explore feminist curatorial strategies, studying how feminist ideas infiltrate art institutions and change them. However, I will also show how feminism is institutionalized and changed by the institutions it infiltrates.

The three institutions studied are different in their methodological approach to feminism. Each of them adopts a particular feminist methodology and different curatorial strategies. I will show how the three institutions examined adapted feminism to their particular history, mission, resources and budget, rethinking feminism, reinterpreting their permanent collections and changing acquisitions policies and exhibitions. For example, the Women's Museum in Aarhus is focused on making women's history visible, while MoMA's strategy since 2006 has been to include more women in its collections and exhibitions. Finally, the Sackler Center's mission is to apply a feminist methodology to art history, history and anything within the visual field of creative endeavour.

### Chapter 3. *Collaboration, leadership and organizational change.*

Collaboration is a feminist strategy that subverts the notion of curatorial authorship, authority and power. In this chapter I will study how feminism is changing work structures in the museum. Additionally, I will focus on the relationship between power and collaboration and how it affects the institution. Central to my study will be the role of women and men in positions of power in changing museums, and how they are encouraging collaborative approaches.

Specifically, in this chapter I will explore the impact of collaboration in my three case studies. Collaboration, anti-hierarchy and flexibility are essential characteristics of the Women's Museum in Aarhus, partially because its founders were influenced by feminist theory, but also because it was a small-scale institution: collaboration in Aarhus is not just a feminist strategy but also a tool for survival. However, as the Museum grew and there was more professionalization and specialization it lost part of its collaborative and anti-hierarchical approach. In the present time, it has become more institutionalized but it has also maintained a commitment to its collaborative spirit. Additionally, the Museum still works closely with organizations of a similar scale to its own when looking for joint funding and programming collective exhibitions.

At the Brooklyn Museum and MoMA, collaboration has been a central strategy in bringing about organizational change. There has been an impulse to work more collaboratively due to the influence of feminism but also due to a larger institutional desire to strengthen collaboration. Feminist infiltration happened at the same time as an institutional mandate to unify departments and to improve inter-departmental collaboration. Consequently, in both institutions it is unclear whether collaboration is motivated by feminist theory or related to major institutional changes in the museum.

In both institutions, collaboration and organizational change have been partly due to the efforts of two philanthropists who have cooperated with the museums' directors to bring about organizational change. At MoMA, inter-departmental collaboration has been actively encouraged by feminist philanthropist Sarah Peter and Museum Director Glenn Lowry; at the Brooklyn Museum, changes are the result of the partnership and alliance of Elizabeth A. Sackler and Museum Director Arnold Lehman.

#### Chapter 4. *Audience and community engagement*

In this chapter I will explore how my three case studies are related to society, to their communities, to audiences and to their neighbourhoods. Organizations such as the Women's Museum in Aarhus have found it easier to develop relationships with their neighbourhood. The Museum has been an activist institution, which has been involving visitors and reaching out to the community since its foundation. It has also maintained a commitment to its community and to social engagement to the present day, embracing

criticism, political activism and involving artists. MoMA is opening up to the community through a variety of programmes, especially through the Department of Education. However, programmes to enable the community to access the Museum have not been sufficiently incorporated into the Modern Women's Project. Finally, I will show that, although one of the main interests of the curators of the Brooklyn Museum is the involvement of the community in the Museum, these efforts have not been sufficiently incorporated into the programme of the Sackler Center.

# Methodology

In my thesis, I will use a feminist methodology to study how feminist curatorship has influenced the structure of art institutions. In the following paragraphs, I will offer a definition of feminist methodology, explain how this methodology has impacted my thesis and discuss and analyze the feminist methods I have used for gathering data.

## **Feminist methodology.**

Feminist methodology is a research model in which feminist concerns, theory and ethics inform the strategies for gathering and interpreting evidence.<sup>157</sup> Feminist-informed methodology gained ground as a part of the second wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Initially, feminist scholarship focused on criticism of traditional research, which was associated with a male paradigm.<sup>158</sup> Feminist scholars were concerned with the exclusion of women from traditional knowledge, arguing that the established arts and sciences had often misrepresented and excluded women. They opposed the objectivity and hierarchy of traditional methodologies<sup>159</sup> and were critical of traditional researchers for the selection of sexist and elitist research topics and methods and the exploitative relationship between researcher and participants.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, several feminist research models have been supported or employed by contemporary feminist researchers.<sup>160</sup> Firstly, a feminist empiricist model emerged in the late 1960s;<sup>161</sup> in this model, knowledge was grounded in women's experiences and perceptions. However, one of the problems for the project

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157 Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, *Feminist methodology. Challenges and choices*, (London: Sage, 2002), p. 16.

158 Ibid., p. 15.

159 Gayle Letherby, *Feminist research in theory and practice*, (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), p. 67.

160 Alison M. Jaggar, *Just methods. An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader*, (Boulder, London: Paradigm, 2008)

161 Ibid., p. 269.



of grounding feminist research in women's experiences is that women's heterogeneity makes it impossible for any subgroup to represent all women.<sup>162</sup>

A second model is a methodology based on feminist standpoint theory. This model is rooted in an analysis of the diversity of women's experiences and recognizes the role of emotions.<sup>163</sup> Feminist standpoint theory, which has been developed in the work of authors such as Sandra Harding, goes beyond feminist empiricism because it gives weight not only to experience but also to the roles played by both the political commitments and the social locations of women.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, according to feminist standpoint theory, women are the most appropriate researchers to study other women because they are more suited to identifying with and understanding women's experiences.<sup>165</sup> For example, for Yoland Wadsworth, feminist research is not just research on women; it is also research 'for' and 'by' women.<sup>166</sup>

However, standpoint theory has been considered essentialist, as it seems to identify a unified category of women, ignoring women's heterogeneity and overlooking significant differences within women such as class, ethnicity and race.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, for some feminists, standpoint theory favours women who are in a more privileged social location, who then would speak on behalf of all women.<sup>168</sup> Finally, there are doubts as to whether research based on the assumptions of differences between men and women are justified, especially if we understand gender identity as a social construction.

Thirdly, postmodernist theory departs from earlier feminist positions in that it views gender as a constructed and performed category. In my research, I have adopted a postmodernist approach based on Butler's *Gender Trouble*, which I have used to reflect on my data collection strategies and on my relationship with my interviewees. My research is also grounded in intersectional and transnational positions held by authors

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162 Ibid., p. 271.

163 Maeve Landman, 'Getting quality in quantitative research: a short introduction to feminist methodology and methods', *Cambridge Journals*, 65 (2006) 429-433, (p. 430).

164 Ramazanoglu and Holland, p. 60; Jaggar, p. 303.

165 Diane L. Wolf, 'Situating feminist dilemmas in fieldwork', in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, ed. by Diane L. Wolf, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p. 13.

166 Yoland Wadsworth, 'What is feminist research? Bridging the Gap: Feminisms and Participatory Action Research Conference', Conference Papers, June 22-24, (2001) Boston College, p. 2.

167 Wolf, p.13.

168 Jaggar, p. 306.

such as Crenshaw, bell hooks and Talpade Mohanty, and curators such as Nochlin and Reilly.

These author's views challenge earlier feminisms' tendencies to universalize the female experience and make a departure away from binary thinking, such as masculine/feminine, women/men and white/black. They claim that the concept 'woman' is not universal as 'women' are not a homogenous group; instead, 'women' are divided by socio-economic and ethnic variables. Feminists influenced by postmodernism, intersectionality or transnationality do not aim to reveal universal truths about women's experiences. On the contrary, they acknowledge that many stories, multiple and contradictory, may be told.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, these theories emphasize the idea that categories such as 'man', 'woman', 'masculinity' and 'femininity' 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality' have meaning only in the context of historically and culturally-specific discourses. They deny any possibility of any universal experience of being a 'woman', as the experiences of those categorized as woman are shaped by the available discourses of gender. Finally, these positions rethink what it means to be a feminist in radically different socio-cultural, political, racial and class situations, and reject the idea that people from different nations, ethnicities, races and classes have the same subjectivities and experiences with gender inequality.<sup>170</sup>

Using these research models I have explored three feminist methodological characteristics that have influenced my data collection strategies and my relationship with the interviewees: reflexivity, subjectivity and consideration to the concept of power.

## **Reflexibility**

One of the main characteristics of feminist practice is its reflexivity; that is, learning and engaging in critical reflexion while creating new knowledge. For example, for Judith A. Cook and Mary M. Fonow, reflexivity in feminist methodology refers to feminisms' tendency to examine the nature of the research process, especially focusing on the

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. p. 344, 345.

<sup>170</sup> Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, 'Curators' preface', in *Global Feminisms*, ed. by Reilly and Nochlin, p. 13.

relationship between researcher and researched.<sup>171</sup> This relationship can be hierarchical and unequal, is related to power issues and consequently is one of the most central ethical issues for feminists.<sup>172</sup> In this research project, I have reflected on my own position as a researcher and I have considered how my questions, methods for gathering evidence, criteria for interpreting the evidence, and conclusions are affected by my own social and personal situation.

## **Power**

Secondly, a distinctive characteristic of feminist methodology is an interest on the nature of power in the research process. Early feminist methodologies adopted an 'optimistic view' of power relationships between the researcher and the researched.<sup>173</sup> Feminists rejected the artificial separation of researchers and researched, changing it into an egalitarian relationship of friendship and reciprocity. However, third-wave feminists positions have critiqued this position, as they consider that the relationship between researcher and researched is more complex and could never be egalitarian or reciprocal.<sup>174</sup> For third-wave feminists, the researcher would always hold the power as he or she makes the decisions about the topic of research and how to conduct, analyse and disseminate it.<sup>175</sup> However, the research respondent can also be very powerful as it is he or she who holds the data, and he or she can be in a position of power. Specifically, intersectional positions are especially valuable to analyse these relationships as intersectionality provides a unique analysis of power and inequality. For example, intersectional knowledge projects acknowledge how the distinctive social location of individuals and groups influence power relations.

In my research, I have considered how power relations with the participants influenced knowledge production, the researched, the research and myself and I have reflected on the disparity of power and its influence on both the researcher and the researched.

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171 Judith A. Cook and Mary E. Fonow, *Beyond methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991)

172 Wolf, p. 1.

173 Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner, 'Feminist methodologies and epistemologies', in *Handbook of 21st Century Sociology* ed. by Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), p. 40.

174 Doucet and Mauthner, p. 40; Wolf, 19.

175 Wolf, p. 19.

Moreover, I have been aware of the situations in which the people studied could exercise power over me. When conducting my interviews, I was aware that some of the interviewees could be in a position of power, but I was careful that it did not impact my research. Finally, I did not take decisions unilaterally or without connection with the people interviewed and I discussed matters of confidentiality and validity with the people involved in the research. For example, I submitted parts of my thesis whenever required by the interviewees who were interested in reading the sections in which they were quoted.

### **Subjectivity**

Finally, feminism, in opposition to traditional scientific research, places importance on the idea of subjectivity. For traditional non-feminist researchers, the best methods are those most successful in producing objective knowledge, which has to be collected in a purely objective way.<sup>176</sup> Scientific knowledge-seeking is intended to be objective and protected from political interests in order to produce less distorted results. However, feminist methodology is concerned with replacing the norm of objectivity of traditional research, encouraging some subjective principles of research.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, feminism is a political movement, which acknowledges that research cannot be morally and politically neutral<sup>178</sup> and that the researcher should have political and ethical commitments.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, feminist scholarship should employ subjective principles of research, encouraging taking sides and personal commitment to the feminist cause. Finally, feminism values the personal, the private and the political as objects of study, and emotion and reflexivity are considered as essential values of research.<sup>180</sup>

For example, the core insight of intersectional knowledge and transnationality projects destabilize claims to universal truth, as they acknowledge the influence of the subjectivity, social location, race, gender, ethnicity and class of the researcher. The social location of the feminist researcher; that is, his or her race, gender, ethnicity and class, shapes the results of his or her analysis and plays a role in the research process.

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176 Letherby, p. 73.

177 Ibid., p. 69.

178 Jaggar, p. 374

179 Ramazanoglu and Holland, p.16

180 Letherby, p. 73.

The researcher is not an invisible, anonymous and objective voice of authority, but a real individual with specific cultural beliefs, behaviours and interests.<sup>181</sup>

When doing my research, I considered my social location as researcher, and how my questions, methods and conclusions are affected by my own position and situation. Rather than presenting my research in a passive voice, in this thesis I have reflected on how I chose my research topic, on my techniques for gathering evidence and on how I chose my criteria for interpreting the evidence.<sup>182</sup>

### **Feminist research methods.**

In the following paragraphs, I will examine feminist research methods for data collection. Most feminist scholars have advocated for qualitative research methods; during the 1980s, much of the debate on feminist research was focused on finding appropriate methods consistent with feminist values. Feminists criticized the traditional use of quantitative methods and argued for the use of qualitative methods, which were considered more appropriate to produce data for feminist research. Qualitative methods had the potential to offer a more human, collaborative and less hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched.<sup>183</sup>

For example, in her article 'Interviewing women: A Contradiction in Terms'<sup>184</sup>, Ann Oakley criticized the traditional criteria for interviewing and argued for the value of the qualitative interview for feminist research. According to Oakley, in traditional interviewing there was a distance between the interviewer and the interviewee; the interviewer did not give information and did not reveal her feelings to the researched.<sup>185</sup> There was a power dimension of research inherent in the way in which a more powerful

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181 Sandra Harding, *Feminism and methodology: social sciences issues*, (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1987), p. 9.

182 Jaggar, p. 345.

183 Ibid., p.155.

184 Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms' in *Doing feminist research* ed. by Helen Roberts, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp.30-62.

185 Ibid., p. 32-41.

woman asked the questions and a less powerful woman gave the answers.<sup>186</sup> For Oakley, a feminist interview should be a mutual interaction in which women share information about themselves as a means to confront distance, and researchers answer questions when asked. This participatory model of research aims to produce non-hierarchical research relationships to break down the separation between researcher and respondents, who can play an active part in the research process.<sup>187</sup>

However, some feminist scholars have criticized the potentially exploitative nature of in-depth qualitative interviewing.<sup>188</sup> The closeness of feminist interviews may encourage private revelations that could expose the researched to greater exploitation.<sup>189</sup> Quantitative methods and traditional methods could be less harmful for respondents. According to Letherby, respondents should know how to protect themselves from friendly interviewers, especially when researchers come from the more privileged social classes and offer interpretations of the lives of those who are less privileged. Finally, Letherby promotes the appropriate use of both qualitative and quantitative methods as feminist research tools. She considers that qualitative methods are not the only legitimate approach, and that feminism could use a multiplicity of techniques.<sup>190</sup> Other scholars such as Harding have also suggested that there are no distinctive research methods that are exclusively employed by feminist researchers<sup>191</sup> and that any method can be used in a pro-feminist or non-feminist way.<sup>192</sup> The difference between feminist and non-feminist research lies not in the type of methods used, but rather in the way conventional methods are used to meet research goals.

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186 Letherby, p. 82.

187 Oakley, p. 41.

188 Letherby, p. 85; Wolf, p. 19.

189 Wolf, p. 21.

190 Letherby, p. 88.

191 Harding, p. 1.

192 Letherby, p.5..

## **Data collection methods.**

In order to gather information about the art institutions studied, I have collected extensive qualitative primary data through interviews. These methods are more appropriate for producing data for feminist research because they are closer to the participants and can offer a more collaborative relationship with them. The qualitative interviews conducted have enabled me to analyse the structure, curatorial strategies and organizational change which occurred within my three case studies in depth.

During my data collection phase, I conducted one-to-one, semi-structured interviews which led to in-depth studies of the three museums. The interviews were open-ended in order to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data.<sup>193</sup> Responses were recorded using a tape recorder; although there were pre-written questions, my interviews were flexible and informal as I pursued a more casual and conversational style of interviews to allow questions to be answered in a more natural way. Finally, for analysis purposes the data for each individual interview was transcribed *verbatim* and stored securely on a PC, analysed and examined to identify contents and themes.

## **Ethical framework.**

In order to ensure that my research was ethically appropriate, I followed the ethical principles and guidelines of the University of Leicester. I obtained the informed consent of those I was going to interview and I provided them with an Information Sheet giving details about the research study and the data collection strategies, why the information was going to be collected, what type of information I wanted from them, and how it was

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<sup>193</sup> Michael Q. Patton, *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*, (London, Sage, 2002), pp. 342, 353.

going to be used; participants had the right to withdraw their participation in my research at any time. Finally, I maintained confidentiality at all times, not sharing information about a respondent with others for purposes other than research.



# **Chapter One: Rethinking feminism and reinterpreting collections.**

## **Introduction.**

In this chapter I examine how feminism infiltrates three institutions: the Women's Museum in Aarhus, MoMA in New York and The Brooklyn Museum in New York. Initially, the Women's Museum in Aarhus was going to be a pilot study which I selected because I had an interest in alternative grassroots spaces. However, the findings that emerged from the interviews conducted at Aarhus were fundamental to define my research topic and research questions. The interviews conducted at the Women's Museum in Aarhus helped me realise the importance of feminist curatorship within feminist institutions. At Aarhus, one of the few women's history museums in the world, the curator-directors have documented and made visible a history of women which is not often presented in museums. The curator-directors interviewed were interested in inquiring about women's lives, in claiming a history of women that has been forgotten and suppressed and in presenting a counter-narrative of traditional history.

Secondly, the interviews conducted at the Sackler Center and at MoMA helped me reflect on the relationship between feminist curatorship and institutions. After these interviews, I could understand and define feminist curatorship, and I could reflect on the importance of the acquisition of women's and feminist artworks and the planning of feminist exhibitions. Therefore, after these interviews I had a clear idea of how feminism influences the museum and on the important challenge of implementing feminist curatorship in the museum.

Finally, in this chapter I will demonstrate how feminism is institutionalized, changed and modified by the institutions it infiltrates. The three institutions studied have adapted feminism to their particular history, collections, resources and mission. I will show how these three institutions adopt a particular feminist methodology and curatorial strategy, how they rethink feminism and how they reinterpret history, the history of art, the history of women and their collections by deploying a feminist perspective.

### **The Sackler Center at The Brooklyn Museum, New York.**

The Sackler Center opened in 2007 at the Brooklyn Museum; the Center's mission is 'to raise awareness of feminism's cultural contributions, to educate new generations about the meaning of feminist art, to maintain a dynamic and welcoming learning environment and to present feminism in an approachable and relevant way'.<sup>194</sup>

The Sackler Center emerged from the personal vision of Elizabeth A. Sackler and was established through her generosity. Sackler defines herself as a public historian, a social and art activist and an American Indian advocate. She is President and CEO of the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, member of the National Advisory Board of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C., and President of the American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation, which she founded in 1992.<sup>195</sup>

Sackler founded the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation in 2002 to raise awareness of the contributions of women in all areas of art and culture, with a specific focus on women and feminist art exhibitions. Sackler had been interested in feminist art since she met Judy Chicago in 1988 and began collecting her work.<sup>196</sup> Through this foundation, Sackler bought Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* in 2002 and donated it to The Brooklyn Museum in the same year. The artwork had been locked away in storage at The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. since 1988. In order to showcase it, Sackler envisioned a place to house *The Dinner Party* which would be a research centre and an exhibition space at the same time.

The Center's 8,300-square-foot space, a design conceived by Susan T. Rodriguez, comprises a gallery devoted to *The Dinner Party*; the Herstory Gallery, a biographical gallery which presents exhibitions highlighting the women represented in *The Dinner Party*; The Feminist Gallery, an exhibitions space for a regular programme of feminist

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194 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/>

195 <http://repatriationfoundation.org/foundation/index.php/foundation.php>

196 Camile Morineau, 'Private Collections of Work by Women Artists: An Overview', in *Art Press*, 383, (2011), 60-63 (p. 60).

art exhibitions; The Forum, a computerized study area, and additional space for the presentation of public and educational programmes.

Sackler has been involved in the programming since the opening of the Center. For example, the Sackler Center First Awards and the exhibitions at the Center are made possible with support from the Sackler Foundation. Finally, in April 2012, Sackler announced a major donation to The Brooklyn Museum to support the establishment and salary of a permanent curator of feminist art for the institution indefinitely.<sup>197</sup>



Figure 1: Judy Chicago (American, 1939). *The Dinner Party*, 1974-1979. Sackler Center, Brooklyn Museum. Picture reproduced with permission of © Judy Chicago, ARSNY. Photo credit: © Donald Woodman.

### **Feminist methodology and curatorial strategies at the Sackler Center.**

Since the foundation of the Sackler Center in 2007 there have been two curators at the Center, Maura Reilly from 2007 to 2009 and Catherine Morris from 2009 to the present. The central position of the Center within feminist debates and the importance of redefining feminism have been essential for both curators. For Reilly, ‘it is important to

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197 Melena Ryzik, ‘Brooklyn Museum’s Feminist Art Post to Become Permanent’, *The New York Times*, 18 April 2012, <<http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/18/brooklyn-museums-feminist-art-post-to-become-permanent/>>

think where we are, where are we theoretically, conceptually, what are the issues, where are the agendas, and how are we going to shift the dialogue and maybe spark a new dialogue within feminism itself and contemporary art so people in the non-feminist art world will look at us'.<sup>198</sup>

For Sackler, Reilly and Morris, the Sackler is a feminist art centre, not a museum for women's art. For example, the word 'feminism' in the title of the Center was always in Sackler's mind.<sup>199</sup> This purpose has been maintained to the present day: according to Morris, the Sackler is not a place for showing women artists or to provide a 'back entry door to the museum' for women's art.<sup>200</sup> The strategy of providing a space for women artists to 'assert visibility' and to 'bring out women artists who have not been given gallery space' would be, for Saisha Grayson, outdated.<sup>201</sup> According to Grayson, 'maybe a generation ago getting women to have solo shows would have been a feminist project',<sup>202</sup> but in the current state of feminism and contemporary art a centre for women's art would not be productive in terms of changing 'patriarchal structures'.<sup>203</sup> For Grayson and Morris, it is necessary to do something more; specifically, it is necessary to rethink the curatorial and methodological approach to the art presented.<sup>204</sup>

With the change of curators in 2009, there has been an important shift in the approach of the Center to feminism and curatorship. Reilly's curatorial approach generally focused on feminist women artists. For example, Reilly and Linda Nochlin's inaugural exhibition, *Global Feminisms* (2007), consisted of work by eighty young women artists outside Western Europe and America but men artists and queer politics were excluded from the show.<sup>205</sup>

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198 Lynn Hershman, 'Transcript of Interview with Maura Reilly', *Stanford University Digital Collections*, 6 February 6 2007, <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

199 Linda Stern, 'Breaking Ground on Feminist Art: Elizabeth A. Sackler', in *On the Issues Magazine*, Summer 2009, <[http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009summer/2009summer\\_Stein.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009summer/2009summer_Stein.php)>

200 Catherine Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

201 Saisha Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

202 Saisha Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

203 Saisha Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

204 Saisha Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013; Catherine Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

205 Rosalyn Deutsche, Aruna d'Souza, Miwon Kwon, Ulrike Muller, Mignon Dixon and Senam Okudzeto, 'Feminist Time: A Conversation', *Grey Room*, 31 (2008), 32-67 (p. 51).

Catherine Morris had a similar approach when she took over in 2009. Morris revealed in a 2009 interview that she was ‘exploring the concept of feminism’ and investigating what made art feminist.<sup>206</sup> She explained that ‘if the Sackler Center is going to stay relevant, it is going to have to keep asking itself that exact question: what makes art feminist? Part of my job is to hash out what that feminist content is or might be’.<sup>207</sup> The only women who would be able to exhibit at the Center were women who considered themselves feminists, and ‘women who did not consider themselves as feminists, would not be included in the Center’.<sup>208</sup>

However, since 2010, Morris has been redefining the definitions of feminism and changing the methodological approach to the question of feminist art. Interviewed by the researcher in February 2013, Morris explained that she was not interested in defining feminist art, feminist artists and feminist projects any more.<sup>209</sup> The question of ‘whether a work of art is feminist or not’ did not seem ‘productive’ any more<sup>210</sup> and she did not want the Center to become a place which exclusively showed feminist artists from the 1960s to the present.

Morris considers feminism as a social, political and cultural issue which varies from place to place, from person to person, from generation to generation and involves people across race, gender, age and history, so there is no feminism but feminisms.<sup>211</sup> For Morris, issues of race, ethnicity and class cannot be separated from those of feminism and it is not possible to talk about feminism as a social movement without taking these issues into account.<sup>212</sup> For Grayson, feminism is related to ‘challenges to embedded power structures and the dispersal of authority and authorship and collaborative work’.<sup>213</sup> According to Grayson, their intention at the Center is to show artists who are working on gender issues and ‘questions of power, or the delusion of authority or

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206 Harry J. Weil, ‘Great Women Artists: A Conversation with Catherine Morris’, in *Afterimage*, vol. 38, issue 1, (2010), 14-18 (p. 17).

207 Ibid., p. 17.

208 Ibid., p. 18.

209 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

210 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013

211 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

212 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

213 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

critique', but whether these artists claim their art as feminist or not and whether they define themselves as feminists is 'irrelevant'.<sup>214</sup>

The methodology adopted at the Sackler by Morris reflects a postmodern feminist standpoint, which rejects the male-female binary in relation to feminism. For Morris, engaging with feminism should not be related to gender, as 'gender is fluid' and the women-men binary in relationship to feminism is not useful any more.<sup>215</sup> Due to this redefinition of feminism, the policy regarding exhibiting men and queer artists has changed. Morris and Grayson acknowledge that it is very important to engage with men, as well as with queer politics and queer curators in order to change the historical patriarchal narrative.<sup>216</sup>

When these curators were interviewed, they explained that their objective was to 'clarify the position' of the Center.<sup>217</sup> The main objective of Morris was to think more 'methodologically and 'strategically' about the curatorial ambitions of the Center, in order to figure out what feminism is 'curatorial and methodologically'.<sup>218</sup> For Grayson, the main curatorial approach at the Center is to use feminism as a 'strategic tool and a lens' to understand all history, art history and visual culture.<sup>219</sup> The curators interviewed wanted to be as 'expansive' and 'open' as possible about what feminism means and to use feminism to reflect on the entirety of history and art, even on those works of art or objects which appear to have nothing to do with feminism.<sup>220</sup> Consequently, the idea of 'feminism' is not necessarily present in the artworks displayed any more, but it is present in the curatorial and methodological strategy applied and in the 'the process through which they show [the artworks] and the questions they ask.'<sup>221</sup>

However, there are certain moments in art history that are highlighted at the Center. In the Feminist Art Space at the Center there have been exhibitions dedicated to feminist artists such as Patricia Cronin, Kiki Smith, Eva Hesse and Lorna Simpson and there have

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214 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

215 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

216 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

217 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

218 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

219 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

220 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

221 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

been collective exhibitions on the history of feminist art, including *Reflections on the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video*, (2009-2010).

In some of these exhibitions the curators have attempted to present feminist art in relation to other movements in history. Morris considers that it would not be productive for the Center to be a 'ghetto', isolated and separated from the rest of art history.<sup>222</sup> For example, the exhibition *Materializing "Six Years": Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art* (September 2012 – February 2013) was based on the influence of the book *Six Years* (1973) by Lucy Lippard on the development of Conceptual Art. Morris intended to express the idea that conceptual art was influenced by and developed at the same time as feminist thinking. While traditional historical narratives separate conceptual art from feminism, the exhibition sought to demonstrate that the development of conceptual art and the development of feminism occurred simultaneously, and at the same time as the development of civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement.<sup>223</sup> The exhibition showed many male artists who had nothing to do with feminism, such as Richard Serra, Joseph Kosuth and Daniel Grant, but in the context of the exhibition there was a discussion influenced by feminism.<sup>224</sup>

### **Influence of the Sackler Center in the Brooklyn Museum**

According to the curators interviewed, the mission of the Sackler Center is to be an 'intervention' in the Brooklyn Museum<sup>225</sup> to help curators at the Brooklyn rethink their collections. For Grayson, the fact that the Sackler is a feminist art centre within an elitist, encyclopedic institution like the Brooklyn Museum is a form of 'politics, a strategy and a critique'.<sup>226</sup> It is essential for these purposes that the Sackler represents a 'permanent commitment to feminism'<sup>227</sup> which is part of the institution and not a momentary intervention in the museum such as *elles@centrepompidou*.

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222 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

223 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

224 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

225 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

226 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

227 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

The objectives of the curators at the Sackler are the same as those of the Brooklyn curators interviewed. Chief Curator Kevin Stayton explained that when the Center was founded, curators at the Brooklyn did not want the Center to be a ‘satellite that operated semi-independently’;<sup>228</sup> instead they wanted the Sackler to operate within the context of the Brooklyn. For Stayton, the Sackler’s mission is to ‘infiltrate the rest of the museum’ to help the curators rethink and reinterpret the collection ‘through a feminist filter’.<sup>229</sup> Under the influence of the Sackler, the curators at the Brooklyn Museum can use a feminist approach to ‘find new ways of thinking about the art under our control’.<sup>230</sup> Morris explained that the Sackler curators were already significantly impacting on the history of the Brooklyn, and Brooklyn Museum curator Edward Bleiberg agreed that the Sackler ‘has affected the questions we ask about works of art and has affected the approaches we take to works of art’.<sup>231</sup>

Stayton explained that the foundation and mission of the Sackler Center ‘suits the purposes and mission’ of the Brooklyn<sup>232</sup> which is to ‘act as a bridge between the rich heritage of world cultures, as embodied in its collections, and the unique experience of each visitor [...] and to serve its diverse public as a dynamic, innovative and welcoming centre for learning towards the visual arts’.<sup>233</sup> For Stayton, the Brooklyn Museum aims at rethinking its collections and addresses alternative ‘hidden histories’.<sup>234</sup> This aim is related to the Museum’s mission ‘to serve underserved’ and ‘diverse’ audiences and to make the collections available to the widest possible audiences.<sup>235</sup>

For Stayton, one of the ways to ‘answer the diversity question’ and to make the museum comfortable for people who are ‘not used to going to museums’ is to collect: for example African American art, art by women and art by ethnic minorities. The other way to answer this question and fulfil the mission is to ‘allow for different kinds of interpretation, perceptions and experiences’ in the Museum.<sup>236</sup> Thus, for Stayton the best

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228 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

229 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

230 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

231 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

232 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

233 <<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/>>

234 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

235 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

236 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.



way to fulfil the mission of the Museum is to collect artworks and to address the gaps in the collection while at the same time reinterpreting the artworks the Museum already has.

### **Acquisitions at the Brooklyn Museum and the Sackler Center.**

The Brooklyn Museum is an institution with ‘vast and deep’<sup>237</sup> collections, which range from Ancient Egypt art to contemporary art. The collections were formed in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s by people who were ‘forward looking’ for their time but who had a different view of the history of art and did not collect African American art or art by women.<sup>238</sup> Consequently, there are significant lacunae in the collections; curators at the Brooklyn are aware of the importance of correcting the balance of the collections and collecting in those areas neglected by their predecessors in order to be able to ‘tell the whole story’.<sup>239</sup> Stayton highlights the importance of the acquisitions programme, which is more than ‘what we did in the past and more than most museums do in the present’.<sup>240</sup>

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237 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

238 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

239 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

240 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.



Figure 2: Kiki Smith (American, born Germany, 1954). *Annunciation*, 2008. Cast aluminium, wood, 61-1/2 x 32 x 19 in. (156.2 cm x 81.3 cm x 48.3 cm). Brooklyn Museum. Purchased with funds given by John and Barbara Vogelstein, Alan and Leslie Beller, Constance and Henry Christensen III, Nikola Duravcevic and Dana Ben-Ari, Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia, Leslie and David Puth, Elizabeth A. Sackler, John S. Tamagni, Barbara and Bill Wynne and Designated Purchase Fund, 2011.78a-b. Picture reproduced with permission of © Kiki Smith, courtesy Pace Gallery. Photo credit: © Kerry Ryan McFate, courtesy Pace Gallery.

In recent years, the Museum has focused on addressing the gaps in the collections, collecting art by women, African American artists and ethnic minorities. The main addition of a feminist artwork at the Brooklyn has been Judy Chicago's iconic *The Dinner Party*. This artwork, the centrepiece around which the Sackler Center is organized, comprises a ceremonial banquet, arranged on a triangular table with a total of thirty-nine place settings, each commemorating an important woman in history. The names of another nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine women are inscribed in the golden white tiled floor below the triangular table. Apart from the *Dinner Party*, the Brooklyn

has also collected works from other feminist artists such as Kiki Smith and Rachel Kneebone.

However, there is not a specific acquisitions programme at the Sackler Center. Morris admits that she does not have a separate acquisitions budget for the Sackler Center and for this reason she is unable to focus on acquisitions.<sup>241</sup> In addition, one of the policies of the Brooklyn is that if a department is going to acquire a work of art it should be able to display it, but at the Sackler they do not have this capacity since there is not a permanent collections gallery. For Morris, these space and budget limitations have prevented her from collecting the work of artists who have exhibited at the Sackler although ‘there are many things I would have loved to have become part of our collection’.<sup>242</sup> She also explains that the longer they wait to buy, the harder it is to build a collection. For Morris, it is difficult to support artists when it is not possible to collect and display their work.<sup>243</sup> This issue also seemed to be a cause of concern for one of the artists interviewed: the artist expressed concern that her work had not been collected after her exhibition at the Sackler, and considered that this fact ‘did not look good on her CV’.<sup>244</sup>

In addition, at the Brooklyn Museum the different departments are encouraged to buy works of art that are ‘multilevel’;<sup>245</sup> that is, objects that could potentially be used and displayed in different departments and ideally within the entire collection, for example, ‘a print that is from the nineteenth century but which is also related to Asian art’.<sup>246</sup> Whenever the Brooklyn curators are planning to acquire a work, they need to consider how it would be used in the rest of the Museum and whether it would be productive to tell other stories.<sup>247</sup> For this reason, artworks relating specifically to the Sackler Center, acquired for example with the support of a donor, must be utilised within the entire collection, and this issue limits the acquisition scope of the Center even more.

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241 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

242 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

243 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

244 Anonymous 2, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

245 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

246 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

247 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

However, the fact that the Sackler Center is part of the Brooklyn Museum makes feminism and gender one of the stories that curators from other departments are interested in telling. The question of gender and identity is central to contemporary art, partly because of the influence of feminism, and by extension some artworks acquired by the Contemporary Art Department that relate to gender and identity are related to feminism as well.<sup>248</sup> Moreover, the Sackler Center partners and acquires some works through the Contemporary Art Department and the American Art Department. For example, the Sackler has collected works by Rachel Kneebone after her exhibition *Regarding Rodin*, in collaboration with the Contemporary Art Department. The work *Annunciation* (2008) by Kiki Smith was acquired after her show *Sojourn* at the Sackler because ‘the whole museum thought it was strategically relevant’.<sup>249</sup>

This collaboration with other departments made it possible to incorporate a growing feminist art collection of around two-hundred pieces.<sup>250</sup> The Sackler also receives support for acquisitions from independent donors and from the Director of the Museum: Grayson explained that if Arnold Lehman is interested in a particular work of art which has been in an exhibition ‘he can help to make that possible’.<sup>251</sup> It seems that although the Sackler Center has made some acquisitions in collaboration with the Contemporary Art and the American Art departments, curators at the Center cannot take independent decisions based on their own criteria regarding acquisitions.

### **Reinterpretation of collections at the Brooklyn Museum.**

For Stayton, the second way to ‘answer the diversity question’ at the Brooklyn is to encourage different kinds of interpretation in the Museum.<sup>252</sup> Although for Stayton the Museum remains largely traditional with galleries devoted to Asian Art, Egyptian Art and American Art, in recent years (2001 – 2012) it has focused on redesigning some of its galleries and reinstalling its major collections to make them more accessible to the

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248 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

249 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

250 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

251 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

252 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

public. For Stayton, the objective of reorganizing the collection is to foster more effective communication with the public and encourage the public to understand and learn something about the art displayed.<sup>253</sup>

The reinterpretation starts with the kinds of subjects that the curators choose for the exhibitions, which are subjects that should have a broad appeal for the public.<sup>254</sup> At the same time, the curators are trying to make the Museum's collections more meaningful by 'looking at the past' to rediscover what is 'hidden in plain sight' and thinking of new ways of presenting these untold or ignored stories to the public.<sup>255</sup> Stayton stresses the importance of feminism in the reinterpretation of the collections: the objective of the rearrangement of the collections is, for Stayton, to view the collection 'in terms of cross-cultural connections, in terms of feminism, in terms of serving underserving audiences and in terms of listening to voices that have not been heard'.<sup>256</sup>

For example, the curators have begun to reconsider and understand the 'unseen female role'<sup>257</sup> within the collections of European Paintings and American Art, and also in the Asian and Native American collections. There are already some examples of the reinterpretation of collections using a feminist perspective. The Museum has reinstalled period rooms relating to the domestic sphere in line with feminist thinking<sup>258</sup> and in the Egyptian galleries there is now a section on women, which was developed at the time of the foundation of the Sackler. This section, according to Bleiberg, reflects how feminism has impacted Egyptology, although he admits that there is still an 'old-fashioned' representation of women by presenting objects such as cosmetic utensils and jewellery. However, the exhibition also tries to reflect on how Egyptology has changed dramatically with second-wave feminism, and there is a completely different way of looking at the role of women in society.<sup>259</sup>

In 2012 the Museum proposed an innovative long-term reinterpretation of the collections, *Connecting Cultures*. The exhibition was developed to create new ways of

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253 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

254 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

255 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

256 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

257 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

258 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

259 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

looking at art by making connections between cultures and juxtaposing thematically linked works. *Connecting Cultures* is the first introductory gallery the museum has arranged; the intention of this gallery is to welcome the visitor and to give audiences a sense of the different kinds of art the Museum houses. For Stayton, with *Connecting Cultures*, curators are trying to explore how people would experience a thematic display, and it is possible that in the future they will try to reinstall the more traditional galleries of the Museum.

In *Connecting Cultures*, the curators are trying to abandon the traditional way of organizing museum collections, based on geography, chronology and gender. The exhibition draws objects from different parts of the collection – American Art, Asian Art, Ancient Art, Contemporary Art and Art of the Native Americas – which are presented in juxtaposition.<sup>260</sup> In *Connecting Cultures*, curators attempt to address broad thematic subject matters, to which every individual collection at the museum can contribute, such as landscape paintings or representations of the human form, combining, for example, European paintings with Egyptian and Cambodian sculptures.<sup>261</sup>

### **Reinterpretation of collections at the Sackler Center.**

An important part of the exhibition programme at the Sackler Center is focused on reinterpreting history using a feminist point of view. One of the main objectives of the Center is to discover ‘unexplored areas of history’<sup>262</sup> and programme exhibitions on these neglected areas using the Brooklyn’s collection.

Maura Reilly, founding curator of the Center, began reinterpreting women artists of the past through a feminist point of view.<sup>263</sup> For Reilly, ‘it is important to look back at work that is historical and re-evaluate work by women artists of the past and to do an

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260 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

261 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

262 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

263 Weil, p. 17.

exhibition that uses a feminist analysis and approach to show the public a kind of proto-feminist exhibition'.<sup>264</sup>

Morris has further developed this curatorial approach; one of her main curatorial strategies at the Center is rereading and reinterpreting history trying to change 'the way we accept a certain version of history and narratives'.<sup>265</sup> At the Sackler, curators are interested in a feminist curatorial practice, which they use as a lens to look at the past with a feminist perspective. Their intention is to consider any historical era, and 'almost any object', and articulate it in relationship to 'feminist priorities'.<sup>266</sup> For these purposes, having a broad collection such as the Brooklyn's is very useful. According to Morris, they have the 'entire museum and its own histories and collections at our disposal'.<sup>267</sup> However, when Morris and Grayson work with the collection they are not specifically focused on feminist objects or objects made by women or related to women. There are not many of these objects in the Museum as the collections were not originally acquired with a feminist perspective in mind. However, the Brooklyn's vast historical collections allow curators to discover objects that are not considered as feminist, but can be used to express new views about the past. For Grayson, 'having objects that are not feminist and that maybe are exactly the opposite is incredibly useful'.<sup>268</sup> Therefore, the rethinking of the past and of history and the reinterpretation of the Museum's collections are part of the same curatorial strategy.

Since the Sackler Center opened at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007 there have been multiple exhibitions which are based on the Museum's collections. Some of these exhibitions take place at the Herstory Gallery at the Sackler Center, an exhibition space dedicated to exhibitions that explore the contribution of the 1,038 women named in *The Dinner Party*. The exhibitions at the Herstory Gallery intend to recover a 'lost history' of women through the 1,038 possible biographies.<sup>269</sup> However, Morris explains that her intention is not to curate biographical exhibitions, partly due to space and budget limitations, and partly because it is not 'useful' to turn a biography into an exhibition.

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264 Hershman, 'Transcript of Interview with Maura Reilly', <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

265 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

266 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

267 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

268 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

269 Jessica Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

Instead, Morris' objectives are presenting exhibitions based on 'footnotes' on each of the personal biographies represented in *The Dinner Party*.<sup>270</sup> For Morris, an exhibition based on a small moment in a personal biography also retains a feminist component, 'because the larger impulse generally in modernism is to go for the grand narrative'.<sup>271</sup>

These exhibitions, generally made possible by the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, present objects which draw from the permanent collection and which are reinterpreted through a feminist lens. For example, the inaugural biographical gallery show at the Sackler Center was the exhibition *Pharaohs, Queens and Goddesses* (February 2007 – February 2008), co-curated by Maura Reilly and Edward Bleiberg. The exhibition featured objects from the Museum's collections, the central object being a head of Pharaoh Hatshepsut. This show was dedicated to powerful female pharaohs, queens and goddesses from Egyptian history and focused on how our attitude towards powerful women in history has changed due to the influence of feminism.<sup>272</sup> Most of the women represented, such as Cleopatra, Hatshepsut and Nefertiti, are honoured in *The Dinner Party*.

The exhibition sought to reinterpret traditional views on women and power in Ancient Egypt and capture the ways in which the reputation of powerful women has changed over the last forty years, partly due to the influence of feminism. This exhibition is an example of the influence of the Sackler Center in the reinterpretation of Ancient Egyptian objects in the permanent collections. For Bleiberg, co-curator of the exhibition, 'this is not an exhibition I would have done without the Sackler Center'.<sup>273</sup>

Another exhibition at the Herstory Gallery, *The Fertile Goddess* (December 2008 – May 2009), featured nine female figurines from the Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic, and explored them as a source of inspiration for Chicago's figure of the Fertile Goddess at the *Dinner Party*. This exhibition was co-curated by Madeleine E. Cody, Research Associate in Egyptian, Classical and Ancient Middle Eastern Art at Brooklyn Museum and Maura Reilly. The exhibitions also explored how feminism re-examined ancient

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270 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

271 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

272 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

273 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.





United States.<sup>274</sup> For the exhibition, Morris recovered a ‘fascinating’ part of history which was lost: the contribution of thousands of women to the nineteenth century Sanitary Movement and the Sanitary Fairs that were held during the Civil War to raise money for the war effort.

The objects displayed in the exhibition were found in storage in the Brooklyn Museum’s collections. Most of the objects were almost unknown until Morris rediscovered them for the exhibition. According to Stayton, ‘one of the great things about being in an institution that does have great collections is that there are these discoveries: if you ask the right questions you tell a completely different and sometimes a more interesting story’.<sup>275</sup> For example, the genesis of the exhibition – and one of the most interesting objects – was a doll from the Museum’s collection made by a woman named Eliza Lefferts and sold at the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair. This doll had been in the collections since the nineteenth century but nobody ‘had paid attention to it’<sup>276</sup> until it was rediscovered for the exhibition.

The exhibition *Workt by Hand: Hidden Labor and Historical Quilts*, (March – September 2013), which took place in the main galleries of the museum, showcased thirty-five American and European quilts from the Brooklyn Museum’s collection. The interpretation of the quilts presented in the exhibition was different from the traditional interpretation of these objects in decorative arts department or a craft museum. Instead of focusing on the patterns or on the chronology, the exhibition examined the impact of feminist scholarship on the ways in which quilts have been viewed and interpreted, considering gender and power implications in our perceptions of quilts. The curators questioned the historical designation of quilts as crafts, rather than as art objects, and how this related is to the gender of the people who created them.<sup>277</sup> The exhibition also explored how our perceptions of quilts has changed over time, especially during the early twentieth century, under the influence of modernism, when quilts were appreciated as works of abstract art.

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274 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

275 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

276 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

277 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

In addition, the interpretation examined how quilts were related to female experience and formed part of the social connections between women.<sup>278</sup> The exhibition explored quilts as a product of female labour and questioned what female and male labour meant in the nineteenth century. The title of the exhibition, 'Workt by hand', refers to the 'hidden labour' in these works. For Stayton, if the work that was put into these quilts had been valued the same as male labour in the nineteenth century 'nobody could have afforded them'.<sup>279</sup>

Finally, there have been some exhibitions at the Brooklyn in which feminist artists have reinterpreted collections. For example, in her exhibition *Regarding Rodin* (January – August 2012), Rachel Kneebone juxtaposed her work with Rodin's sculptures from the Museum's collections. The aim of the exhibition was to show how the two artists were related and how there was a fluid relationship between Kneebone's and Rodin's work. The exhibition allowed people to rediscover and reinterpret the work of Rodin, as 'just putting Rodin in a feminist art centre makes you look at Rodin differently'.<sup>280</sup>

### **The Modern Women's Project at MoMA.**

The Modern Women's Project started in 2006 thanks to the initiative of Sarah Peter, a feminist artist, donor and patron of the arts who approached the museum with the idea of supporting women within it. Peter was open about the different possibilities regarding how to support women at the Museum. She asked women curators at MoMA to meet and discuss what they wanted to do with her financial support, whether they wanted a structural, administrative change, or a change related to acquisitions, exhibitions and research.<sup>281</sup> The Modern Women's Project group was formed in 2006 by a large group of women curators; the first in charge was Mary Lea Bandy, Chief Curator at the time and Senior Deputy Director of curatorial affairs. After Mary Lea retired, Deborah Wye, Chief Curator of Prints, Illustration, Books and Drawings, Anne Umland, Curator of

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278 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

279 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

280 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

281 Roxana Marcoci, Personal Interview 27 June 2013.

Painting and Sculpture and Susan Kismarik, Curator of Photography, were asked by Glenn Lowry to manage the group, and finally Connie Butler, Chief Curator of Drawings, took charge. The Modern Women's group met regularly and there were multiple cross-departmental discussions to decide what to do for women at the Museum.<sup>282</sup>

Finally, the group decided to use Peter's financial support to study the role and the presence of women artists in the Museum. This research resulted in a publication, *Modern Women* (2010) about women artists in the collection. The curators then decided that they wanted to create a public dimension for the Modern Women's Project and they organized a large-scale symposium, *The Feminist Future*, in 2007.<sup>283</sup> The objective of the curators was to announce that feminism was a real focus of research at MoMA and to open the discussion to the public.<sup>284</sup> For the curators it was essential to have a variety of thinkers at the symposium in order to be able to have a dialogue about the current situation of feminism. The symposium was attended by different generations of feminist artists, curators and theorists from the United States and internationally. For Sally Berger, at the symposium there were different points of view expressed by people attending it, reflecting the differences among generations, curators and artists about what feminism means.<sup>285</sup>

After the symposium and the publication of the book, the curatorial departments discussed the ways in which they could give women more presence in the Museum. There were other initiatives, all of them supported by Sarah Peter: lectures, a number of exhibitions, a series of programmes, and the permanent collections were rearranged so that every department regularly had women artists on view. Then, in 2010 Sarah Peter founded the Modern Women's Fund, a fund for supporting the acquisition of works by women artists for the permanent collection.

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282 Marcoci, Personal Interview 27 June 2013.

283 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

284 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

285 Sally Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

## **Feminism at MoMA.**

Although MoMA has been criticized since its foundation for its institutional sexism, in the last few years there has been a ‘generational shift’<sup>286</sup> that has made the Modern Women’s Project possible, and this shift is one of the reasons for organisational change at the museum since 2006.<sup>287</sup> In recent years, the ‘old guard’ of MoMA – curators like Peter Galassi and Laurence Kardish – retired<sup>288</sup> while a younger generation took over. This is a new generation of curators educated in the 1990s with a postmodern perspective,<sup>289</sup> more aware than their predecessors of alternative art practices and of the significance of women artists and feminist ideas.<sup>290</sup> According to Butler, curators such as Alexandra Schwartz, Clara Drummond, Rajandra Roy and David van der Leer were ‘trained to think critically’ about art within the museum and ‘the canonical art history’ that a place like MoMA has always represented.<sup>291</sup>

Connie Butler, who has served as the Chief Curator of Drawings at the Museum since 2006, was ‘instrumental’ for the Modern Women’s Project.<sup>292</sup> Both Alexandra Schwartz and Connie Butler brought with them a significant background in feminist curatorship to MoMA. Schwartz explained that she shares the perspective of the ‘curators of her generation’, junior curators in their late thirties and early forties for whom feminist art history is just ‘normal’.<sup>293</sup> Her ideas about feminism, curatorship and art are part of ‘how she thinks’, her practice as an art historian and ‘how she was trained’ at University.<sup>294</sup>

For Butler, the change in leadership at the museum is also part of that generational change.<sup>295</sup> According to Butler and her colleagues Anne Umland and Roxana Marcoci, Glenn Lowry – who took over in 1995 after Richard Oldenburg retired – has given more importance to building relationships with artists, women and to inter-departmental

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286 Alexandra Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

287 Cornelia Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

288 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

289 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

290 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013; Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013; Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

291 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

292 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

293 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

294 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

295 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

collaboration and these factors led to the Modern Women's Project.<sup>296</sup> For Butler, Lowry is 'absolutely feminist in his desire for more representation of women' and he has been 'instrumental' in the effort to increase the representation of women.<sup>297</sup> Butler explains, "He will say for example, 'let's look at the exhibition schedule coming up, we have all these white men, there aren't any women in the schedule'".<sup>298</sup> According to Butler, Lowry has been empowered by the women working at the Museum to take a more effective approach towards the representation of women.<sup>299</sup>

However, Schwartz and Butler acknowledge that many curators at MoMA do not have a feminist perspective of curatorial work.<sup>300</sup> For Schwartz, '[Feminist art history] was not as much [part] of the methodology of a lot of people at MoMA as I would have thought'.<sup>301</sup> The Modern Women's Group tried to accommodate these curators with different perspectives about art history and about feminism. Two of the curators interviewed at MoMA – Figura and Umland – admitted they did not have a feminist perspective on art. However, the fact that MoMA is an institution with a variety of points of view and a diversity of opinions concerning feminism is regarded as a 'strength' by Butler.<sup>302</sup> MoMA curators are trained in different ways; according to Butler, 'some think critically about art history and some don't. For example, some curators are trained in a kind of connoisseurship, deep scholarship, of a more traditional level'.<sup>303</sup> However, these different approaches to art history can enrich the critical thinking of the collections. Feminist curatorship is one of 'many methodological approaches'.<sup>304</sup> it is the approach in which Schwartz and Butler are most interested, but they do not advocate that a feminist approach to art history is the only possible one.<sup>305</sup>

MoMA curators tried to reflect these different perspectives and points of view in the book *Modern Women*, by including writers with a feminist perspective and others with

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296 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013; Anne Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013; Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

297 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

298 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

299 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

300 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013; Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

301 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

302 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

303 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

304 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

305 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

a more traditional understanding of art history. For example, Butler considered the diversity of points as something ‘positive’ for the publication.<sup>306</sup> each of the authors was given the freedom to choose the topics they wanted to write about. At the same time, the inclusion of non-feminist perspectives responded to the desire to reflect the broader history of the Museum. Butler explained that ‘we cannot take a museum which has never thought about feminism and feminist art history and suddenly make a book about the collection that only does that, because it would not reflect the institution’s history’.<sup>307</sup> In the book, the curators wanted to reflect on the history of the collection and to highlight the fact that women had always been part of the Museum: works by women artists had always been collected, and women curators, founders and patrons had always been an important part of the history of MoMA.

However, *Modern Women* also included internal criticism in Connie Butler’s article as well as criticisms from authors such as Aruna d’ Souza and Griselda Pollock. For Schwartz, internal and external criticism is inevitable in an institution like MoMA and it is ‘part of the conversation’.<sup>308</sup> Marcoci views criticism as something constructive and necessary in order for the museum to change and adds that ‘only when you can have a critical view on yourself you can make the changes that are necessary’.<sup>309</sup>

### **The Modern Women’s Project: Inclusion of women artists.**

The MoMA Modern Women’s Project is focused on increasing the presence of women in the Museum through acquisitions, collection displays and exhibitions. The main objective is to make women more visible in the programme, to have a more balanced exhibition schedule and more balanced displays of the permanent collection.<sup>310</sup> Curators at MoMA are not trying to include feminist artists or feminist art, but they are focusing on women. Schwartz explains that during the meetings of the Modern Women’s Group, one of the central questions of feminist art (i.e. ‘What is feminist art?’) was widely

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306 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

307 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

308 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

309 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

310 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

discussed and that the impossibility of defining feminist art was one of the reasons why the group decided to focus on women artists.<sup>311</sup>

Part of the change at MoMA is that in the museum's public programmes, acquisitions and exhibitions the curators are conscious of the percentage of women, men and ethnic minorities when they are creating a show.<sup>312</sup> For Umland, the inclusion of women affects every collection display and exhibition because every time the curators install a gallery they pose themselves the question: 'if there is not a woman in the room, why not?'.<sup>313</sup> Umland admits that MoMA's inclusive policy may not seem 'enough' in comparison with other museums' programmes, but for a museum with the 'sexist reputation' of MoMA, just the mere fact that this question regularly arises is an important change.<sup>314</sup> Schwartz admits that a certain amount of 'counting' the number of women per show is still important, but in the future this counting will be less important when feminist thinking becomes part of the institution as it will be more 'natural' to include women.<sup>315</sup>

However, there is a diversity of opinions regarding the definition of feminism and of feminist methodology. For Alexandra Schwartz, the practice of singling out women artists at MoMA is a 'feminist project' and the methodology used is a 'feminist methodology'<sup>316</sup> even when the artists selected do not identify themselves as feminists. For Schwartz, a feminist methodology is not just related to displaying feminist artists or women artists but can be applied to artists working before the 1960s: 'you cannot call Sonia Delaunay a feminist artist, because feminism as we know it did not exist then, but was she working on the spirit of feminism? Absolutely!'.<sup>317</sup> What is more, for Schwartz, a feminist methodology can be applied 'to talk about anything or anyone' as it is related to 'thinking about gender and about power relationships'.<sup>318</sup>

However, Anne Umland is reluctant to use the word 'feminism' for the project. Although she is making sure that there are 'more women in the program', and she admits that there

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311 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

312 Barbara London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

313 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

314 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

315 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

316 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

317 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

318 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.



is a 'non-hierarchical structure and openness to alternative histories', she doubts whether this means that there is a 'greater presence of feminism in the museum'.<sup>319</sup>

The inclusion of women artists on a regular basis is not just due to the effort of one curatorial group, but is a 'real institutional mandate' at MoMA based on a series of public programmes, acquisitions, displays and reinstallations of the collections where curators are making sure that women artists are represented 'at all times, [...] in every program, in every exhibition.'<sup>320</sup> For Marcoci, the institutional strategy of inclusion is part of a cultural change at the Museum: during the last six years there has been a strong feeling within the Museum, from the director to the curators, that this was an important mission and that it necessary to change. Marcoci explains that 'change' can only happen when the will to change is global, when it involves a 'change of mentality' and when it affects everyone at the Museum.<sup>321</sup>

### **Changing the history of art.**

Apart from including more women artists, curators at MoMA are looking at the history of modern and contemporary art in a different way. For Marcoci, 'I think the way that we look at the history of art is very different from the way that our predecessors looked at it'.<sup>322</sup>

Curators interviewed insisted that they were interested in presenting 'alternative' stories, more complex than those found within traditional Western histories.<sup>323</sup> For Butler, there is a desire to 'represent multiple stories', not just the story of women artists.<sup>324</sup> For Marcoci, in order to change traditional views on art history it is necessary to 'include different perspectives, both within and outside the museum.' In order to tell these alternative stories it is important to understand the 'ramifications' of a rich and complex genealogy.<sup>325</sup> London agrees that the story they want to tell is 'not tidy, it is messy'.<sup>326</sup>

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319 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

320 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

321 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

322 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

323 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

324 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

325 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

326 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

This historical process applies to racial, social and economic diversity: there is an ongoing conversation about African American artists, about global issues and about how to present artists who are not part of canonical modernism taking place at MoMA.<sup>327</sup>

The conversation about women artists and the conversation about racial, social and economic diversity are connected. For Butler, the inclusion of more women artists affects the other alternative stories that the Museum is telling: ‘If you put more women artists on view it changes the questions that you ask, because you have to try to unpack the history in a different way’, taking into consideration race, class and geographical divisions.<sup>328</sup>

Additionally, the inclusion of women’s art is related to the increasing importance of performance art and political art at MoMA. For Marcoci, since the creation of the Department of Media and Performance Art at MoMA in 2006, the Museum has started collecting more performance art, exhibiting it and programming it regularly. The interest in performance art and the efforts to acquire it have been fundamental in supporting the presence of more women in the Museum, due to the important role that women have had in performance art since the 1960s.<sup>329</sup>

### **Research projects at MoMA.**

In order to acquire and display works by women, curators at MoMA focus on researching the collection. The book *Modern Women*, which surveys modern and contemporary art by women artists, is a re-examination of the museum’s collections through a feminist and post-colonialist inspired point of view. However, the initial idea for the book *Modern Women* was not ambitious; the curators had planned to publish a ‘coffee table’ book of the collection featuring iconic, canonical artists.<sup>330</sup> However, when Butler and Schwartz were placed in charge of the publication they turned it into something theoretically richer and intellectually ambitious.<sup>331</sup>

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327 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

328 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

329 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

330 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

331 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

For *Modern Women*, MoMA curators focused on conducting a strategic review of the collections and started looking at the objects in the collection in relation to larger feminist issues and debates.<sup>332</sup> There was an effort to rediscover the collections and to try to understand what the gaps were and which artists had been overlooked.

For Schwartz, one of the main characteristics of the book is that the curators limited themselves to the collection and they were working with ‘what they had’.<sup>333</sup> This was a restriction which conditioned the book, because the collection has significant gaps in women’s art and feminist art. For example, Schwartz explained that although they tried to be as international as possible, this was extremely difficult as they were restricted by the collection.<sup>334</sup>

Additionally, MoMA established two research projects using the databases associated with *Modern Women*, also sponsored by Sarah Peter. The first research project focused on the identification of artworks in the collections which were made by women, because before the Modern Women’s Project, MoMA did not track the gender of artists in its databases. Secondly, there was another important research project to furnish images for all the works by women artists in the databases. This was also an important step because before the project most works by women in the collections did not have images. According to Schwartz and Umland, if the curators cannot see the image of an artwork in the databases, it is not very likely that they will choose that artwork in a display or an exhibition.<sup>335</sup>

In *Modern Women*, the curators rediscovered artists in the collection and brought many materials to light. For Figura, ‘there was an effort to dig into what we have in the collections and bring out artists who deserved to be better known’.<sup>336</sup> The book features a mixture of canonical artists like Frida Kahlo and Louise Bourgeois and lesser-known artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Gego and Ana Maria Maiolino. For Schwartz this mixture of artists was intentional. Curators tried to encourage contributors to write about

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332 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

333 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

334 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

335 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013; Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

336 Starr Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

their own interests and their areas of expertise, and some of them wanted to write about lesser known artists.<sup>337</sup>

A problematic issue in *Modern Women* is whether the publication was canonical or not and to what extent the book created a new canon. The curators interviewed disagreed in their ideas about canonicity, and this disagreement shows the different views on art history present at the Museum. Butler was aware of the issue of the creation of a new canon through the publication and of the problem of the selection of certain artists and the dismissal of others: 'There are lots of people who should be in that book and they are not in that book and I hear from them and that is a problem because in a way you create a new canon'.<sup>338</sup> However, Figura did not question the canon: in her view the artists rediscovered would be added to the existing canon. According to Figura, the artists that the book brought to light are now part of the 'canon' or may eventually 'become canonical artists' and find their place of the history of modernism.<sup>339</sup>

### **Reinstallation of collections.**

The effort to integrate women artists can also be appreciated in recent exhibitions, acquisitions, and in the reinstallation of the permanent collections, where MoMA curators are making sure that women artists are given a 'central position'.<sup>340</sup> For Figura, there are more women artists in the galleries now than ever before and numerous exhibitions of women artists feature in the schedule.<sup>341</sup>

Most of the reinstallations of the galleries are a result of a 'conscious effort'<sup>342</sup> on the part of the curators to ensure that women artists are well-represented and that there is equality between men and women. For example, one of the new rooms in the Department

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337 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

338 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

339 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

340 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

341 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

342 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

of Photography, which focuses on new acquisitions of historical and contemporary work, opened in August 2013. In the new room half of the artworks are by men and the other half by women.<sup>343</sup> Curators have also reinstalled the permanent historical collections in the Alfred H. Barr Painting and Sculpture Galleries, and, according to Butler, there are more women on view ‘than ever before’, and that is ‘massive’.<sup>344</sup> Women artists presented in these galleries include Dorothea Tanning, Yayoi Kusama, Vija Celmins, Marisol, Sylvia Plimack, Natalia Goncharova and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Some artworks, such as Louise Bourgeois’ sculpture *Quarantania, I* (1949-1953) occupy a central position in these galleries. However, the majority of artists on view in the Painting and Sculpture Galleries are canonical male artists. Umland explains that it is easier to reinstall artworks in the contemporary art galleries than in the historical collections, because it is harder to find and acquire artworks by artists of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.<sup>345</sup>

Curators are also collaborating on reinstalling the second-floor contemporary galleries. An example of the reinstallation of the contemporary galleries is the show *Here is Every. Four Decades of Contemporary Art* (September 2008 – March 2009) organized by Connie Butler. This show was the fifth in a series of installations focusing on MoMA’s contemporary collection and included several acquisitions of artists such as Matthew Barney and Bruce Nauman. However, Butler made sure that more than half of the artists presented were women, as her goal was to have a ‘strong representation of women to reflect what happened in the art world.’<sup>346</sup> For example, there were artworks by Nan Goldin, Joan Jonas, Sanja Ivekovic and Valie Export. Some of them, such as Ida Applebroog’s video *Chronic Hollow* (1989) had never being shown in the Museum before.

## **Exhibitions.**

Since 2007 there have been numerous one-person shows and group exhibitions of women artists, most of them sponsored by Sarah Peter and related to the Modern

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343 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

344 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

345 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

346 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

Women's Project, for example *Performance7: Sanja Ivekovic: Sweet Violence* (December 2011 – March 2012), *Mirage by Joan Jonas* (December – May 2010), *Lee Bontecou: All Freedom in Every Sense* (April – August, 2010), *Mind and Matter: alternative abstractions, 1940s to Now* (May – August 2010), *Maya Deren's Legacy: Women and Experimental Film* (May – October 2010) *Experimental Women in Flux* (August – November 2010), *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography*, (May 2010 – April 2011), *Cindy Sherman* (February – June 2012), *Isa Genzken: Retrospective* (November 2013 – March 2014) and many others.

The strategy of inclusion of women has been constant, continuous and progressive,<sup>347</sup> a conscious and 'proactive' process<sup>348</sup> related to the programme. However, here has not been a statement, 'landmark' or highly publicized exhibition such as *elles@centrepompidou*.<sup>349</sup> Marcoci explains that 'it's not enough to have just one symposium or just one show', but instead it is important that exhibitions on women artists are an integral part of the programmer 'at all times'.<sup>350</sup> For Schwartz, the strategy is not to 'ghettoize' women or to separate and exclude women's work from the rest of the programme.<sup>351</sup> According to Figura, curators at MoMA are making sure that the strategy for the inclusion of women is an 'ongoing fully-integrated part' of how they work at the Museum.<sup>352</sup>

Artist Mira Schor qualifies the infiltration of feminism at MoMA as a 'stealth approach'. For Schor, the constant infiltration of feminism has been almost hidden, disguised and not publicized but it has been effective in the long term.<sup>353</sup> An example of the 'stealth approach' taking place at MoMA is the show *Mind and Matter*, curated by Alexandra Schwartz. Although all the artists in the show were women artists dealing with body or gender issues, the word 'women' was not in the title and the press release did not mention that it was an all-women show. This was a decision made by the curator, who decided to 'normalize' the fact that all the artists in the show were women.<sup>354</sup>

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347 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

348 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

349 Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

350 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

351 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

352 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

353 Mira Schor, 'Stealth Feminism at MoMA', in *A Year of Positive Thinking* blog, 16 May 2010, <<http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/16/stealth-feminism-at-moma/>>

354 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

### **The Modern Women's Fund: Acquisitions.**

After the publication of the book and the symposium, Sarah Peter wanted to continue to support women at MoMA. In 2010 she established the Modern Women's Fund, which has made further exhibitions related to women and acquisitions of work by women artists possible. The Modern Women's Fund is one of the multiple acquisitions funds at the museum aimed at specific kinds of work. For example, there is a Latin American Fund and a twenty-first century fund for the acquisition of contemporary work made in the last five years.<sup>355</sup>

There are ten people on the committee of the Modern Women's Fund, who contribute to the Fund: Sarah Peter, other trustees from the Museum and people outside the Museum who are interested in women's issues and women's art. Connie Butler served as a chair person for two years of the Fund's administration, while Roxana Marcoci is the current chair and will continue in this position in the future.

Since the Fund was established, the curators have been constantly adding work to the collections. The acquisition process starts with curators conducting research on the collections to understand where the weaknesses are in order to 'fill the gaps'.<sup>356</sup> When researching the collections, a curator or group of curators identify an area which has been neglected, an artist who is not well represented or who has been overlooked or a piece which is particularly interesting or is in danger of being lost.<sup>357</sup> The committee of patrons and trustees of the Modern Women's Fund meet once a year.<sup>358</sup> For this meeting, MoMA curators send proposals to the committee, which votes and decides which works the Museum should acquire.

However, the Modern Women's Fund is not the only way to acquire works by women. Figura explains that if the committee decides not to acquire a certain work, the curator

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355 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

356 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

357 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

358 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

can propose the acquisition to its departmental committee or perhaps to the Latin American Fund or the Twenty-First-Century Fund.<sup>359</sup>

The Fund was established three years ago and the committee has met three times. According to Butler, members of the committee have spent close to half a million dollars each time, buying ‘fantastic, important, usually cross-departmental bodies of work’.<sup>360</sup> Through the Modern Women’s Fund the Museum has acquired works by artists such as Geta Bratescu, Elizabeth Catlett, Simone Forti, Simryn Gill Singaporean, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Kathe Kollwitz, Zoe Leonard, Sylvia Plimack, Martha Rossler, Betye Saar, Gillian Wearing, Lia Lublin and Anna Oppermann.

Through the Fund the museum acquires both historical and contemporary works by women artists but for Butler there is more emphasis on the historical works because artworks by mid-career artists and historical artists – especially the ‘pre-war generation’ – are the hardest to obtain.<sup>361</sup> For example, one of the latest acquisitions, a work by Dorothea Tanning, was very difficult to acquire.<sup>362</sup>

Marcoci explains that the Modern Women’s Fund allows curators to acquire works by women artists cross-departmentally. This means that curators from different departments are often able to work together and present a collective proposal of works by artists who have been working in different media to the committee. For example, the first time that the five different departments worked together at the Museum was for the research, proposal and acquisition of a number of works by Romanian artist Geta Bratescu. In order to visit the artist and to select the works they were interested in, an inter-departmental group of curators made a trip to Bucharest. Then, the inter-departmental group of curators presented a collective proposal to the committee. The acquisition of the bodies of work by Bratescu involved all five departments because it included video, prints, drawings and photographs.<sup>363</sup>

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359 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

360 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

361 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

362 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

363 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.



According to Berger, a curator at the Department of Film, the acquisition of films is a lengthy process which may take years, because it involves conservation and restoration issues apart from research. For this reason, the Department can only collect one or two films per year. The material collected in the Department of Film is in its original form. In order to collect it the curators need to find the original film material, which is very delicate and sometimes has not been stored properly or has been lost. Often, the Department has to preserve the film materials and restore them, working in cooperation with a specialized laboratory. Then, the filmmaker, if she is still alive, has to review the copies and approve them before the film can be brought into the collection.<sup>364</sup>

### **The Women's Museum in Aarhus, Denmark.**

The Women's Museum in Aarhus has been a feminist museum since its foundation in 1982, focusing on exploring women's cultural history in Denmark and on telling the story of women's past and present lives. The Museum started as a 'grassroots movement' founded by a group of women inspired by the sense of community and sisterhood of the women's movement of the 1970s.<sup>365</sup> Also, the founding group set up a Women's Museum Society in 1982, with the purpose of establishing a professional women's museum and creating jobs for women within this institution. At the time of the founding, the Museum started 'without anything';<sup>366</sup> it was located in a small room in a school, thanks to the help of one of the founders who was a teacher there. The group spent the first membership fees from the Women's Museum Society on a phone and a postal address. In this room, they used these to start fundraising via foundation and public grant committees.<sup>367</sup>

The group succeeded in securing public funding for unemployment projects<sup>368</sup> and in 1984 the Municipality of Aarhus provided a space for the Museum in the old City Hall, built in 1857. This place, one of the most 'significant'<sup>369</sup> buildings in Aarhus, had

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364 Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

365 Bodil Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

366 Merete Ipsen, Personal interview, 11 September 2012.

367 Ipsen, Personal interview, 11 September 2012.

368 Ipsen, Personal interview, 11 September 2012.

369 Jette Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

housed a police station from 1941 to 1984. There was competition to gain access to the old City Hall from the City Museum in Aarhus, but according to Sandahl the help of a Mayor in charge of buildings, who had some sort of ‘solidarity’ with the founding group, was essential to gain access to the building. However, one of the reasons why the group successfully gained access to the old City Hall was that vacant buildings were at risk of being occupied at that time so it was felt that the group would ‘protect’ the old City Hall through their presence.<sup>370</sup> During the first years the group could use the building only temporarily and they had to renew their permission every year until they secured the permission on a permanent basis.<sup>371</sup>

Gaining access to the old City Hall was one of the most significant moments in the history of the Museum and a ‘huge recognition’ of the work the group had been doing.<sup>372</sup> When the founding group was established in the building they started building collections of everyday objects, oral histories and documents, most of them given by donors. Two years after the foundation, the group opened their first exhibition, *Make Room for Life*. Then, in 1992-1993 the building was renovated for the purposes of holding exhibitions. The Museum kept growing and a side wing was added in 2005 for an exhibition on childhood.<sup>373</sup>

Gaining access to the old City Hall was essential in the process to become a nationally-accredited museum.<sup>374</sup> However, of the consequences of gaining official state recognition was that the structure of the Museum changed. During the process of recognition there were fundamental discussions about the structure and the organization of the museum, and the group re-examined their ways of working. Additionally, since the official registration there have been other changes in directorship which can be attributed to variations in the economic situation. Since the 1990s there has been a decrease in funding for projects which has reduced the group of academics who were in project manager positions,<sup>375</sup> and today there are just two leaders remaining: Merete Ipsen and Bodil Olesen.

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370 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

371 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

372 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

373 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

374 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012

375 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012; Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012,

## **Feminism at the Women's Museum in Aarhus.**

The Museum has undergone major changes in its organization and structure since its foundation. However, the museum has maintained its commitment to feminist values to the present day. Museum leaders interviewed identified themselves as feminists and agreed that the museum was a feminist institution. Olesen explained that 'I don't have feminist ideas, I am a feminist'.<sup>376</sup> For the museum leaders, the Museum is a place for all kinds of feminism, from a second-wave inspired feminism to a more psychoanalytically-based feminism. The initial group who founded the Museum came from different positions within feminism and all of them 'co-existed' in the institution.<sup>377</sup> For example, Sandahl and Ipsen came from a background in 'radical psychoanalytically-based feminism' and were interested in the psychoanalytical analysis of the position of women in history.<sup>378</sup>

Over the years, the Museum has had an influence on the feminist consciousness of its staff. For example, Olesen's ideas on history, women and feminism changed after she started working at the Museum, and she began to look at history in a different way. It 'opened my eyes. [...] I thought that the history I knew wasn't completed'.<sup>379</sup> Kristin Taylor, who had been volunteering at the museum for one month at the time of my interview with her, explained that she was more 'aware of the position of women in society', and of the 'unspoken dilemmas we don't talk about today'.<sup>380</sup> However, the interviews showed that there is a difference between the Museum leaders and the members of staff in their understanding of feminism and feminist consciousness. The anonymous member of staff interviewed did not think of the museum as a feminist institution: 'I just think of us as a museum [...] about women's history [...] with occasional art exhibitions by women'.<sup>381</sup>

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376 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

377 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012

378 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012

379 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

380 Kristin Taylor, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

381 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012

For many years, the mission of the Museum was to document and make visible the history of women in Denmark and to explore the story of women's past and present lives and work.<sup>382</sup> However, staff interviewed thought that the Museum had changed slightly in its mission: although the permanent displays present the history of women in Denmark, temporary exhibitions focus on race, global issues and gender. There is an effort to engage adult audiences and children on gender issues.<sup>383</sup> For example, the exhibition about childhood is not about girl's history but about the history of girls and boys. However, Ipsen explains that they still want to identify the Museum as fundamentally concerned with women's issues, rather than gender issues<sup>384</sup> and she explained that it was not possible to understand women's history without understanding gender.

### **Voicing the unspoken.**

Since its foundation in 1982, the Women's Museum in Aarhus has been collecting objects, documents, photos and oral histories to document the lives and work of women in Denmark. Most of the objects collected and presented at the museum are everyday objects, such as clothes, books and photos which appear to have nothing to do with feminism. However, these objects are related to a re-examination of the history of women and of the role that women have played in history.

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382 <http://kvindemuseet.dk/uk/>

383 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

384 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.



Figure 4: Display case at the Women's Museum in Aarhus. Picture reproduced with permission of © The Women's Museum in Aarhus.

For the Museum curators, 'inquiring about women's lives often implies questioning what has been silenced.'<sup>385</sup> They are interested in talking about the unspoken and unseen aspects of women's lives. For this reason, the curators have collected objects related to overlooked areas of women's experiences, such as the body, the domestic sphere, maternity and violence against women, and there are objects in the collections such as sanitary towels and methods of birth control. The Museum also specializes in women's work, but often women's work in history has produced perishable goods, such as clothes or food. Therefore, when building the collections, the curators have searched for and focused 'on what has been lost, been worn out or eaten up'.<sup>386</sup>

At Aarhus, the collection of objects and oral histories has been associated with research projects and exhibitions on women's issues and gender. The Museum conducts research on different topics while collecting objects and oral stories, and the final result of the research and collection is generally an exhibition. For Olesen, the Museum's preferred method of publishing its research is by presenting an exhibition, so that the objects, research and oral histories can be made accessible to the public.<sup>387</sup>

<sup>385</sup> <http://kvindemuseet.dk/uk/>

<sup>386</sup> <http://kvindemuseet.dk/uk/>

<sup>387</sup> Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

The museum produces three to four temporary exhibitions on specific aspects of women's history a year. Some of them are about the women's movement, women's right to vote, women's access to education and women's work, such as *8<sup>th</sup> March, International Women's Day* (March, 2013) and *Women's right to vote for 100 years* (February - December 2009). Many exhibitions and research topics are about unspoken aspects of women's lives. For example, one of the first exhibitions and research projects – *Make Room for Life* (1984) – was on giving birth and single mothers.

Through the exhibitions and collections the Museum makes women's history visible and often speaks about the unspoken and the overlooked aspects of women's lives. In the permanent collection the Museum presents painful and controversial issues such as methods of birth control, abortion and violence. In addition, the Museum regularly programmes temporary exhibitions that present controversial and difficult subjects, such as prostitution (*Prostitution and Trafficking*), rape (*It's Not Your Fault*), immigration (*The Journey to Denmark, Beyond Frontiers*), landmines (*Miss Landmine*) and homelessness (*Without a Home*)



Figure 5: *It's Not Your Fault* installation, Women's Museum in Aarhus (October 2010 – May 2011)  
Picture reproduced with permission of © The Women's Museum in Aarhus.

However, the attendance figures for this kind of exhibition are not high.<sup>388</sup> Museum staff are aware that when they present these special exhibitions on difficult subjects, visitors are not going to come to the Museum ‘on buses’.<sup>389</sup> For example, some regular Museum visitors refused to attend *It Is Not Your Fault* and preferred to stay at the café because they did not need to see more ‘troubles’.<sup>390</sup> Also, Olesen explained that it is more difficult to obtain financial support for these exhibitions which will attract a ‘small target group’, as ‘politicians’ encourage the museum leaders to prepare exhibitions about ‘something happy’.<sup>391</sup>

For Sandahl, collecting and presenting these controversial and unspoken issues is related to their feminist ideas on history. For museum staff, collecting and presenting controversial and painful issues is a ‘*raison d’être*’.<sup>392</sup> The mission of the Museum when it was founded was rediscovering all these aspects of women’s lives and presenting them to the public, through the collection the objects, conducting research on the topic and presenting exhibitions. By building collections and enquiring about painful aspects of women’s lives, the Museum intends to reclaim a hidden part of women’s history that has been forgotten and suppressed. For Ipsen, women’s history should not just be about ‘needlework’, ‘wedding dresses’ and ‘happy couples’ as they have to show other parts of women’s history.<sup>393</sup> Ipsen explains that visiting the Museum should be like ‘entering a world where the subjects are turned upside down’.<sup>394</sup> This method of ‘giving official voices’<sup>395</sup> to women and presenting a counter-narrative of traditional history is for museum staff a position related to the feminist movement; for Sandahl, ‘voicing the unspoken’ was what the ‘feminist movement was about’.<sup>396</sup>

At the same time, the Museum has been exhibiting, researching and presenting the work of contemporary Danish artists, such as Astrid Gjesing and Kirsten Rose. Olesen explained that the artists must be women and the criterion for selecting them is the

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388 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

389 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

390 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

391 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

392 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

393 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

394 Ipsen, The Women’s Museum in Denmark.

395 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

396 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

quality of their work.<sup>397</sup> Museum leaders choose women artists who reflect on gender, but they don't have to identify themselves as feminists<sup>398</sup> For example, Ulla Dietrichsen exhibition *BeautiFULL* (September – January 2013) reflects on the role that the concept of beauty plays in women's lives. Museum curators also exhibit and research the work of Danish women artists of the past, such as Lisabeth Jerichau Baumann, Lis Zwich and Mette Aarre.

In 2001, the Museum opened its first permanent exhibition on *Women's History and Work*, located on the second floor of the museum. The exhibition is organized chronologically from prehistoric times to the present time, and it presents themes such as motherhood, childbirth, marriage, housekeeping, working life and prostitution, as well as the Women's Liberation Movement in Denmark. The exhibition shows controversial topics, such as the struggle for legal abortion, and presents objects like breast prostheses near stories about breast cancer.<sup>399</sup>

The directors decided to arrange a permanent exhibition in 2001 because continuous changing exhibitions were 'really hard work'.<sup>400</sup> In addition, visitors to the museum expect to visit cultural historical exhibitions and occasionally there were temporary art exhibitions but no sign of a cultural historical museum.<sup>401</sup> However, for Sandahl the chronological permanent display was a negative change for a museum which had presented temporary thematic exhibitions for nearly twenty years.<sup>402</sup>

## **Conclusion.**

The three institutions studied are different in their methodological approaches to feminism: each museum has adapted feminism to its mission, collection, history and financial resources. The Women's Museum in Aarhus, an institution founded in the 1980s under the influence of second-wave feminism, is a space only for women, focused

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397Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

398Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012

399Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

400Ipsen, Merete, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012

401Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

402Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.



on creating jobs for women and on making women's history visible. MoMA's strategy since 2006 has been to include more women in the Museum, an important step in an institution which has been criticised since the 1970s for its institutional sexism. The Modern Women's Project's objective is to increase the presence of women through acquisitions, collection displays and exhibitions. Finally, the Sackler Center's mission is to apply a feminist methodology to reflect on art history, history and the visual field more broadly. Since 2010, Catherine Morris has been redefining the definition of feminism and changing the methodological approach to the question of feminist art. At the Sackler Center, they are interested in a feminist curatorial practice and at looking at the past and at the history of art through a feminist perspective.

## **Chapter Two: Collaboration, leadership and organizational change.**

### **Introduction.**

In this chapter I will explore the impact of collaboration in my three case studies – the Women’s Museum in Aarhus, the Brooklyn Museum in New York and MoMA in New York. I will study the role of collaboration in generating organizational change and the impact upon collaborative practices within each institution.

When I collected data for this thesis, the interviews at the Women’s Museum in Aarhus were fundamental because they helped me define my thesis argument on the tension in the relationship between feminism and professional practice. Based on these interviews, I could establish that one of the main characteristics of a feminist institution is its collaborative nature. The Women’s Museum in Aarhus, a small-scale, grassroots feminist institution since its foundation, was in its first years an example of feminist professionalization. The Museum experimented with non-hierarchical forms of collective management and collective leadership, and created organizational forms that demanded dialogue and consensus of all women working in the Museum. Additionally, at Aarhus the directorship is non-hierarchical: rather than a single director there is a joint directorate. Moreover, after the interviews I realised that the Museum underwent major changes over the years in its institutional structure that demonstrated the difficulties of maintaining a commitment to feminism while being more professionalized and institutionalized.

Secondly, the interviews conducted at MoMA and at the Brooklyn Museum made me realize that both museums had undergone major changes influenced by feminism, but there were also experiencing challenges to maintain a commitment to feminist values. I realised there were issues of institutionalization, containment and non-embeddedness of feminism. These two institutions made me reflect on the tension in the relationship

between feminism and professional practice and on the difficulties of implementing collaboration in a hierarchical institution.

Moreover, one of the main questions which informs this chapter is whether working collaboratively constitutes working in a feminist way. Collaboration has been a feminist strategy since the sixties and seventies, a source of support for women artists and a way to self-empower which they deployed through activism, collective artworks and cooperative artist-run galleries.<sup>403</sup> However, in the three institutions studied it is unclear whether collaboration is motivated by feminist theory or whether it is related to major institutional changes in these museums.

Finally, I will also examine the relationship between power and collaboration and how it affects the institution. This relationship can be problematic because collaboration implies a degree of power-sharing, apart from elements such as communication, trust and solidarity. Power imbalances and hierarchies seem to be in contradiction with cooperation. However, in the institutions studied collaboration was encouraged by museum leaders and philanthropists. Central to my study will be the role of women in positions of power in changing the museum and how these powerful women are encouraging collaborative approaches.

### **Collaboration, professionalization and hierarchy at the Women's Museum in Aarhus.**

#### Collaboration and community involvement

The Women's Museum in Aarhus started as a grassroots movement. It was founded in 1982 as a collaborative museum, inspired by the feminism of the 1970s. The founders were an interdisciplinary group of ten women working and conducting research in different areas at the University of Aarhus.<sup>404</sup> The group of women who founded the

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403Geraldine Prat, 'Collaboration as feminist strategy, Gender, Place and Culture', *A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 17:1, (2010), 43-48, p. 44.

404 Bodil Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012; Merete Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

Museum had an important sense of community involvement and collaboration. During its first years, the Museum grew through work carried out by women from the community. There was a collective effort to build up a collection of material culture, to collect oral history and to gather documents relating to women's history and work.

Women from the community joined the museum and participated in it through the Women's Museum Association. This Association had been established in 1982 with the purpose of founding the Museum. This was common practice in Denmark, where many initiatives begin with the setting up of a society. In addition, the Association was a place in which, after women had worked at the museum for a given period of time, they could continue with their commitment by joining the Association. As a consequence, there was no real division between the work place and the Association.<sup>405</sup>

The Museum was, and still is, a working environment only for women. These women took ownership of the museum; according to Sandahl, women from the Association told her that it was 'the first time in their lives they were doing something meaningful'.<sup>406</sup> They were involved in the Museum, contributing to major decisions and actively participating in the Association.

The Museum benefited from the contribution of women from different social classes and generations. For Sandahl, it was 'interesting' for the Museum founders to work with women from the community, who were in their fifties and sixties, while the Museum founders were in their thirties. In addition, many women working in the Museum and participating in the Association had a different social background to the founding museum members; according to Sandahl some of women had been 'seamstresses in a factory their whole lives', but women in the Association were not elected on the basis of traditional museum qualifications.<sup>407</sup> The majority of the Museum's workers had previously been unemployed, as one of the objectives on the founding of the Museum was to create a place where unemployed women could obtain a job.

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405 Jette Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

406 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

407 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

### Anti-hierarchical structure.

During the Museum's first years the form of management was democracy; there was an equal, flat and non-hierarchical structure characterised by dialogue, discussions and collective decision-making. Museum founders created a balance of powers, a structure that demanded consensus, dialogue and agreement rather than building power. Instead of one museum leader, power was shared between the Museum founders and the members of the Association and they all had equal influence over decisions.<sup>408</sup> The founders took into account all the voices involved in the Museum, all the different positions and disagreements before reaching an agreement. Association members were respected and listened to; for Sandahl they had never experienced 'being in a position like this, where people were listening to them'.<sup>409</sup> The curator-directors would not make major decisions without the support of the group of women in the Association. However, Sandahl explained that women in the Association mainly provided the backing for the decisions of the founding group rather than making decisions on their own. For example, when they were deciding whether the Museum should be a work place only for women, women in the Association were strongly supportive of this commitment, but the main decision came from the Museum leaders.<sup>410</sup>

The majority of post holders in the Museum's board were also women from the Association. In this way, the power of the Women's Museum Association was translated into official museum legislative terms through the Museum statutes and on the board. The Museum had statutes that were unique in the Danish museum world. To create these statutes, a member of the National Council of Culture worked with museum members to ensure that the documents were in compliance with Danish museum legislation. In most museums' statutes, disagreements on the board can be solved because there is an uneven number of members or because the chairs can vote by counting double so that it is possible to create a majority.<sup>411</sup> However, on the Women's Museum's board, the museum membership could actually reach equal numbers and so a motion could not be

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408 Merete Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

409 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

410 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

411 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

outnumbered. As a consequence, the board and managers had to reach consensus through discussions and agreement.

### Collective directorship.

The form of management used at the Women's Museum in Aarhus since its foundation in 1982 is collective leadership. According to Ipsen, the collective directorship model was inspired by the women's movement, as the ten leaders who founded the museum were all equals.<sup>412</sup> Museum staff interviewed by the researcher explained that the main advantage of collective leadership was its 'productivity' compared to other forms of management.<sup>413</sup> On a personal level, Sandahl explained that the collective leadership model was 'superior' to that of hierarchy and 'satisfying', without any conflicts arising between the leaders.<sup>414</sup> At the same time, this form of management was also flexible: Olsen explained that, unlike in other museums, it was possible to change the agenda during directorial meetings. In addition, the curator-directors are able to share responsibilities and to be involved in other projects outside the Museum.<sup>415</sup>

However, Ipsen explained that there are disadvantages to this model: for example, people dealing with the museum leaders could become 'confused' as there was not a clear leader at the Museum. For this reason, the directors try to have defined areas of work in the institution.<sup>416</sup> This model presented challenges for some of the directors as well. Olesen, for instance, found it difficult to adapt to this form of leadership; it was a 'confusing' learning process although at the present time this form of management is 'daily life' for her.<sup>417</sup>

The collective model of management and the anti-hierarchical structure have been maintained to the present day. However, it is important to acknowledge that the leaders have been working at the Museum for long periods of time: Ipsen started working at the

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412 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

413 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

414 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

415 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

416 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

417 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

Museum in 1982 and Olesen in 1990. This is possibly one of the reasons why the collective leadership has worked so effectively: the curator-directors know each other very well; there is common respect and trust and a friendly working environment that has been maintained throughout these years. The anti-hierarchical structure and the collective leadership were also possible because the Museum itself is small with a limited number of staff. The museum directors are able to take common decisions quickly because they can communicate effectively and because their offices are closely connected.

In an interview with Emily Pethick, director of the Showroom, she explained that it is easier to work collaboratively and with more flexibility in smaller organizations. These institutions can be more independent, more flexible and are more able to take risks and do things spontaneously.<sup>418</sup> However, when the institutions start growing and changing it can be challenging to maintain a collaborative and non-hierarchical structure.

### **Changes in the Women's Museum in Aarhus.**

During the years it has been operational, there have been important changes in the Museum's collaborative model and collective leadership due to its growth, professionalization and changes in funding and state recognition. These changes have affected the way the Museum operates; the institution gradually became more hierarchical and it lost part of its collaborative spirit.

#### Museum's growth, access to the city hall and official recognition.

One of the changes that led to the professionalization of the Museum was its growth and access to the old City Hall. In 1984 the Women's Museum Association acquired the right-hand section of the City Hall, and then from 1992-1993 the entire building was renovated for the purposes of holding museum exhibitions. As the Museum expanded in

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418 Emily Pethick, Personal Interview, 17 January 2013.

size the women's group was able to add a side wing to the building in 2005, which is fitted for a permanent exhibition on gender and childhood.

Gaining access to the City Hall was fundamental in the consultation process towards official registration. The Aarhus museum was legislated and state-recognized by Danish authorities and gradually became more consolidated and professionalized. The movement towards official recognition started in the middle of the 1980s, when the Museum was evaluated in terms of its research, collections and administration by the Association of Danish Museums.<sup>419</sup> The Museum obtained the official recognition in 1990, when it took its place among the nationally accredited museums in Denmark.<sup>420</sup> The conclusion of the Association of Danish Museums was that the Women's Museum had achieved professional standards in the areas evaluated.

One of the issues debated during the process of official recognition was the collective leadership in the Museum. The idea of a collective leadership was previously unknown in the Danish museum world. In order to retain their collective leadership model, museum leaders needed the state and Danish legislation to recognize it. Danish museum legislation is very detailed and specifies how museums should be run; within this, the role of the museum director is well-defined. However, in the process of becoming a registered museum, they applied and were granted an exception from the paragraph of the Museum legislation concerning the museum director. The group was authorised to run the Museum on a collective basis for three years, after which it would be evaluated again. The collective leadership was evaluated successfully again in the middle of the nineties and the Museum gained permission to keep their collective leadership model indefinitely.<sup>421</sup>

However, state recognition provoked changes in the flat structure and in the collective leadership of the Museum. In 1982, the first leaders of the Women's Museum were a group of ten women; some of them were academics and others were not, but this did not create a hierarchy. However, in order to gain official registration, all the Museum leaders

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419 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

420 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

421 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.



had to possess a degree in order to fulfil the criteria to be directors. People without degrees could not be part of the collective management.<sup>422</sup>

### Professionalization and specialization.

In the late eighties and early nineties the Women's Museum in Aarhus was not professionalized. None of the group were museum professionals or had any museum experience, which made the Museum flexible and 'fresh'.<sup>423</sup> According to Sandahl, 'we were not following the rules because we didn't know the rules'.<sup>424</sup>

For Sandahl, collaboration at the Museum was related to being a 'small museum'. In the late eighties and early nineties there were not many members of staff and for this reason the directors and women working at the Museum were sharing all the roles and responsibilities such as collecting oral history, collecting physical objects, registering objects and planning exhibitions and projects as well as networking with other museum.<sup>425</sup> This fact encouraged equality in the Museum as it was possible for all the members to maintain a broad perspective on all of the tasks.<sup>426</sup>

However, Museum growth and state recognition led to some professionalization and specialization.<sup>427</sup> In order to be registered as an official museum, its members had to examine their ways of working and make sure they were following the correct procedures. After three or four years of producing exhibitions and building collections in a 'free' and what Ipsen refers to as an 'anarchist' manner, the group started to work in a more 'ordinary' way.<sup>428</sup> For example, they started selling tickets for exhibitions and collecting and registering objects in a traditional manner.<sup>429</sup> Before state recognition the group had been collecting objects without obtaining information regarding their provenance. After being officially recognized, they had to modify their collecting procedures and this narrowed down the collecting scope of the Museum.<sup>430</sup> Gradually,

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422 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

423 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

424 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

425 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

426 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

427 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

428 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

429 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

430 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

as the institution grew, there was a more extensive division of labour. With professionalization and specialization it was more difficult to maintain the Museum's values of equality; and museum members lost the 'equalities of doing everything'.<sup>431</sup>

### Funding.

Finally, the official recognition and the growth of the Museum led to changes in funding which also influenced the collective leadership model. In the eighties the Museum attracted significant funding from initiatives designed to combat unemployment rather than from the cultural sector. This funding came from the local, national and European Union level for unemployment projects. The funding was not steady – they had to apply for funding from project to project – but it was very generous. According to Sandahl, 'money was poured into creating jobs for the jobless'.<sup>432</sup>

However, in the late eighties the Museum increasingly struggled to gain unemployment funding. After the Museum's official recognition in 1991, it began sourcing funding from the cultural sector, the local government (the municipality of Aarhus), the national government (the Ministry of Culture) and from private foundations and entrance fees.

The changes in funding impacted the collective management and the flat structure of the Museum.<sup>433</sup> When funding became harder to obtain, some of the project manager jobs and job schemes were discontinued.<sup>434</sup> In 1982 there were ten women museum leaders, but when the Museum was recognized by the state in 1991, these positions were reduced to six and all post-holders had to be academically educated. Later, changes in the funding for unemployment reduced the number of academically educated leaders to three.<sup>435</sup> At the present time, there are just two museum leaders remaining, Ipsen and Olsen; the Museum still struggles to obtain funding, and Ipsen explained that in the future there will probably be only one museum director.<sup>436</sup> At the moment of the interviews, the Museum had an annual budget of approximately twelve million Danish Krone (1.4

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431 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

432 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

433 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

434 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

435 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

436 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

million pounds approximately). Some of this funding comes from private foundations and Danish institutions, such as the Egmont Foundation, the Oak Foundation Denmark, the Ole Kirk's Foundation, The Farumgaard Foundation, The Cultural Heritage Agency and the City Council of Aarhus. However, one of the main funding sources for the Museum remains unemployment subsidies that cover wages of the women employed.<sup>437</sup>

#### Recent changes affecting collaboration.

At the time of the interviews on which this research is based, the Museum was in a transitional phase, facing major challenges to its collaborative structure and the involvement of women from the Women's Museum Association. The Association, which had owned and run the Museum since the foundation of the institution, was dissolved at the start of 2012.<sup>438</sup> Anonymous Participant 1 explained that the Association had to vote twice to dissolve itself. Since the dissolution, the Museum has been an independent institution with a new board and a Society of Friends of the Museum.<sup>439</sup> Nowadays there is a hierarchical structure: the two director-curators are in charge and make all the decisions.<sup>440</sup>

The recent organisational developments in the Museum are also due to changes in funding and to the professionalization of the Museum. According to Anonymous 1, being an independent museum rather than a museum owned by a society attracts more funding from other institutions.<sup>441</sup> Ipsen explained that the reason why they changed the board and dissolved the society was that 'everything was more professionally analysed' and at the same time it was beneficial for the Museum to involve other local institutions in its management.<sup>442</sup>

One of the most important changes in the Museum concerns the board. Since 2012 there has been a new board formed by seven members of different institutions in Aarhus: a

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437 Merete Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

438 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

439 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

440 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

441 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

442 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

member appointed by the city council, a member appointed by the University of Aarhus, a member from the Society of Friends of the Museum, one of the curator-directors, a member of the trade unions, a member working in film and other media and one of the members of staff working at the Museum.<sup>443</sup>

Anonymous 1 lamented that the new board was less involved with the rest of the Museum than the Women's Museum Association had been. For example, the city council took several months to appoint members and as a consequence they did not have board meetings for half a year; at the time of the interviews the new board members had not met the Museum's members yet. Moreover, Anonymous 1 explained that initially there was no staff member on the new board. Then, a staff representative privately asked the women working at the Museum if they wanted her to 'fight' to have a representative on the new board and they all agreed.<sup>444</sup>

However, some of the interviewees explained that the anti-hierarchical spirit that has not been retained at the institutional level has nevertheless been maintained on a personal level.<sup>445</sup> There is a friendly and respectful approach in the relationships between the directors and the rest of the staff. Olesen highlighted the importance of 'respecting their staff', who took 'ownership' of the Museum 'as much as the leaders'.<sup>446</sup> For Ipsen, it is essential to 'think non-hierarchically'; that is, to promote a high level of information sharing, to have open discussions with members of staff and to take into account the different voices at the Museum.<sup>447</sup> Anonymous 1 explained that she did not feel that the managers were her bosses; they were 'like another colleague' although she admitted that it was they who made decisions.<sup>448</sup>

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443 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012; Merete Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

444 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

445 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012; Merete Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

446 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

447 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

448 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

### **Other forms of collaboration: Networking with different institutions.**

The Museum cooperates with other museums and institutions in Denmark, such as the Museum of Copenhagen and the open-air museum Den Gamle By.<sup>449</sup> Also, the Women's Museum ran the new-extinct Center For Gender Studies at Aarhus University in cooperation with the Institute of History and Area Studies, the University of Aarhus, the Women's History Archives and the State and University Library in Aarhus.

There are important collaborations with other Danish museums in research projects, most of them undertaken by Olesen. For example, the exhibition *Diana's Daughters: Female Hunters Then and Now*. (11 February – 6 May 2012) was a three-year joint research project of Olesen and The Danish Museum of Hunting and Forestry.<sup>450</sup>

During the last few years, the Museum has also found new ways to be collaborative through international projects with other museums, most of them with funding from the European Union. One of the first exhibitions which received financial support from the European Union was *100 Years of Women's Suffrage in Europe* (April – August 2007). The exhibition travelled from the Frauenmuseum, Bonn, to Aarhus and then to the Women's Foundation eFKa in Krakow; it was a collaborative project involving the three institutions. Another European Union funded exhibition was *The Journey to Denmark* (June – September 2010), a project in which the partners interviewed and photographed immigrant families in different European cities. Finally, the project *Young Women Speaking the Economy*, which received funding from the Museums & Community Collaborations Abroad (MCCA), was developed in partnership with the International Museum of Women, San Francisco (USA), the Sudanese Women's Museum and Ahfad University for Women in the Sudan.<sup>451</sup>

In 2013, the Museum was part of the international co-operative project *MUSLIMA: Muslim Women's Art and Voices* (August – October 2013) which presented works by ten female Muslim artists. The project was a collaboration between the Women's Museum in Aarhus, the International Museum of Women, the Museum of Islamic Civilisation in

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449 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

450 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

451 <http://kvindemuseet.dk/>

Sharjah (UAE) and the Ayala Museum in Makati City (Philippines) and it received support from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the Danish Art Council.<sup>452</sup>

To apply for and receive funding from the European Union, the Women's Museum and the other institutions from its network have to be cooperative, support each other, negotiate collective ideas, share knowledge to produce exhibitions and tackle issues together. However, this collaboration is not motivated specifically by feminist theory; rather, it is about creating solidarity with other small institutions and finding methods of sustainability in a hostile funding climate.

### **Collaboration and leadership at the Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum and at MoMA.**

In this section I will explore the impulse to work collaboratively in two elite American institutions, the Brooklyn Museum and MoMA. These museums are professional and hierarchical institutions which are using strategies to incorporate feminism and organizational change and to be more open and democratic.

#### **The Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.**

##### **Leadership.**

##### Women in positions of power.

At MoMA and at the Brooklyn Museum, women in positions of power have been encouraging organizational change. Elizabeth A. Sackler founded and sponsored the Sackler Center while Sarah Peter supported the Modern Women's Project at MoMA.

For Chicago and Reilly, the infiltration of feminism into elitist American art institutions is partially due to powerful women who can economically support other women. Feminism is influencing institutions because women 'have come forward to provide

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<sup>452</sup> <http://kvindemuseet.dk/>

patronage for another woman's work – at a level from which women had formerly been restricted'.<sup>453</sup> There is a new generation of women who are in positions of power in major cultural institutions as benefactors, donors, trustees and collectors. These women are addressing issues related to feminism, collecting artworks by women artists and supporting feminist exhibitions. Consequently, organizational change is coming from inside the museum due to the pressure exerted by women in these institutions. For example, there are major donors who support women's and feminist art such as Sackler, Peter, Carol Jenkins - president of the Women's Media Center - Helen LaKelly Hunt, Barbara Dobkin and Jennifer Buffett.<sup>454</sup> Moreover, according to Reilly, the simultaneity of feminist exhibitions and events such as *Global Feminisms* at the Sackler Center, *WACK!* at MOCA and the symposium *The Feminist Future* at MoMA were related to women getting into positions of power.<sup>455</sup> However, change is not just about women having economic power, but also about leadership, and about women 'having the skills to move into leadership'.<sup>456</sup>

According to Camille Morineau, one of the characteristics of the American art scene is the importance of philanthropists, and this fact has played an essential role in relation to the collection of art made by women.<sup>457</sup> For Morineau, some American women philanthropists are collecting exclusively the work of women artists. For example, Sackler has acquired the largest private collection of works by Chicago. Also, philanthropist Wilhelmina Cole Holladay started a collection of works by women artists in the 1980s and opened the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington in 1987 to house her collection.<sup>458</sup> For Morineau, although public museums are trying to address the question of gender imbalance in their collections, private collections are often ahead of them. For example, patrons and private collectors such as Heather and

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453 Hoban, 'We are Finally Infiltrating', <http://www.artnews.com/2007/02/01/were-finally-infiltrating/>

454 Hershman, 'Transcript of interview with Maura Reilly', <https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>;

455 Phebe Hoban, 'We're Finally Infiltrating', *Art News*, 2 January, 2007, <http://www.artnews.com/2007/02/01/were-finally-infiltrating/>

456 Hershman, 'Transcript of interview with Maura Reilly', <https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

457 Camille Morineau, 'Private Collections of Work by Women Artists: An Overview', in *Art Press*, 383, (2011), 60-63 (p. 60).

458 Ibid., p. 60.

Tony Podesta, Linda Lee Adler, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Barbara Lee, Margaret Loeb, Leonore Pereira and Rich Niles are exclusively supporting and acquiring works by women artists.<sup>459</sup>

Elizabeth A. Sackler.

According to Morris and Grayson, feminist infiltration and institutional change at the Brooklyn Museum are related to women being in positions of power and leadership, women who have the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about feminism and who have the means to support other women. At the Brooklyn Museum, there are influential and powerful women on the Board of Trustees, such as Sackler and Stephanie Ingrassia, who are advocating for contemporary art and feminist art.<sup>460</sup> For Maura Reilly, thanks to these women in power feminism is now within an elitist institution, with a department dedicated to feminism along with the departments of Asian Art, Egyptian Art and American Art.<sup>461</sup>

Sackler, a social and artist activist and an advocate for Native American causes, is the founder of the Center and the primary donor. The Center emerged from her personal vision and it is her initiative, commitment and financial support which have made it a permanent intervention in the Brooklyn Museum. After the foundation, Sackler has continued advocating for the Center through the board.<sup>462</sup> Also, she has been involved in the programming since the opening of the Center and she selected the architect, Susan T. Rodriguez.

Sackler manages her philanthropy through the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation, which she founded in 2002 to raise awareness of the contributions of women in all areas of art and culture, focusing on women and feminist art exhibitions. Through this foundation,

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459 Ibid., pp. 61, 62.

460 Saisha Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013; Catherine Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

461 Hershman, 'Transcript of interview with Maura Reilly', <https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>

462 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.



Elizabeth A. Sackler bought Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, donating it in 2002 to the Brooklyn Museum and made the Sackler Center possible. Her foundation also supports the salary of the staff: in April 2012, Sackler announced a major donation to the Brooklyn Museum to support the establishment and salary of a permanent curator of feminist art for the institution.<sup>463</sup>

The Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation makes possible all the exhibitions at the Center. Curators at the Sackler have to make proposals regularly to the Sackler Foundation for continued funding. In these proposals they detail their plans for the Center for the following five years, including the number of exhibitions and the kinds of exhibitions and programmes they are planning, but they do not have to specify the themes and content of the exhibitions. Then, based on what they have done in the past and their proposals for the future, Sackler and the Sackler Foundation decide whether or not to continue funding for the programme.<sup>464</sup>

However, it seems that the Museum and the Center are seeking independence from this source of funding. According to Stayton, curators are trying to find more resources apart from the Sackler Foundation in order to have greater economic independence. Stayton highlighted the importance of having a 'mix of funding' that would give the Museum more independence instead of relying in just one particular donor's generosity.<sup>465</sup>

#### Involving men: Arnold Lehman.

Although there are only women working at the Center, Morris and Grayson explained that the Center is not a women-only institution and they stressed the importance of involving men. For Morris, men can be equally interested in feminism and they can become 'allies' in developing a feminist art programme. Some of them, like Arnold Lehman, director of the Brooklyn, were actively involved in the foundation and the

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463 Melena Ryzik, 'Brooklyn's Museum Feminist Art Post to Become Permanent', *Arts Beat, The New York Times*, 18 April 2012.

464 Kevin Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

465 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

running of the Center.<sup>466</sup> In fact, the Sackler Center is an example of the importance of collaboration between a feminist donor – Sackler – and a museum director.

For Stayton, Sackler's and Lehman's partnership in the foundation of the Center was possible because the donor's ideas and those of the director's were 'running a parallel course'.<sup>467</sup> Sackler thought of starting an entire museum for feminist art in the late 1990s. However, she soon realised that it would require an enormous effort and would be a large project; then, she began to think about the different Sackler Galleries and Wings that her father and uncles had created within other institutions. Eventually, she decided to partner with an already-existing institution which would be willing to engage with her and share her vision.

In 2002, Sackler shared her vision of a feminist department with Lehman and they began discussing the possibility of the Center. They also had the support of the Board of Trustees; Sackler herself was a member of the Board. Then, the same year Sackler arranged the gift of the *The Dinner Party*'s through the Elizabeth A. Sackler Foundation to the Brooklyn Museum with an agreement that it should serve as the centrepiece of a feminist art centre, which would include a permanent collection, galleries for changing exhibitions and a space for educational activities.<sup>468</sup>

Sackler founded the Center in the Brooklyn because she responded to the institution and to what the institution had been doing in the late nineties and early noughties.<sup>469</sup> When Lehman started running the Museum in 1997, his objective was to make it welcoming and unconventional, in relation to its Manhattan art museum competitors, prioritising visitor experience and community engagement.<sup>470</sup> For Stayton, Lehman is a 'forward looking director', aware of the need for the Museum to serve the public, committed to the notions of 'diversity and freedom of speech'<sup>471</sup> and, for Bleiberg, willing to transform the Museum into a place where the 'traditionally underrepresented are represented'.<sup>472</sup>

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466 Catherine Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

467 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

468 Dana Micucci, 'Feminist Art get Place of Pride in Brooklyn', *The New York Times*, 19 April 2007.

469 Edward Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013; Kevin Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

470 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

471 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

472 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

Sackler was aware of these ideas and responded to the Museum because she intended to apply a similar approach related to feminism.<sup>473</sup> At the same time, Lehman decided to support Sackler's initiative because the Center's programme was consistent with his objectives for the Brooklyn Museum.

### **Collaboration.**

From its foundation in 2007 until 2011 there were just two members of staff at the Center: a curator and a research assistant. In July 2011 the Sackler doubled its size by adding two positions: an assistant curator and a programme manager. Being a department with just four members of staff makes it challenging to report any collaborative methods harnessed by the people working at the Center.

### Networking with other institutions.

The Center actively networks with other feminist institutions and women's museums. For example, the Sackler Center is a Founding Program Partner of The Feminist Art Project (TFAP) together with Rutgers University and it hosts an annual March Program organized by TFAP, A.I.R. Gallery and the Institute for Women and Art (IWA). The Center also programmed the exhibition *Herstory Archive* (September 2012) together with the Lesbian Herstory Archive, a volunteer-run collection of archives relating to lesbian history based in Brooklyn. Finally, they have been in conversations with the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington regarding travelling exhibitions such as *Workt by Hand* (March – September 2013).<sup>474</sup>

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473 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

474 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa>

## Inter-departmental collaboration between the Sackler Center and the Brooklyn Museum

In recent years there has been an impulse at the Center to work more collaboratively with other departments at the Museum. The main collaborative effort has been with the Department of Education, especially since Jessica Wilcox – the Programme Manager – was hired in 2011. Before Wilcox arrived most of the programmes were run through the Department of Education only. The Programme Manager is part of the Sackler Center but she works closely with the Department of Education designing educational programs. Wilcox's aim is to bring a feminist perspective to programmes and to engage the public in current exhibitions at the Sackler. Sometimes the programming is related to filling the gaps in audience development that the exhibitions at the Sackler were unable to address.<sup>475</sup>

On the other hand, there has been important inter-departmental co-curation with the Brooklyn Museum since the foundation of the Sackler. The Herstory Gallery at the Sackler Center, which is dedicated to exhibitions that explore the contributions of the 1038 women named in *The Dinner Party*, is an example of collaboration between the Brooklyn and the Center. For example, *Pharaohs, Queens and Goddesses* (February 2007 – February 2008), which was the inaugural biographical gallery show in the Sackler Center, was co-curated by Maura Reilly, founding curator of the Sackler Center and Bleiberg, and the exhibition *The Fertile Goddess* (December 2008 – May 2009) was co-curated by Madeleine E. Cody, Research Associate in Egyptian, Classical and Ancient Middle Eastern Art at Brooklyn Museum and Maura Reilly.<sup>476</sup>

A recent example of inter-departmental co-curation is the exhibition *Workt by Hand: Hidden Labour and Historical Quilts* (March – September 2013), in which Morris worked collaboratively and in 'constant conversation' with Barry Harwood, curator of Decorative Arts and Stayton, Chief Curator and specialist in decorative arts.<sup>477</sup> Harwood and Stayton contributed their expertise and connoisseurship in choosing the quilts and researching their background while Morris contributed her knowledge of feminist theory.

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475 Jessica Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

476 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa>

477 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

### Collaboration at the Brooklyn Museum.

According to Morris, collaboration with other departments is not specifically feminist, but it is standard museum practice at the Brooklyn Museum. For her, inter-departmental collaboration at the Center is part of a major institutional mandate at the Brooklyn to bring down barriers between departments and to achieve more unity.<sup>478</sup> Moreover, collaboration is related to practical reasons: the Sackler Center does not have a collection, so it has to interact with other departments in order to present exhibitions.<sup>479</sup>

In recent years there has been an effort to work collaboratively and to unify departments at the Brooklyn Museum. When Lehman started running the Museum in 1997, it was made up of separate departments organised in terms of the cultures represented. Each of the departments was run independently from the Museum's primary mission. Lehman's objective was to have a single mission and a unified goal. For this reason, in the last five years there has been an effort to unify the primary mission of the Museum, unify departments and work collaboratively within departments.<sup>480</sup> The organizational structure has been simplified: the curatorial departments have been reorganized and unified so they are more centralized. At the present moment, there are just four curatorial departments: Exhibitions, Arts of the Americas, Contemporary Art and Egyptian, Classical and Ancient Middle Eastern Art.<sup>481</sup> The departments are now more involved with the Museum's goals and objectives rather than operating independently and being 'collecting units on their own'.<sup>482</sup> For Stayton, this centralization has proven to be effective, and it has the advantage that all the curators have the opportunity to be engaged in other departments, and 'do a bit of everything'.<sup>483</sup>

The main measure to encourage collaboration at the Museum has been inter-departmental co-curation. In order to present exhibitions, curators from different

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478 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

479 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

480 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

481 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

482 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

483 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

departments have to interact with each other, and the exhibitions at the Museum are now organized by mutual goals rather than individual departmental goals.

A major example has been the long-term installation of the collections in the exhibition *Connecting Cultures*, starting in 2012, which was made possible by curators from different departments. *Connecting Cultures* was developed to create new ways of looking at art by making connections between cultures, juxtaposing thematically linked works. With this exhibition it was possible to present a more complex analysis of the collections in the Museum.<sup>484</sup>

Overall, Bleiberg and Stayton evaluated inter-departmental collaboration positively. For Bleiberg, the main advantage of inter-departmental collaboration is that curators from different fields can share ideas, expertise and offer the benefits of their knowledge to each other.<sup>485</sup> It is possible to exchange more ideas for programmes and exhibitions, and so it is more productive than working in isolation. The challenge is to make sure that everybody's ideas are also incorporated into each programme. Another disadvantage is that it is more time consuming and curators have to work harder. Also, it is necessary to take into account other people's schedules, writing styles and attitudes.<sup>486</sup>

### **Leadership and collaboration at MoMA.**

In the last twenty years, MoMA has also seen a fundamental transformation in terms of inter-departmental collaboration. Under the leadership of Glenn Lowry, who became director of the Museum in 1995, MoMA has almost doubled its size while increasing exhibition space. Its funding has almost quadrupled to nearly a billion dollars and extensive collections have been acquired. Also, the Museum has included more Latin American and non-Western art and it has become more welcoming to performance and political art.<sup>487</sup> At the same time, the institution has focused on collecting more work by women and feminist artists, especially through the Modern Women's Project. This

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484 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

485 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

486 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

487 Randy Kennedy, 'MoMA's expansion and director draw critics', *The New York Times*, 21 April 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/arts/momas-expansion-and-director-draw-critics.html>>

initiative started as a small ‘grassroots’<sup>488</sup> project in 2005 but it soon became very influential in the Museum. One of the main characteristics of the project is the balance of collaboration and leadership.

### Women in positions of power

According to Grayson, women curators, benefactors and trustees in important positions have been influential in implementing organizational change at MoMA.<sup>489</sup> For Schwartz, the change at MoMA is related to a generational shift: there is a new generation of women in positions of power in museums, the ‘Hillary Clinton generation’.<sup>490</sup> These women, now in their sixties, participated in the second wave of feminism. They are economically independent and are thinking about their ‘legacies, about what marks they want to leave in the world and how they want to set up their philanthropy’.<sup>491</sup>

However, for Butler, this change in the Museum is only partially related to women in positions of power. Butler explained that some of the powerful women curators and trustees at MoMA are not interested in a feminist agenda. Change at the Museum is not related to gender but to a new generation of curators. In fact, Butler credits much of the progress in institutions towards feminism to male colleagues who are interested in gender issues such as Doryun Chong, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture (now Chief Curator of the M+ Museum), and scholars like Richard Meyer, who wrote an essay for the catalogue of *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*.<sup>492</sup>

### Sarah Peter

The organizational changes and the feminist approach at MoMA are also related to the influence of Sarah Peter.<sup>493</sup> At MoMA, some of the curators had been looking at

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488 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

489 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

490 Alexandra Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February, 2013.

491 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February, 2013.

492 Cornelia Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

493 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February, 2013.

women's work before the Modern Women's Project but they never 'had the money to look at it before'.<sup>494</sup> It was Peter's initiative and support which made the project possible.<sup>495</sup>

Peter is a philanthropist, patron of the arts and feminist artist who is involved in diverse organizations focused on women's leadership. For example, she economically supports the Omega Women's Leadership Center, based in New York, and the Odwar Fund in Uganda. Her long-term goal is to train outstanding women in the financial world.<sup>496</sup>

Peter established the Modern Women's Fund in 2005 with the purpose of supporting women at MoMA.<sup>497</sup> Initially the Fund went towards the book *Modern Women* and to the symposium *The Feminist Future* in 2007. After the book was published, Peter supported small exhibitions in each department. Currently, the Fund is financing the acquisition of artworks by women artists.

One of Peter's main interests is leadership and the empowerment of women. For example, the Fund supports a coach, Barbara Tannenbaum, whose expertise lies in public speaking. Tannenbaum coaches staff at the museum with their public speaking, teaching them to be more articulate and confident.<sup>498</sup>

Since the establishment of the Fund, Peter has been an important presence at MoMA. For Butler, her philanthropy is effective because it is 'very personal': Peter is involved in every aspect of the project, tracking 'her dollars very carefully'.<sup>499</sup> However, Peter is a very discreet philanthropist and her project does not have much publicity.<sup>500</sup>

### Curators at MoMA

According to Peter, she chose MoMA for her philanthropy because she was impressed by the large group of women curators and the leadership at the Museum.<sup>501</sup> In fact, part

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494 Sally Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

495 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

496 <https://www.eomega.org/workshops/teachers/sarah-peter>; Sarah Peter, Phone Interview, 15 July 2013.

497 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February, 2013.

498 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013; Barbara London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

499 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

500 Barbara London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

501 Peter, Phone Interview, 15 July 2013.



of the culture of MoMA has been to have women in positions of power. MoMA's three founding 'mothers' – Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan – were women. Also, there are powerful women on the Board of Trustees and some of them have a feminist agenda.<sup>502</sup> For example, Agnes Gund, President of the Board, is interested in feminism and contemporary art and has donated important feminist artworks by Lynda Benglis.

Women curators have always been part of the history of MoMA<sup>503</sup> but in recent years some of them have moved into significant leadership roles.<sup>504</sup> For example, in the 1970s there was only one woman head of a department (Ria Castleman, Head of Prints and Illustrated Books). However, in the last ten years, there have been more women chief curators, such as Mary Leah Bandy, Cornelia Butler, Roxana Marcoci, Anne Umland, Ann Temkin and Deborah Wye. The arrival of Butler, appointed by Lowry in 2006, was instrumental for the Modern Women's Project as she was a well-respected feminist curator after the important show *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.<sup>505</sup>

### Involving men: Glenn Lowry

According to Marcoci, for change to be permanent and effective it has to involve everyone in the Museum and its communities, not just 'a fraction of the public and of the curators'.<sup>506</sup> The Modern Women's Project involved almost all the curators at MoMA; it was the first time that a project was so widespread in the museum.<sup>507</sup> Peter's initiative affected the entire Museum, 'crossing departments and crossing levels' from the curators to the Board to the director.<sup>508</sup>

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502 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

503 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013; Anne Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

504 Anne Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013; Sally Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013; Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

505 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

506 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

507 Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

508 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

However, the Modern Women's group itself was composed of women curators only. Schwartz acknowledged that the absence of men in the group was problematic and that they addressed this issue several times in their meetings. According to her, the decision to have only women came from the museum director; it was Lowry who appointed women to work on the project.<sup>509</sup>

Butler explained that men were involved in the Modern Women's project in different ways. The contributions of male curators such as Laurence Kardish, Luis Pérez-Oramas or Christophe Cherix were evident in the publication *Modern Women* and in the exhibitions. Also, the group had the support of collectors like Glenn Furhman, a member of the Modern Women's Fund committee who collected and donated an important group of works by Lynda Benglis through his family foundation.<sup>510</sup>

The interviewees agreed that Lowry's support was essential and influential for the Modern Women's Project.<sup>511</sup> Butler explained that the project would not have been possible without his support. For the curators interviewed, the MoMA director was 'supportive',<sup>512</sup> 'encouraging',<sup>513</sup> and 'engaging'.<sup>514</sup> Lowry was involved with the group, attending all Modern Women's Projects events, symposiums, openings and meetings of the Fund. The director worked closely with the curators and stayed aware of the issues, ideas and artists they were debating.<sup>515</sup> For Marcoci, this is not different from Lowry's general approach at the Museum. In general, the director is very involved with artists and curators. Lowry is an 'artist's director', who very frequently goes to studio and gallery visits, 'certainly more than other directors and sometimes more than other curators'.<sup>516</sup>

Since the inception of the Modern Women's Project, Lowry's objective has been to increase the representation of women in the Museum and to include more women artists in the programme. According to Butler, the director frequently insists on looking at the

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509 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

510 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

511 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June, 2013; Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

512 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013; Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013; Starr Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

513 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

514 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

515 Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

516 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

exhibition schedule and modifies it if it does not contain enough women. He also supports the acquisitions of works by women: whenever there is a major acquisition that needs additional support for a woman artist's work he will try to raise the funds for it.<sup>517</sup>

However, author Mira Schor noticed that curators at MoMA seemed to need permission from the museum director to implement change at the Museum.<sup>518</sup> According to Schor, when Halbreich, Associate Director of MoMA, tried to involve the curators in the Modern Women's Project she asked each of them 'What do you want to do', and then, leaning in, 'What do you really want to do'. According to Schor, Halbreich reported to the director that there was 'self-censorship' in the organization. Then Lowry 'gave permission for her to give permission' to the other curators to express what they really wanted to do on the project. Schor lamented the fact that feminist infiltration has to rely on permission from 'more or less enlightened or benevolent' individuals in institutions. However, Schor also acknowledged that, in order to change major institutions like MoMA, it is better to obtain the permission than not to obtain it.<sup>519</sup>

## **Collaboration.**

### Collaboration at MoMA.

The collaborative and non-hierarchical nature of the Modern Women's Project is related to important organizational changes at MoMA.<sup>520</sup> According to Schwartz, 'the project couldn't have happened before structurally';<sup>521</sup> it was not a coincidence that the project evolved at the same time that the structure of the Museum changed.

Inter-departmental collaboration, which was one of the main features of the project, was also an institutional mandate at MoMA. When Lowry started running the Museum he made it his mission to encourage inter-departmental collaboration and inter-disciplinary

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517 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

518 Mira Schor, 'MoMA panel: "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now"', in *A Year of Positive Thinking*, 23 May 2010, <<http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/23/moma-panel-art-institutions-and-feminist-politics-now/>>

519 Ibid.

520 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

521 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

ways of thinking. Lowry's objective was to re-structure a 'balkanized' museum.<sup>522</sup> For this reason, during the last ten years Lowry has encouraged collaboration between departments and the breaking down of fixed structures.<sup>523</sup> This structural goal is possibly one of Lowry's motives in supporting Peter with the development of the project.

Before Lowry's initiative and the Modern Women's Project, MoMA was a territorial museum.<sup>524</sup> MoMA is organized by medium; for Marcoci the departments 'functioned like Federations', and, according to London, they were 'bureaucratized by medium'.<sup>525</sup>

The Museum's media division began in the 1960s at the same time as the Museum's expansion. As the institution grew, it became more territorial with separate departments: Drawings and Prints, Painting and Sculpture, Photography and Architecture. This separation was useful for administrative and preservation purposes, as conservation methods can be different for each medium.<sup>526</sup>

However, this separation by medium does not effectively represent artistic practice. Curators at MoMA often collect and research the entire career of a particular artist and most artists work across media. Thus, in order to represent the career of an artist, there should be a conversation among curators.<sup>527</sup> Inter-departmental collaboration and interdisciplinary methods of working are necessary in order to reflect artists' careers.

However, Lowry's directorship and the changes in structure and inter-departmental collaboration have drawn criticism by authors such as Randy Kennedy. When the Museum was territorial, the chief curators were very powerful. Changes encouraged by Lowry resulted in criticism that the director was consolidating too much power and taking away power from the chief curators, sometimes making it difficult for them to organize the exhibitions as they preferred. Lowry denied those claims explaining that his objective was to improve collaboration at the Museum.<sup>528</sup>

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522 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013; Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

523 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

524 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013

525 cited in Mira Schor, 'MoMA panel: "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now"'.

526 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013; Barbara London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013; Roxana Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

527 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

528 Kennedy, 'MoMA's expansion and director draw critics'.

### Collaboration in the Modern Women's Project.

During the last ten years at MoMA there has been more inter-departmental engagement in different projects<sup>529</sup> but the main collaborative effort has been the Modern Women's Project. Inter-departmental collaboration was relatively unusual when the project started and MoMA was still distinctly hierarchical.<sup>530</sup>

The Modern Women's collaborative model has also been encouraged by Peter. She is especially interested in collaboration and the strategies at MoMA suited her objectives. According to Umland, Peter's model of philanthropy was 'empowering' and 'feminist'.<sup>531</sup> Her idea of collaboration was that all the women involved contributed to the project. Peter asked the curators to meet and decide what they wanted to do with the funding, encouraging cooperation, participation and dialogue.<sup>532</sup> Their choice did not have to be related to women artists: it could be structural change, programming, a children's facilities centre for working mothers, acquisitions, publications, etc., but it had to be a decision of the curators.

### The Modern Women's Group.

After Peter approached the Museum in 2005, all the curators were invited to participate and decide what to do with the funding. Each department nominated a representative to the Modern Women's group.<sup>533</sup> At that point, collaboration was new for the people involved because there had not been much cross-departmental collaboration before.<sup>534</sup> The group met in various capacities, discussed different ideas and shared information. After several meetings, the group started to look at the role and place of women artists at MoMA and curators decided to use the grant for research and to publish a book. The information from the meetings was filtered back to everyone in the Museum, even those

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529 Schor, 'MoMA panel: "Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now"'.  
530 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

531 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

532 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013; London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

533 Umland., Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

534 Butler, personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

not participating, so everyone was aware of the project.<sup>535</sup> This measure came from a desire for greater transparency within the institution which characterized the meetings and the project.

Throughout these years, there were different curators in charge in the group, all of them appointed by Lowry. The first head of the group was Mary Leah Bandy, then Deborah Why, Umland and Susan Mismark and finally Butler. However, the organization was non-hierarchical all the women present had a vote and all the voices were heard.<sup>536</sup> Also, when planning the articles for the book, Schwartz and Butler encouraged the curators to write about their own interests, expertise and passions in order to incorporate a variety of points of view. For this reason, some of the artists discussed in the book were outside of the canon while others were very well known.<sup>537</sup>

For Schwartz the collaboration was logistically complicated because it involved curators from every department in the Museum.<sup>538</sup> The discussions were across mediums, across departments and across artistic practices. Most curators were 'excited' to learn more about other departments, collections and artists.<sup>539</sup> For example, the department of Film contributed with research on filmmakers. Butler explained that it was interesting to learn about women filmmakers and actresses that were almost unknown to her such as Maya Deren and Lillian Gish.<sup>540</sup>

Dialogue and consensus were essential in developing trust and collaboration. In the meetings the curators had the opportunity to express opinions and address issues that they had never been able to discuss before. For Berger, curators 'expressed a lot of feelings and sentiments and ideas'.<sup>541</sup> In the internal debates self-criticism was essential, which allowed the curators to understand issues in the institution and to think about the changes required.<sup>542</sup>

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535Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013.

536London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013; Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

537Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

538 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013,

539Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

540 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

541Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

542 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

At the beginning they met almost weekly until they got to know each other. Then the meetings took place were once a month and sometimes even more frequently. During their conversations the group would think of women artists that would be representative for the book, symposium and exhibitions. To prepare for these discussions, the departments conducted a strategic review of their own collections and assembled the information into images. Every curator would bring images of artworks from their own collection to the meetings. They would pin the images on the wall and tell each other why they were interested in those particular artists and artworks. For London, those meetings were ‘eye opening’ for the people involved.<sup>543</sup> According to Butler, it was ‘fascinating’ for the curators to discover that they had common interests and passions in certain areas.<sup>544</sup>

The project brought all the women at MoMA together. The interviewees described a friendly atmosphere, familiarity, great ‘collegiality’,<sup>545</sup> a sense of community<sup>546</sup> and a positive and relaxing environment which the curators had not experienced before at MoMA.<sup>547</sup> For Schwartz the project was ‘enjoyable’ and ‘fun’ and for Butler the collaboration was ‘fantastic’.<sup>548</sup> The curators were enthusiastically participating in the project; Umland explained that she was ‘thrilled’ to collaborate. She explained that ‘generally I have to go to many meetings I do not want to go but [to] the Modern Women’s meetings were just fabulous’.<sup>549</sup> Interestingly, Schwartz explained that the positive working environment was partially related to the gender of the people involved: ‘I don’t want to stereotype women, but I think the fact that it was so collaborative and supportive is because women are better than men at that’.<sup>550</sup>

Finally, one of the causes of the positive working atmosphere was that the curators felt strongly that they were part of a crucial mission at the Museum and that they have had an opportunity to participate in a ‘historical’ project at MoMA.<sup>551</sup> The curators were

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543 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

544 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

545 London, Personal Interview, 25 June 2013.

546 London, Personal Interview, 5 June 2013; Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

547 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

548 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013; Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

549 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

550 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013

551 Berger, Personal Interview 27 June 2013.

‘excited’ and ‘proud’ to be part of it.<sup>552</sup> Berger explained that ‘we owed it to ourselves to have the opportunity to do it’.<sup>553</sup>

#### The Modern Women’s Fund: Acquisitions.

The collaboration that produced the book, the symposium and the exhibitions has continued with the Modern Women’s Fund and an acquisitions programme to increase the presence of women artists in the Museum.<sup>554</sup>

After the publication of the book Peter decided to continue her philanthropy, but she wanted other donors to join the Fund and to support her.<sup>555</sup> As a consequence, the Fund now comprises a committee of ten people, a mix of trustees from the Museum and women who are interested in women’s issues. Butler served as chair for two years and Marcoci is the current chair. The ten members of the committee have to pay a membership fee and their contribution goes to support acquisitions.<sup>556</sup>

The Modern Women’s Fund allows the Museum to acquire works by women artists cross-departmentally.<sup>557</sup> In order to decide what to acquire, curators are constantly conducting reviews of the collection in order to understand where the gaps are. They meet regularly in various capacities and have open discussions about acquisitions. Although they are competing for the same funds they have a shared agenda.<sup>558</sup> Apart from the meetings, the Modern Women’s Fund is involved in other types of events and activities such as tours to visit specific artists’ studies, exhibitions or collections of women’s work.

The main acquisitions meeting happens once a year, but at the time of the interviews conducted for this research, curators were trying to get more members involved with the Fund so they would be able to meet more than once a year. Before the annual meeting,

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552 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

553 Berger, Personal Interview 27 June 2013.

554 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

555 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

556 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

557 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

558 Figura, Phone Interview, 19 July 2013.



the chair invites all the curators and all the departments to submit proposals of works by women artists they want to collect. Sometimes these proposals are put forward by an individual department, and at other times they are inter-departmental. Then, the committee of patrons hold a meeting in which they vote and decide how they would like the Fund to be spent.<sup>559</sup> If the Modern Women's Fund committee decide not to fund the acquisition of a particular artwork, the curator can take the proposal back to their department and acquire it that way.

At the time of the interviews, the committee had met three times and had spent close to half a million dollars each time acquiring 'fantastic' bodies of work.<sup>560</sup> Most of the acquisitions had been inter-departmental. For example, the acquisition of works by Romanian artist Geta Bratescu was made through the participation of five departments: Media and Video, Prints and Illustrated Books, Drawings, Photography and Painting and Sculpture.<sup>561</sup>

### Impact of the project in MoMA

The Modern Women's Project has had an important influence in cultural and structural change at MoMA since 2005. The project has brought museum staff together as a community. Currently, there is an open dialogue and transparency about how acquisition funds are used and prioritised. The Museum is now characterised by more fluidity between departments and a feeling among the staff that they are all working with one collection as opposed to many individual and separate collections. For example, when Butler was Chief Curator of Drawings, she curated small galleries in the department of Painting and Sculpture such as the Marlene Dumas exhibition *Measuring Your Own Grave* (2009).

The project has encouraged the Museum's curators to co-curate exhibitions. In recent years there have been exhibitions curated by curators from two different departments. For example the exhibition *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988* was a joint project of Butler and Luis Perez-Oramas, Curator of Latin American Art.

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559 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

560 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

561 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

However, the main collaborative initiative that emerged after the Modern Women's Project was the networking and research project C-MAP (Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives in a Global Age Initiative). C-MAP was launched in 2009 as a cross-departmental research programme whose objective was to understand the 'changing conditions of an increasingly global world.'<sup>562</sup> The programme allows curators at MoMA to exchange knowledge and ideas with scholars, artists, cultural historians and other experts around the world. Its aim is to build and maintain relationships between the Museum and a network of modern and contemporary art communities outside North America and Western Europe.

There are three research groups focusing on East Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. These groups are inter-departmental, formed by members of MoMA's curatorial, educational and publication departments as well as the Museum library and the archives. Also, curators are joined by international scholars and artists. The groups travel to Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and East Asia to explore artistic practices and to meet artists and curators. They also invite curators and writers from these areas to visit New York.

The C-MAP programme has contributed to the cross-departmental acquisitions of works by artists from these regions. There have been several exhibitions at MoMA by curators who are members of the C-MAP groups. Curators from MoMA also exchange books and documents with curators from the network and they publish research and translate original publications that have not previously been published in English.<sup>563</sup>

## **Conclusion.**

Collaboration, anti-hierarchy and flexibility were essential characteristics in the Women's Museum in Aarhus, partly because its founders were influenced by feminist

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<sup>562</sup> <http://www.moma.org/>

<sup>563</sup> <http://www.moma.org/>

theory, but also because it was a small institution. However, as the Museum grew there was a greater degree of professionalization and specialization and consequently it lost part of its collaborative and anti-hierarchical approach. The Women's Museum Association disappeared and the anti-hierarchical directorship was legislated. Although the Museum has become more institutionalized, it has maintained a commitment to feminism and a collaborative spirit. Nowadays, the Museum is focusing on other kinds of collaboration, especially networking with other institutions on an international level. However, this collaboration and networking is not specifically inspired by feminism. Instead it is a tool for survival and a way to obtain funding together with other small organizations.

At the Brooklyn Museum and at MoMA there is an impulse to work more collaboratively. This effort is due to the influence of feminism but also to a larger institutional desire to strengthen collaboration. In both museums, feminist infiltration and collaboration happened at the same time as an institutional mandate to unify departments and improve inter-departmental collaboration.

At the Brooklyn Museum and at MoMA, collaboration as a strategy has been central in bringing about organizational change. The people involved have had to decide on objectives together, build up mutual trust, share information and responsibilities and create transparency. As a consequence, both institutions are changing, becoming more flexible, more open and more collaborative.

In both institutions, collaboration and organizational change are the result of the confluence of the efforts of curators, philanthropists and museum directors. Feminist leaders have cooperated with the directors to bring in organizational change. At MoMA, inter-departmental collaboration has been actively encouraged by feminist philanthropist Peter and museum director Lowry. At the Brooklyn Museum, changes are the result of the partnership and alliance of Sackler and Lehman. However, it seems that feminist principles need institutional permission, and they clearly have to adapt to the rules of larger institutions.

## **Chapter Three: Audience and community engagement.**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will explore how my three case studies – the Women’s Museum in Aarhus, the Brooklyn Museum and MoMA – relate to society, their communities and their audiences. I will demonstrate how these institutions are places for discussion and debate and how they are involved in political and social activism. I will reflect on how feminism influences community and audience engagement: feminist theory has argued for deconstructing the patriarchal structures of society. Feminist criticism of and reflection on society contributes to finding ways of including new audiences in museums, especially those audiences that have been marginalized.

I will study how these three case study museums are changing society beyond the museum walls, by heightening people’s awareness of political and social issues. Moreover, I will show how the three museums are making a difference in society and benefiting the public as well as incorporating political issues into the institution and reflecting the ethical, political and social dilemmas of the society in which they are situated.

Also, I will explore how the three institutions studied have contributed to society by being open with – and influential in – their communities. I will examine how the three museums have, to a greater or lesser degree, involved their users and included groups of people who do not normally use museums and who have been historically excluded from museums. I will focus on the different strategies each museum is using in order to facilitate equal access to and equal opportunities for culture for everyone. For example, I will show how these museums are trying to correct historical inequalities and discrimination based on class, race, ethnicity and gender differences. I will investigate how these museums are encouraging the public to make use of them, how they are listening to voices that have been overlooked and how they are incorporating these voices into the museum. Finally, I will show how, by including these audiences, these

museums have become more popular and respected by their traditional audiences as well as by other groups and minorities.

Secondly, I will examine the identities of museum's audiences, the different neighbourhoods and communities which surround the museums and how they have, in turn, influenced these institutions. I will consider how the museums have been affected when the society around them has changed. One of the most significant ways in which society has influenced these museums is through criticism from artists and activists.

My first case study, the Women's Museum in Aarhus is a grassroots institution that has been involved with its community since its founding. The museum has long had an interest in involving visitors and reaching out to the community. Also, the museum has been an activist institution maintaining an important social commitment. For many years, the purpose of the museum has been to create jobs for women in the community, to make women's history visible and to involve people in the community. I will demonstrate, however, that its social commitment has changed slightly. In recent years, society around the museum has changed; the museum is now focused on involving this changing community, especially through social inclusion programmes for immigrant women.

MoMA is a museum which has been historically disconnected from society. However, in recent years the museum has been opening up to society, developing multiple programmes to involve the community through the Department of Education. However, I will show that these developments have not been sufficiently incorporated into the programme of the Modern Women's Project. At the same time, the Museum – together with the Modern Women's Project – is changing partly as a result of criticism. The Museum has been responsive to disagreement, self-doubt and a critical revision of its history. To do so, the museum has embraced criticism, involved artists, engaged the public and incorporated political activism within the institution.

Finally, the Brooklyn Museum is an institution which has been historically involved with its community and its audience. One of the factors that has most influenced the Museum is its particular focus on involving audiences within its neighbourhood. Also, the

museum has housed the Sackler Center since 2007, a department characterized by the strong social commitment and activism of its founder, Elizabeth A. Sackler.

### **The Women's Museum in Aarhus.**

#### **Community involvement in the founding of the museum.**

Since its foundation in 1982, the Women's Museum in Aarhus has been an active agent within the community.<sup>564</sup> Over the years, women from the community have formed connections to the Women's Museum through different sorts of employment of shorter or longer duration, job training, study periods, volunteering and participation in theatre and music shows, lectures and discussion meetings. Also, many women and men have donated objects to the Museum's collection, given interviews or contributed to the extensive amount of testimony relating to women's lives that the Museum has gathered.<sup>565</sup> Finally, the Museum has involved the community in its research projects and its social activism.

The Women's Museum started as a popular initiative in which the community was involved.<sup>566</sup> According to Sandahl, the first person to formulate the idea of a women's museum was an equality consultant at a job centre for unemployed people, who formed a large group of women around her.<sup>567</sup> However, for Ipsen, the idea of a women's museum started in the research environments of the University of Aarhus in the early 1980s. There were several groups of women academics working in different departments, researching and publishing on women's history and culture. These groups of women decided to found a women's museum so that their research on the history of women would reach wider circles and benefit the community.<sup>568</sup> Following the foundation, the Museum grew through work conducted by women of all ages and from

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564 Jette Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

565 Merete Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

566 Sandahl, 'Fluid Boundaries and False Dichotomies – Scholarship, Partnership and Representation in Museums?', keynote paper presented at the INTERCOM Conference Leadership in Museum: *Are our Core Values Shifting?*, Dublin, Ireland, October 16-19, 2002, p. 4.

567 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

568 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

all levels of society who participated in projects and collected oral histories, documents and objects.<sup>569</sup>

According to Sandahl, throughout the history of the Women's Museum there have been three levels of 'social embeddedness and trust in the community'. The first level of trust was the fact that the Museum was, and still is, a working environment only for women. This was one of the basic principles of the Museum and a real 'core position', although it could be 'contested towards the outside world'.<sup>570</sup> The reason behind this decision was that at the beginning of the 1980s, the unemployment among Danish women was very high.<sup>571</sup>

For Sandahl, the Museum, as an experimental workplace for women of all ages, social classes and levels of education has been an unequivocal success.<sup>572</sup> During the interviews conducted by this researcher at the Museum, the working environment was also seen in a positive light by Anonymous 1.<sup>573</sup> For Ipsen, the fact that there were no men working at the Museum meant that it was a place for a great diversity of women, 'young, old, educated, uneducated, married, unmarried, lesbian and heterosexual'.<sup>574</sup> To have women working together without men meant that they were able to explore the differences among them, how they all had 'different skills' and how they could find solutions in 'different ways' because they were just focusing on women and not on the 'polarity [of] male-female'.<sup>575</sup>

According to Sandahl, the fact that they are a work place only for women ensured that they had a protective environment that was part of creating a sense of trust in Museum workers and in the women interviewed by them.<sup>576</sup> The leaders felt some sort of responsibility for the women working in the Museum, who occasionally were victims of

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569 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

570 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

571 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012; Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

572 Sandahl, 'Voicing the Unspoken in Denmark, in *Museum International*, 171: 3 (1991), 172-175, p. 174.

573 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

574 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012

575 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012

576 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

domestic violence or former alcoholics.<sup>577</sup> For Anonymous 1, victims of domestic violence would ‘feel safer’ at the Museum, which was like a ‘heaven’ for them because there were no men and they did not have to ‘cringe every time somebody came through the door’. During the interview, Anonymous 1 remembered a lady working at the museum who was a victim of domestic violence: she was encouraged to leave her husband by the museum staff, but she left the Museum instead and they did not see her again.<sup>578</sup>

Women work in the Museum under different employment schemes. Most of them stay at the museum for six months or a year until they change their occupation; some of them are working part-time while others are working full-time. Some women are working for their welfare cheques, some work for unemployment benefits and others are studying at university and need to do three months of work.<sup>579</sup> There are volunteers working at the reception one day per week, twenty hours per week, four days per week or full-time. For example, when the interviews were conducted by the researcher, one of the volunteers was a pensioner who was working at the Museum three afternoons per week but she was receiving a full salary for her job.<sup>580</sup> One of the interviewees, Kristin Taylor, was a recently-graduated history student, who was in a six-month position at the Museum while she was looking for a job. She was not paid for her work at the Museum, but instead she was given a fee from her unemployment insurance.<sup>581</sup>

Another important employment scheme at the Museum are the so called ‘flex jobs’. Olesen explained that the Museum had an agreement with the social welfare department to train and test four people who had been out of the job market for a significant amount of time. Some of these people were not fit for full-time work due to stress or health-related issues. The Museum trained and tested them to determine how many days per week they were able to work, whether they were able to work full-time or if they had to be offered another solution. Under this job scheme, the government pays half or three

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577 Bodil Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

578 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

579 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

580 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

581 Christine Taylor, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.



quarters of the workers' wages as compensations to the workplace as these workers still need a full-time wage even if they can only work part time.<sup>582</sup>

According to Sandahl, a second level of social embeddedness within the community was the fact that women working at the Museum came from the unemployment sector. This was a truly unique factor that gave the Museum a non-elitist base and an embeddedness with broader groups of women.<sup>583</sup> Although the women employed had no previous background in museum work they participated in most Museum functions. Sandahl explained how these women were encouraged to apply their experience and skills in different museum jobs. For example, some of them had extensive knowledge of the treatment and use of different textiles and tools, as well as the patience required to register objects or answer questions from the public.<sup>584</sup>

Generally, Olesen is responsible for visiting and interviewing the women wishing to work at the Museum, who can start their work placement shortly after the interview.<sup>585</sup> However, Anonymous 1 – who is involved in the training of staff for jobs in the reception area and in other places – explained that there was not a specific programme of training, and that she believed in 'learning by doing' more than in 'note-taking'. During the interview, she explained that she had recruited five new trainees to work at the reception desk.<sup>586</sup> When women need specific additional training, such as in digital registration of objects, it is conducted by project directors or other women who already know the job but will soon be leaving.<sup>587</sup>

The fact that women do not stay at the Museum for long periods of time affects working relationships, because museum staff 'do not invest too much' of themselves in them.<sup>588</sup> Some of the workers stay at the Museum for only thirteen weeks and just when the rest of the staff have got to know them and they are 'doing a proper job and they do not need instructions all the time', they are gone again.<sup>589</sup> Another disadvantage is that the

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582 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

583 Sandahl, 'Fluid Boundaries', p. 4; Jette Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

584 Sandahl, 'Voicing the unspoken', 174.

585 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

586 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

587 Sandahl, 'Voicing the unspoken', p. 174.

588 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

589 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

Museum needs to train people constantly. However, the benefits of this employment scheme is that there are ‘new voices all the time’<sup>590</sup>, voices that can contribute to the Museum with what is important for them as women or what was important for their mothers.<sup>591</sup>

### **Involving the community in the collection of oral histories and objects.**

A third level of social embeddedness is the fact that the Museum collects objects and oral interviews from the community.<sup>592</sup> For Sandahl, this fact differentiates it from most other museums, which have collected objects from and communicated about various cultures, but they have not worked with the relevant groups they were representing.<sup>593</sup> In this way, the Women’s Museum is truly unique as it is an institution about women, run by women.<sup>594</sup>

Over the years, the Museum has gathered numerous testimonies of women’s lives, collecting oral interviews within the community.<sup>595</sup> The museum has collected oral histories because materials and objects made by women have disappeared: they have been consumed, worn out or eaten up as food. It has been the spoken word more than the written word that has transmitted women’s knowledge and traditions between generations. Also, in the first years, one of the reasons to collect oral histories was that the Museum was located in a small room and the interview recordings and transcripts did not occupy much space. Some of the oral histories were, and still are, associated with ‘painful and private’ memories and experiences.<sup>596</sup> To tackle the challenges associated with collecting these oral histories, people interviewed are often taken into a private room in the Museum where women can reveal things ‘they do not want to tell anyone else’.<sup>597</sup> Generally, people interviewed ask for anonymity, and the fact that no names are

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590 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

591 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

592 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012; Sandahl, ‘Voicing the unspoken’, p. 173.

593 Sandahl, ‘Fluid Boundaries’, p. 6.

594 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

595 Sandahl, ‘Voicing the Unspoken’, p. 172.

596 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

597 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

mentioned ‘comforts them a lot’.<sup>598</sup> Nowadays, the Museum is digitizing a huge number of these interviews and translating them into other languages.<sup>599</sup>

The fact that the workers in the Museum came from the unemployment sector had ‘positive consequences’ for the oral histories collected.<sup>600</sup> Women working at the Museum would bond with the women interviewed and they would know which questions to ask. For Sandahl, they would be talking in the ‘background in a kind of code language’. For example, during the interviews, Sandahl did not know the code language for expressing domestic violence, while the staff member who was with her knew which questions to ask; for example, she would not ask ‘directly about the beatings’.<sup>601</sup> As a consequence, the trust in the Women’s Museum was higher, as women interviewed entrusted staff at the Museum with stories they would not have given to a ‘university-based interviewer’ like Sandahl.<sup>602</sup>

Over the years, the Museum has built collections to document the lives and heritage of women in Denmark. These collections were made of everyday objects, from housekeeping to needlework, as well as clothes, documents and photographs. The collection of objects started after the foundation, when the local newspapers informed readers that there was a new Museum in the town. Shortly afterwards, community members approached the Museum and asked the curators if they wanted objects from their houses, families or grandmothers.<sup>603</sup> By 1990, eight years after the foundation, the Museum had collected around 30,000 items, some of them actively collected by the curators but most of them donated by individuals.<sup>604</sup>

According to Sandahl, people trusted the Museum with worn out, mended, ‘intimate, shameful and personal’ objects, the ‘humble things of poverty’ and objects associated with painful and private aspects of people’s lives such as chipped crockery, threadbare clothing, wedding dresses, kitchen utensils, bags from midwives and visiting nurses and

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598 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012

599 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

600 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

601 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

602 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

603 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

604 Elsa Sherin Mathews, ‘Aarhus Denmark is Showcasing Women’s Lives’, *SOP Newswire*2, 21 September 2009.

wigs from breast cancer patients.<sup>605</sup> These objects were not part of the official story and had not been part of other museum collections at that point.<sup>606</sup>

The Museum had a practice of collecting objects and interviewing the donors at the same time, as the objects donated were often associated with oral histories.<sup>607</sup> Museum leaders would obtain intense personal stories when interviewing the donors over more than fifteen hours, during which time the donors would ‘talk through individual objects’.<sup>608</sup> According to Sandahl, this procedure was something unusual at that time and it was ‘exemplary’ of how collecting should be done.<sup>609</sup>

During the 1990s the Museum amassed two large collections of objects associated with oral histories. One of the collections was centered on a villa built in the 1890s, where the same family had lived for three generations. In the 1990s, a member of the family sold the house, objects and furniture, but she donated what no-one wanted – all the ‘cheap and mended’ items and a ‘fabulous’ photo collection – to the Museum.<sup>610</sup> Sandahl and Ipsen conducted several interviews with this donor, in which she talked about the family history through these objects. A similar project was the collection of 1,500 objects donated by five sisters who were interviewed by Ipsen. The objects collected showed the involvement of the sisters with the community, the family arrangements, the gifts, the Christmasses, the birthdays, the Sunday trips, the deaths and the forgotten memories over an eighty-year period.<sup>611</sup>

At the present time, the Museum still collects objects donated by members of the community.<sup>612</sup> However, Anonymous 1 lamented that the Museum has extensive collections of similar types of objects because ‘a lot of people have saved the same things’, such as their ‘grandmother’s embroidered bed sheets’.<sup>613</sup> The Museum has maintained the practice of collecting objects while interviewing the donors. According to Anonymous 1, generally the donors approach the Museum and explain, for example,

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605 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

606 Sandahl, ‘Proper objects among other things’, *Nordisk Museologi*, 2, (1995), 97-102, (p. 102)

607 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012/

608 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

609 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

610 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

611 Sandahl, ‘Proper Objects’, p. 100.

612 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

613 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

that ‘their old mother is moving to an old people’s house and they don’t want to throw away’ her objects. The registration staff at the Museum check the objects and evaluates whether they need to collect more of that type of objects. If they decide to collect the objects, the staff will interview the donors and enquire about the stories behind the objects, trying to discover as much history as possible for each object. Some of the questions are, for example, ‘Who was the owner?’, ‘When was she born?’, ‘How many children did she have?’, ‘Did she have an education?’, ‘Did she use her education?’, and ‘What happened with her children?’.<sup>614</sup> According to Anonymous 1, Museum staff prefers objects that are worn, repaired and fixed because ‘they have more of a history’ and can be used with ‘more connections’.<sup>615</sup> In fact, before the interview I conducted with her, Anonymous 1 had been working on two duvet covers and pillow cases from the 1940s. The story the staff gathered was that the grandmother of the donors made them during World War II. As this grandmother could not get hold of any new materials she recycled old pillowcases from the attic of the house to make the bedclothes.

Finally, Anonymous 1 explained that the Museum staff make sure that the donors can continue seeing the objects. The computer database called known as Regin is common to all the museums in Denmark, and is where all the objects are registered and digitized. People who have donated objects can access this database and see the photographs of the objects at home.<sup>616</sup>

### **Involving the community in social issues.**

Over the years, the community has also participated in the Museum’s exhibitions and research projects. The Museum curators and workers had a personal approach towards the research, collecting of objects and presentation of exhibitions, using the method of ‘identification’ with the women interviewed.<sup>617</sup>

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614 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

615 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

616 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

617 Sandahl, ‘Fluid boundaries’, p. 5.

For example, one of the first research projects and exhibitions was about childbirth and young single mothers during the 1930s.<sup>618</sup> For this project, the Museum hired young single mothers and teamed each of them with an academically-trained woman. Each team would interview and collect objects from women who had brought up their children while being unmarried, divorced or widowed during the 1930s. The objective was to create involvement and identification between women across generations, as well as across the roles of interviewer and interviewee.<sup>619</sup> During the research process, the young single women were conducting the interviews, and women from older generations would trust them with interesting and personal stories. The task of the professional staff during the interviews was limited to helping translate the conversations and transforming the shared trust of the women into precise and concrete questions and answers. After the research process, the Museum opened its first exhibition, *Make Room for Life*, in 1984.<sup>620</sup>

The Museum frequently returned to this method of collecting and interviewing in different research projects involving the community. Some of the interviews and research collected form the basis of exhibitions, which in this way could be ‘their exhibition’.<sup>621</sup> Consequently, these exhibitions are not ‘about someone, but with and for someone’.<sup>622</sup>

For example, the exhibition *It is Not Your Fault* (October 2010 – May 2011), on the subject of rape, was based on oral stories and testimonies collected by the museum leaders. The exhibition was created in co-operation with the local police and with counselling centres and drop-in centres working with victims of sexual violence. The centres provided the Museum with contacts details for rape survivors, who entrusted the Museum with their stories and participated in focus groups at the Museum sharing their experiences.<sup>623</sup> The museum staff selected seven stories out of all those collected, none of them describing the rape itself.

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618 Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

619 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

620 Sandahl, ‘Voicing the unspoken’, p. 173.

621 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September, 2012.

622 Ipsen, ‘Do Museums Matter’, memorial lecture presented at the INTERCOM Conference in Museum and Politics, Copenhagen, Denmark, September 13-16, 2011.

623 Ibid.

The Museum used these stories – one of them collected from a man and six of them from different women – to create identification with the audience. However, they wanted to communicate the stories without exposing the people who entrusted them to the Museum.<sup>624</sup> For this reason, they sought permission from the victims to use their stories, taking stringent measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The Museum changed the names of the survivors and the places where the rapes took place and asked drama students from the theatre of Aarhus to read the interviews, which the audience could hear through a set of headphones. The Museum staff made sure that the interviewees agreed with the changes made to ensure confidentiality. The experience had a positive impact on the participant survivors of rape who, according to Ipsen, sent thank you notes to the Museum after the exhibition.<sup>625</sup>

The target audience of *It is Not Your Fault* were teenagers and young people. The Museum involved high school students, who helped install the exhibition and participated in workshops to ensure that it would speak their language. Both girls and boys collaborated with the artists who designed the exhibition, working with wall papers and colors. According to Ipsen, the boys were as eager as the girls, and they ‘proudly’ presented the exhibition to their parents and to the rest of the school at the end of the academic year.<sup>626</sup>

Another exhibition, *Prostitution and Trafficking* (September 2006 - March 2007) was based on interviews with prostitutes from Aarhus. The stories collected were used in the exhibition in the form of videos with actors re-enacting the interviews. The data presented in the exhibition came from a project sponsored by the Minister for Gender Equality to support victims of trafficking. One of the initiatives of the research project was to inform foreign sex workers of their rights and of the support office in Denmark and to determine the number of trafficked women in Aarhus. Later, the project presented the information on trafficking to the wider public through the exhibition.<sup>627</sup>

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624 Ibid.

625 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

626 Ipsen, ‘Do Museums Matter’.

627 <http://kvindemuseet.dk/>

In recent years, the social commitment of the Museum has changed to focus on issues of race, globalization and the integration of immigrant women into the community. According to Ipsen, the reason for these changes is that the society around the Museum has changed. During the first years after the foundation, the challenge was to make women's history visible and to create jobs for women. For Ipsen, the challenge at the present is to open the Museum to women from other cultures and to learn from each other.<sup>628</sup>

For example, in 2002-2004 the Museum participated in *Born in Europe*, a joint EU-funded project with five museums in five European cities. The initiative was centered on having a child in a new country. The participating museums interviewed and photographed five immigrant families who had a child in 2002-2004 in different European cities. The result was a travelling exhibition that visited the Museum in October 2003.<sup>629</sup>

In 2013, the Museum was involved in a project focusing on twelve young people, originally from Angola, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Gambia, Congo, Romania, Lithuania, Poland and Thailand who were living in Aarhus. The group met at the Museum every other Wednesday for six months in 2013 and gathered materials and stories about themselves, their aims and aspirations and their role in Danish society. The group participated in workshops and interviews, took photos of their daily lives and produced films on their experience. Finally, the group produced the exhibition *A World of Stories* (August – October 2013) about their life experiences and their integration into Danish society.<sup>630</sup>

Finally, one of the projects with a strong impact in the community is the programme *Cultural Meeting*, funded and supported by the Ministry of Integration in Denmark, whose purpose is the integration of immigrant women into Danish society.<sup>631</sup> The programme supports mentor relationships between immigrant women and a large network of four hundred Danish volunteers. The project matches immigrant women and Danish women taking into account factors such as professional equality, education and

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628 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012

629 <http://kvindemuseet.dk/>

630 <http://kvindemuseet.dk/>

631 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.



personal wishes: a teacher is matched to a teacher, a dentist to a dentist, etc.<sup>632</sup> Through one-to-one meetings at the museum café, women can make connections with Danish people in order to learn Danish or simply to ‘have a friend’.<sup>633</sup> The programme is particularly useful in helping women find a job, as mentors provide access to their professional networks and appropriate advice regarding job applications, workplace cultures, etc. For example, an immigrant woman who used to be a nurse back in her country can be connected to a Danish nurse who could tell her about the qualifications required and her job prospects.<sup>634</sup>



Figure 6: *The Journey to Denmark* exhibition space, Women's Museum in Aarhus (June - September 2010) Picture reproduced with permission of © The Women's Museum in Aarhus.

This initiative was the origin of the exhibition *The Journey to Denmark*, also supported by the Ministry of Integration. From June to September 2010, the museum invited fifteen women with different backgrounds who had participated in the *Cultural Meeting* network. The women met at the Museum and shared stories about their lives in their countries of origin, their reception in Denmark and how they had become a part of

632 Ipsen, 'Do museums matter'.

633 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

634 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

Danish society. Then, the Museum created an exhibition in collaboration with these women, based on interviews, objects, photos and videos collected from them. The interviews and films presented in the exhibition were told in their mother tongues and in their acquired Danish.<sup>635</sup> Additionally, the participants would take turns acting as the guides in the exhibition, receiving visitors and telling them about their childhood in their countries of origin and their adult life in Denmark. Museum visitors and participating women entered into dialogues about love, marriage and divorce, 'faith and headscarves and freedom, children and successes and defeats'.<sup>636</sup> After the exhibition, the Museum curators continued cultivating its relationship with these women, who continued to visit the Museum and meet them on a regular basis.

### **Involving the audience in exhibitions.**

Since its foundation the Women's Museum in Aarhus has focused on different strategies to encourage the participation of the audience in their exhibitions. One of the main ways of involving the audience has been to focus on accessibility: Museum curators have created easily accessible exhibitions, avoiding categorical statements and didactic presentations. One of the objectives has been to involve audiences that do not normally visit museums<sup>637</sup> by stimulating participation, conversation, laughing, chatting, gossiping, interpretation and discussion.<sup>638</sup> At the same time, Museum curators are interested in 'breaking the ice'; that is, eliminating the distance between the Museum's objects, the curators' interpretations and the visitors' perceptions and reception of these.<sup>639</sup>

One of the ways of attaining these objectives has been the creation of exhibitions with emotional content which can 'touch the beholder physically, emotionally and cognitively'.<sup>640</sup> For Sandahl, exhibitions should touch the heart and the head, the intellect and the emotions of the audience.<sup>641</sup> According to Ipsen, the objective of

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635 Ipsen, 'Do museums matter'.

636 Ipsen, 'Do museums matter'.

637 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

638 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

639 Sandahl, 'Proper objects', p. 105.

640 Fisher, 'Exhibitionary Affect', p. 27.

641 Sandahl, 'Proper objects', p. 105.

touching the feelings of the audience is to make an impact and to influence people's minds.<sup>642</sup> In order to express emotional content, these exhibitions break the tenets of logocentrism and visual dominance by involving the five senses and being interactive and participatory.<sup>643</sup> Another strategy in these emotional exhibitions is to use a subjective language as well as personal and real stories and materials in the narrative. In this way, the museum encourages identification with and recognition of the audience through the topics presented.

For example, *Make Room for Life* (1984) presented a reconstruction of a home birth from the 1930s structured so that the direction of the room correlated with the direction of the contractions of a woman giving birth. The rhythm of the contractions was heard from a tape of a woman's breathing, while personal stories of giving birth were told in the pauses.<sup>644</sup>

Another early exhibition, *At Night* (1984), focused on the night and its role in women's lives, exploring emotions, feelings and associations such as desire, pleasure, fear of being attacked, dreaming and nursing the very young and the old. For example, in the gallery dealing with fear, facts were given about how very few women venture out at night and what proportion are attacked. The fear room was filled with a high-pitched sound, there was a bicycle lying on the floor and on the walls there were Perspex boxes containing small weapons and objects, such as a bunch of keys, which women carried for protection.<sup>645</sup>

Moreover, the Museum also challenges its audience by presenting controversial topics such as the struggle for legal abortion, domestic violence and incest, and presenting objects such as sanitary napkins, breast prostheses and wigs from breast cancer patients. However, the themes and objects related to violence and incest are presented separately to the rest of the exhibition so that people who have experienced them do not have to confront them in front of the rest of the public.<sup>646</sup> These themes are presented in a separate display case, and there is a sign in front of the main door.

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642 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

643 Sandahl, 'Proper objects', p. 105.

644 Sandahl, 'Proper objects', p. 105.

645 Porter, 'Seeing through solidity', p. 121.

646 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

Most of the visitors to the Museum are women with ages ranging from 35 to 70 years old.<sup>647</sup> In recent years, the Museum has focused on attracting and involving young people, children, teenagers and male audiences.<sup>648</sup> According to Ipsen, young people are often present in debates, workshops and music events but they rarely visit the exhibitions. In a recent visitor studies project, young people interviewed agreed that the Museum was very ‘interesting’ but that they had no time to visit it, instead prioritizing their friends, their studies or other leisure activities.<sup>649</sup>

Since the creation of the permanent exhibition, *History of Childhood*, in 2006 the Museum has been attracting more school children.<sup>650</sup> The exhibition’s aim is to involve children and was created to encourage identification, recognition and participation among this audience. According to Ipsen, this exhibition was created because it was difficult for children to access the permanent exhibition on the *History of Women*. The *History of Childhood* presents the stories of 14 boys and 14 girls from older generations, as told by real people. For each of the stories there are identity cards with a treasure map giving information about the child and leading to objects in the exhibition which the child had owned. Children participating in the exhibition can recognize themselves in the 28 children presented; it is possible to choose the identities of any of the 28 stories presented.<sup>651</sup> Contrary to the *History of Women*, the *History of Childhood* exhibition focuses on both genders. The reason is that boys and girls visiting the Museum would be able to recognize themselves, as it would be difficult for boys to see themselves in the mirror of girls’ history. However, it is easy for an adult man to recognize the stories of his mother, grandmother or sisters in the permanent exhibition.<sup>652</sup>

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647 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012; Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

648 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012; Ipsen, Merete, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

649 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

650 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

651 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

652 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012



Figure 7: Detail of the *History of Childhood* permanent display, Women's Museum in Aarhus. Picture reproduced with permission of © The Women's Museum in Aarhus.

The *History of Childhood* involves the five senses and encourages participation through the use of colour, light and sound; it can be also experienced with the whole body. In some sections the children can climb or crawl under the display cases or write on the walls. One section has hiding tubes where two people can stand and listen to stories about forbidden or humiliating experiences the children experienced. There are two wardrobes: a pink one with girl's clothes and a green one with boy's clothes, which children visiting the exhibition can try on. One room is turned upside down: children can lie in a cloud on the floor while children's furniture, an owl and stuffed animals come floating down towards them.

Anonymous 1 explained how the Museum also has programmes focused on making the permanent exhibition, *History of Women*, accessible to children and to explain some of the controversial topics to them. For example, when children visit the exhibition Anonymous 1 describes objects such as the handmade menstrual pads in use before tampons. For Anonymous 1, it can be 'great fun' to see children's reactions of interest and shock as she tells them that women made the pads themselves and washed them every month.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

The Museum has also focused on involving children from elementary and secondary schools in different programmes and activities. One of the most popular programmes invites school children to participate in historical debates which occurred in the city council. The restaging of the meeting is particularly realistic because the Museum is located in the old town hall, with some of the furniture from the 1890s on view. The children invited have to debate some of the topics that the city council faced such as 'free food for school children', 'firing pregnant women' and 'more public transport'. The classes re-enact the city council meeting and children act as the Mayor, politicians from across the spectrum, journalists and members of civil organizations. Children debate the issues, 'sometimes very heatedly' and vote 'yes' or 'no' through a computer program. For example, in 1932 the city council debated whether to fire married women to protect the economy as 'they did not need a job because they had husbands who could provide for them'. Children debate the topic without knowing the result of the historical debate; at the end of the activity, the member of staff tells them, for example, that the city council 'decided that they could fire married women'.<sup>654</sup>

### **Impact in the Community: The Museum as a Meeting Place.**

The Museum is an important part of community life. It is a meeting place with a popular café, which also provides an alternative space for debates and meetings characterized by a relaxed atmosphere and there is an anonymous counselling room for women in need.<sup>655</sup> Olesen described the Museum as a 'living house' in the community, a place whose objective is to make people feel at home. The Museum receives favourable reports from visitors which highlight the hospitality of the place.<sup>656</sup> At the time of the interviews, the Museum was open every Wednesday evening. Olesen explained that if they had more funds, they would open every evening.<sup>657</sup>

However, the curators interviewed were not certain about the real impact of the Museum in the community. Ipsen lamented that the level of impact of the Museum in the

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654 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

655 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

656 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

657 Olesen, Personal Interview, 12 September 2012.

community was not high.<sup>658</sup> Anonymous 1 explained that the community was ‘proud’ to have a special and ‘respected’ Museum and the fact that it was not in Copenhagen was seen as a bonus in the neighbourhood. However, these facts did not mean that members of the community would visit the Museum. Anonymous 1 explained that she was not sure the Museum made ‘any difference’.<sup>659</sup>

### **The Modern Women’s Project at MoMA.**

#### **Audience and community engagement: Encouraging participation, art-making and accessibility.**

When Glenn Lowry was appointed as director of MoMA in 1995, one of his objectives was to make the Museum a more friendly and public-oriented place. During Lowry’s tenure, MoMA has become a more popular museum and the number of visitors has doubled to almost three million annually. However, the full admission price has more than tripled, from 8 to 25 dollars. According to Randy Kennedy, the Museum’s transformation was criticized by its board members. Some of them had fears that the Museum was becoming a place for social interactions rather than thoughtful contemplation; that the museum was too complacent and entertaining and that it had moved in a crowd-pleasing direction.<sup>660</sup> For example, Agnes Gund, President of the Board from 1991 until 2002, explained that ‘there are a number of us on the board who do not want to see the Museum become an entertainment center’.<sup>661</sup>

One of Lowry’s measures to make the Museum more friendly and involved with society was to focus on audience and community engagement through the Education Department. Since the late 1990s, educators in that department have made an effort to

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658 Ipsen, Personal Interview, 11 September 2012.

659 Anonymous 1, Personal Interview, 14 September 2012.

660 Randy Kennedy, ‘MoMA’s Expansion and Director Draw Critics’, *The New York Times*, 21 April 2014, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/arts/momas-expansion-and-director-draw-critics.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/arts/momas-expansion-and-director-draw-critics.html?_r=0)>

661 Ibid.

engage the public, focusing on issues such as accessibility, participation, involvement with the community and art-making.

However, this strategy of the Department of Education was consistent with the first years of the history of MoMA. The Museum was founded in 1929 as an educational institution, established for the ‘purpose of encouraging and developing the study of modern art’. Alfred Barr Jr., the founding director of MoMA, clarified the mission of the Museum as ‘educational in the broadest, least academic sense’.<sup>662</sup> After the foundation, the Museum was a ‘laboratory’ for art education and for the development of creative teaching practices. Its mission was less about canonizing objects for posterity and more about helping the public to enjoy and understand modern art.

One of Barr’s key measures in these efforts was hiring Victor D’Amico in 1937 as the first director of Education. D’Amico, who remained in his position for thirty-two years, focused on exploring creativity and new teaching practices. For D’Amico, art-making and personal learning were essential for appreciating modern art. To reach his objectives, he built an education programme in which he supported individual creation, art-making experiences and creative teaching. Some of the programmes and resources he created were a young people’s gallery, a veteran’s art centre, the Art Barge for summer classes and the People’s Art Center – with weekly classes for children and adults – and the experimental Children’s Art Carnival (1942-1969), which developed his ideas about children, creativity and modern art.<sup>663</sup> However, when D’Amico retired this educational programme was replaced by a more modest, scholarly, object-oriented and gallery-focused approach which privileged looking at and talking about art over art-making. In recent years, there has been an effort at the Department of Education to recover the spirit of the first art experiences propounded by D’Amico, especially with the appointment of educators such as Wendy Woon and Calder Zwicky in 2006.

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662 In Wendy Woon, ‘Mining Modern Museum Education: Brisey Rasmussen on Victor D’Amico’, *Inside/Out, a MoMA/MoMA PSI Blog*, 25 June 2010, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2010/06/25/mining-modern-museum-education-briley-rasmussen-on-victor-d-amico](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/25/mining-modern-museum-education-briley-rasmussen-on-victor-d-amico)>

663 In Wendy Woon, ‘Mining Modern Museum Education’, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2010/06/25/mining-modern-museum-education-briley-rasmussen-on-victor-d-amico](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/25/mining-modern-museum-education-briley-rasmussen-on-victor-d-amico)>



## **Art-making, creativity and interpretation.**

To engage the audience and the community, the Museum has addressed important questions on the subjects of anti-hierarchy, authority<sup>664</sup> and interpretation. For Kathy Halbreich, Associate Director, and Woon, the question of interpretation has been central to the Museum and to how it engages with its public and community.<sup>665</sup> The Department of Education is engaging people by encouraging them to form their own interpretations and their own opinions, both in learning about art and in art-making practices. For Woon, people do not need extensive amounts of information to fully appreciate art; what they need is an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions with someone to guide them. For this reason, the educational programmes at the Museum have a non-scholarly approach.<sup>666</sup>

The department is exploring different ways of teaching to help visitors to connect with art in new ways and to offer a more participatory experience.<sup>667</sup> Art-making is one of the ways to encourage participation and to help visitors understand modern art. According to Amy Whitaker, this practice can be politically disruptive and anti-hierarchical because it teaches ‘people to have their own opinion’ and their own interpretation instead of just learning from the museum curators.<sup>668</sup> One of the strategies of the programmes is to invite artists represented in MoMA’s collections to engage in conversations and collaborate with audiences in art-making processes and hands-on activities.

## **Accessibility.**

Secondly, the Museum’s programmes try to ensure accessibility for people of all abilities, backgrounds and ages. Educators at MoMA tailor the programmes to the

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664 Kathy Halbreich, in ‘The Museum Revisited’, *Artforum*, (Summer 2010), 274-334, (p. 278).

665 Halbreich, p. 278.

666 In Wendy Woon, ‘Mining Modern Museum Education’,  
<[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2010/06/25/mining-modern-museum-education-briley-rasmussen-on-victor-d-amico](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/06/25/mining-modern-museum-education-briley-rasmussen-on-victor-d-amico)>

667 Woon, ‘At Play, Seriously, in the Museum’, *Inside/Out, a MoMA/MoMA PS1 Blog*, 21 December 2009, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2009/12/21/at-play-seriously-in-the-museum/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2009/12/21/at-play-seriously-in-the-museum/)>

668 Woon, ‘At Play, Seriously, in the Museum’, *Inside/Out, a MoMA/MoMA PS1 Blog*, 21 December 2009, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2009/12/21/at-play-seriously-in-the-museum/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2009/12/21/at-play-seriously-in-the-museum/)>

public's specific ideas, interests, abilities, backgrounds, ages, problems, needs and particular circumstances as a way to engage them. For example, there are programmes for children, schools and veterans. According to Halbreich, if you say to people "come and see what we are doing" many folks who have never been to a museum will say 'what's in it for me?'. However, when you ask people about the issues that shape their lives and then think about that in terms of how you develop or interpret your program you have a greater chance of engagement".<sup>669</sup> For example, in 2011 the Museum organized an art-making programme for New York City veterans which resulted in an exhibition of their work at MoMA's Cullman Education Building. The objective was to explore issues of identity through art, and the Museum educators had the idea of focusing on tattoo imagery and design for the art-making workshops, as traditionally tattoos have been common among members of the armed forces.<sup>670</sup>

Some of the programmes also focus on individuals with disabilities and on how to make the Museum more accessible for them. For example, there are 'touch tours' for people who are blind or are visually impaired, as well as workshops such as *Creative Lab* (closed in 2012) offering tactile experiences for blind people and which are also accessible for visitors with different learning abilities.<sup>671</sup> Finally, the programme *Creative Ability* has facilitated engagement with art for children with learning and developmental disabilities such as autism since 2006.<sup>672</sup>

One of the most unique programmes is *Meet Me at MoMA*, a free monthly interactive gallery discussion programme specifically designed to make collections accessible for people with Alzheimer's and their care partners. The programme, which started in 2007, was one of the firsts in the United States designed for people with dementia, and has attracted more than 2000 visitors to date. The programme is held when the Museum is closed, and, for one-and-a-half hours, specially-trained educators escort groups of patients and caregivers to selected artworks for observation and discussion.<sup>673</sup>

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669 Halbreich, p. 278.

670 Carrie McGee, 'Inked Identity: MoMA Honours Veterans', *Inside/Out, a MoMA/MoMA PSI Blog*, 11 November 2011, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2011/11/11/inked-identity-moma-honors-veterans](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2011/11/11/inked-identity-moma-honors-veterans)>

671 <http://www.moma.org/learn/disabilities/sight>

672 <http://www.moma.org/learn/disabilities/developmental>

673 <http://www.moma.org/meetme/>

The main objective of this programme is to improve the quality of life and provide positive experiences for Alzheimer's patients, giving the participants the chance to have a good time with their caretakers.<sup>674</sup> *Meet Me at MoMA* helps participants to maintain meaning and dignity in their lives and combat isolation by creating a sense of community at the Museum.<sup>675</sup> The programme aims to get people out of their houses, come to the Museum and engage socially with other patients.

Moreover, the Museum started the MoMA Alzheimer's project in 2007, an initiative to help other museums to develop their own programmes for people living with dementia. Through this project MoMA provided information, advice and an online training manual designed for museum professionals. At the same time, MoMA educators travelled across the US and abroad to present their programmes and workshops. So far, the programme has reached 220 cultural institutions, and around 95 museums worldwide have started their own arts programme for this audience. With these programmes MoMA has sent an important message to the public through engagement with the community and has helped deconstruct the stigma surrounding the disease.<sup>676</sup>

### **Social involvement and community engagement**

Finally, MoMA is also engaged in programming with a social component. Since 2007, the Museum has developed the community partnership programmes, an initiative which offers free art experiences across twenty-nine non-profit and community-based New York organizations. These organizations serve the social, economic and educational needs of audiences who have been historically under-served and overlooked by mainstream museum education programmes. The community partnership organizations address issues such as homelessness, HIV/AIDS, juvenile incarceration, basic adult education, immigration services, prostitution, drug addiction, family illiteracy and job training. For example, the organization Project Luz involves immigrants from Hispanic

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674 'Conversation with Mary Sano and Margaret Sewell of Mount Sinai School of Medicine', *Meet Me Perspectives*, p. 58. <<https://www.moma.org/meetme/perspectives/index>>

675 'Conversation with Jed Levine and Peter Reed of the Alzheimer's Association', *Meet Me Perspectives*, p. 56, <<https://www.moma.org/meetme/perspectives/index>>

676 Carrie McGee, in 'Roundtable with MoMA Educators', *Meet Me Perspectives*, p. 79, <<https://www.moma.org/meetme/perspectives/index>>

countries; Housing Works tackles the crisis of HIV/AIDS and homelessness; Passages Academy serves the city's incarcerated and detained teenagers, and the WISE programme is an initiative of New York City for women who have been arrested for prostitution-related offenses.<sup>677</sup>

The MoMA designs its programmes in collaboration with the staff of the community partnership organizations. Listening and learning from the organizations' educators, they create customized art programmes designed for the specific groups' abilities, needs, interests, problems, educational and personal goals. For some of the programmes they invite audiences to the Museum to look at art and for art-based discussions. Other organizations prefer MoMA educators to visit their sites for discussions focusing on artworks. Finally, for some organizations the focus of the programme revolves around the creation of artworks that connect with the personal and cultural interests of the audience. For example, the Housing Works workshop was an art-making project focusing on the idea of the mask and identity. For the community partnership with Project Luz, they invited the participants – immigrants from Hispanic countries – to make connections between their everyday life experiences and their own practice of learning photography. Finally, the participants had an opportunity to display their artworks in the Biennial Community Partner Art Shows at the Education Department.<sup>678</sup>

For most of the participants their involvement in the Community Partnership Program was their first-ever exposure to the world of modern and contemporary art as well as their first visit to MoMA. As part of the programme, MoMA conducted a series of interviews with participants to understand their views on the Museum. Some of these interviews reveal that the participants had previously viewed MoMA as a highly inaccessible and unwelcoming institution, from which they felt excluded. For example, one of the participants in the Housing Works community programme explained that 'I didn't know that I was allowed to visit MoMA'. Additionally, a participant of the WISE programme believed 'that they wouldn't be allowed in anymore, that they would turn

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677 <http://www.moma.org/learn/community/programs#programs>

678 <http://www.moma.org/learn/community/programs#programs>

them away if they tried to enter the galleries'.<sup>679</sup> According to Kerry Downy, Community and Access Educator, part of the community associates the Museum with ideas of greatness and prestige, but also with inaccessible or hard-to-grasp artworks and the Museum's expensive ticket price.<sup>680</sup>

### **The Modern Women's Project and community and audience engagement.**

One of the main features of the Modern Women's Project is a series of large and small exhibitions which started in December 2009 and which have continued to the present day, for example, the exhibition *Yoko Ono: One Woman Show, 1960-1971* which started in May 2015. However, there has been very little programming related to these exhibitions, and few educational activities, or community involvement. At the same time, there has not been sufficient collaboration between educators and curators of the project.

One of the reasons for the lack of programming is that the Modern Women's Project is an under-the-radar initiative. The benefactor and curators were not interested in publicity and the project was not sufficiently publicized on the website. According to Marcoci, the project was not 'a press and marketing device'.<sup>681</sup> For Mira Schor, the project had a non-public 'Alice in Wonderland secret garden' feeling.<sup>682</sup> Although there were many 'discrete' installations of works by women artists in the galleries and multiple exhibitions on women artists, the visitor would hardly know about many of these shows from the signage in the lobby and from the website. However, these exhibitions and installations evidenced a serious engagement with the curation, presentation and acquisition of works of art by women artists at the Museum. According to Schor, this

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679 Calder Zwicky, 'The Masks We Wear: Identity, Art and AIDS', *Inside/Out: A MoMA/MoMA PSI blog*, 1 March 2010, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2010/03/01/the-masks-we-wear-identity-art-and-aids](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/03/01/the-masks-we-wear-identity-art-and-aids)>

680 Kerry Downy, 'Things we Carry: Art, Identity, and Value within MoMA's Community Partnership Program', *Inside/Out: A MoMA/MoMA PSI blog*, 27 February 2013, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2013/02/27/things-we-carry-art-identity-and-value-within-momas-community-partnership-program](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/02/27/things-we-carry-art-identity-and-value-within-momas-community-partnership-program)>

681 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013. Schor, 'Stealth Feminism at MoMA', in *A Year of Positive Thinking blog*, 16 May 2010, <<http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/16/stealth-feminism-at-moma/>>

682 Schor, 'Stealth Feminism at MoMA', in *A Year of Positive Thinking blog*, 16 May 2010, <<http://ayearofpositivethinking.com/2010/05/16/stealth-feminism-at-moma/>>

secretive, gradual and infiltrative approach could potentially be more effective in the long term than a well-publicized one.<sup>683</sup> However, considering the lack of publicity and discrete scope of the exhibitions, it is understandable that most of them did not involve public programming. Most of the programming was related to film screenings concerning the exhibitions on women filmmakers and actresses such as Ida Lupino, Lillian Gish, Sally Potter, Iris Barry or Maya Deren. Additionally, the exhibition *Counter Space: Design and the Modern Kitchen* (September 2010 – May 2011), involved some activities, performances and courses.<sup>684</sup>

The symposium *The Feminist Future* (2007) was part of the main programming component for the Modern Women's Project and was the main feature of the project publicized by the Museum.<sup>685</sup> The objective of this symposium, organized by the curatorial group, was to announce that feminism was a focus of research at MoMA.<sup>686</sup> According to Holland Cotter, the symposium was an 'unofficial curtain-raiser' for the programme at MoMA.<sup>687</sup> Moreover, the symposium was a means of expanding the research at MoMA and opening the publication and research to external scholars and prominent thinkers.<sup>688</sup> Both curators and audience were aware of the historical significance of the project and the symposium being hosted in a place such as MoMA, 'a bastion of modernism',<sup>689</sup> as it was the first time in its history that feminism had been given 'full-dress museum survey treatment'.<sup>690</sup> The symposium attracted important national and international attention and<sup>691</sup> sold out weeks in advance; some members tried to attend it and could not be accommodated. It also attracted attention from the press, and was featured in the front cover of *The New York Times*.<sup>692</sup>

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683 Ibid.

684 <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1059?locale=en>

685 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

686 Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013.

687 Holland Cotter, 'Feminist Art Finally Takes Center Stage', *The New York Times*, 19 January 2007, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?_r=0)>

688 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013; Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

689 Kristin Jones, 'The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts', *Frieze Magazine*, 105, 3 March 2007.

690 Cotter, 'Feminist Art Finally Takes Center Stage', <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?_r=0)>

691 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

692 Schwartz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013.

One of the aims of the symposium was to host a dialogue about where feminism is today and how women artists think about it. The curators had an interest in accommodating different points of view about feminism, by bringing together different generations of feminists.<sup>693</sup> However, Kristin Jones noticed that the audience was made up almost entirely of older women, most of them scholars and artists from the 1970s generation.<sup>694</sup> The main reason is that the museum focused on involving veterans of the women's art movement of the 1970s because, according to Schwartz, this generation had felt historically excluded from MoMA.<sup>695</sup> However, the group also tried to include younger women and provided scholarships for selected students to attend the symposium. In fact, according to Cotter and Jones, the young artists and students were the ones posing the most agitating and fresh questions.<sup>696</sup>

Controversially, one of the panelists was Marina Abramovic, who constructed arguments that seemed to be in conflict with feminist art history and with the aim of the symposium.<sup>697</sup> Abramovic denied being a feminist artist<sup>698</sup> or even a female artist, because for her 'the really good artists who have something to say, sooner or later they've been included in all the major shows'.<sup>699</sup> She added that 'when I see feminist shows, I always think – and I'm sorry to say it – that the work is not good'.<sup>700</sup> The inclusion of this artist was even more problematic when, despite the efforts of the curators, the symposium was criticized for not being inclusive enough. The audience and panelists were almost entirely white. The only black panelist, artist Wangechi Mutu, joked about this fact during her presentation saying 'I feel like I am gate-crashing a reunion'.<sup>701</sup>

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693 Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013; Umland, Personal Interview, 24 June 2013; Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

694 Kristin Jones, 'The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts', *Frieze Magazine*, 105, 3 March 2007.

695 Schwarz, Personal Interview, 22 February 2013; Cotter, 'Feminist Art Finally Takes Center Stage', *The New York Times*, 19 January 2007,

<[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?_r=0)>

696 Kristin Jones, 'The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts', *Frieze Magazine*, 105, 3 March 2007; Cotter, 'Feminist Art Finally Takes Center Stage', *The New York Times*, 19 January 2007, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/29/arts/design/29femi.html?_r=0)>

697 Kristin Jones, 'The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts', *Frieze Magazine*, 105, 3 March 2007.

698 Berger, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

699 Kate Taylor, 'Feminist Art Goes Back Under the Lens', *The New York Sun*, 2 March, 2007, <<http://www.nysun.com/arts/feminist-art-goes-back-under-the-lens/49658/>>

700 Ibid.

701 Kristin Jones, 'The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts', *Frieze Magazine*, 105, 3 March 2007.

### **The Modern Women's Project, activism and politics at MoMA.**

Another means by which MoMA and the Modern Women's Project have engaged with society and with their audience is through reflection on the history of the Museum's political involvement. The Modern Women's Project has reexamined, incorporated and, to a certain extent, institutionalized the history of political activism and feminist criticism of the Museum.

The history of MoMA is characterized by political protest and feminist disruptions and interventions in the Museum. During the 1970s, one of the main critics of the Museum was the Art Workers' Coalition, an association of artists, filmmakers, writers, critics and museum personnel who staged protests at the Museum to criticize the connection of its board members with the military industrial complex. The coalition successfully put pressure on MoMA, among other New York City museums, to implement various reforms such as a less exclusive exhibition policy that would include women artists and artists of colour, and they emphasized the importance of taking a moral stance on the Vietnam War. Moreover, the coalition succeeded in convincing MoMA and other museums to implement a free-admission day that still exists in many museums.<sup>702</sup>

An important feminist disruption at MoMA was Yoko Ono's *One Woman Show*, the unofficial MoMA debut of the artist in 1971. Ono addressed the absence of her own representation at the Museum by infiltrating the institution to which, as a woman artist, she had no other access. To do so, she advertised her own one-woman show at the institution, but when visitors arrived there was little evidence of her work.<sup>703</sup> Other feminist disruptions at the Museum were various Guerrilla Girls actions in the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Guerrilla Art Action Group's Blood Bath* (1969) and Yayoi Kusama's Sculpture Garden intervention *Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead* (1969)

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702 Christian Viveros-Faune, 'Art versus Politics 2012', *The Village Voice*, 15 February 2012, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/art-versus-politics-2012-7168727>>

703 Butler, 'The Feminist Present', p. 14.



The curatorial group for Modern Women's Project re-examined the activism and political history of the institution, focusing on artists and artworks which had been critical of MoMA. For example, in her article 'The Feminist Present' in *Modern Women*, Butler examined all these disruptions and interventions and the feminist criticism and political action throughout the history of the Museum.<sup>704</sup> Another example of this re-examination is forthcoming 2015 exhibition about Yoko Ono's intervention at MoMA, sponsored by Sarah Peter as part of the Modern Women's Project. Additionally, the re-examination of the history of feminist institutional critique of MoMA was the main topic of the exhibition *Documenting Feminist Past: Art World Critique* (2007), located in the Education and Research building. This exhibition featured material from the MoMA library and archives which documented feminist critique of MoMA from the late 1960s to the present.<sup>705</sup>

In recent years, some of the most important political activism and criticism have been related to Occupy Museums, a collective associated with Occupy Wall Street. The group targeted MoMA in 2011 as they considered the Museum a 'temple of the (new-liberal hierarchical) system (...) and financially dependent on it'.<sup>706</sup> Led by artist Noah Fisher, the protesters held an assembly meeting in front of MoMA and also entered the premises during one of the Museum's First Fridays.<sup>707</sup>

The objective of the occupiers was to start an honest conversation about the presence of money and power in the world of art and culture and to reclaim museum space for 'meaningful culture'.<sup>708</sup> The movement questioned the structure of the Museum board, denouncing MoMA as financially corrupt: according to the occupiers, two MoMA board members, James Noven and Richard E. Oldenburg were also involved with Sotheby's (as a vice chairman and consultant, respectively). They also denounced the fact that Danny Meyer, who runs three restaurants in the Museum, is on the board of Sotheby's. According to Fisher, these trustees help to inflate prices in the art auctions of Sotheby's.

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704 Butler, 'The Feminist Present: Women Artists at MoMA', in *Modern Women, Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, ed. by Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

705 <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/37?locale=en>

706 Joanna Warsza and Florian Malzacher, 'Occupy a Museum Near You! Noah Fisher in Conversation with Joanna Warsza and Florian Malzacher', *Camera Austria*, 117 (2012).

707 Brian Boucher, 'Occupy Museums Targets MoMA Trustees', in *Art in America*, 17 January 2012, <<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/occupy-moma/>>

708 Warsza and Malzacher, 'Occupy a Museum Near You!'

Furthermore, as part of the Museum board, they have some influence over what is shown in the Museum, so that artists' careers are built up through the cultural authority of the Museum. Additionally, at the time of the occupation, Sotheby's was trying to take away the healthcare benefits and cut the pay of their art handlers' Union Group. One of the objectives of Occupy Museums was to put some pressure on the board members of Sotheby's to encourage them to support their workers.<sup>709</sup>

Museum members were involved in the conversation and were interested in the demands of the occupiers. During the occupation of MoMA, Glenn Lowry and other members of staff came down to the galleries to talk to the occupiers and said that they supported the movement to some extent. However, the occupiers explained that they had no demands and that their sole intention was to 'open up a conversation about economic injustice and abuse of the public values'.<sup>710</sup>

The movement refused to enter into a dialogue with the institution or to collaborate with museum members. According to Fisher, there is a risk of institutionalization when organizations are in contact with protesters and with political movements. In such cases, museums can kill protest movements by absorbing them into the existing market, dissolving these movements or using them for advertising purposes. Fisher declined to negotiate with the Museum because there was a risk that 'the museum could try to throw a bone' to the protesters by making some offers and concessions, absorbing the movement into the museum in exchange for publicity. The protesters would then have their 'ego pumped and feel special because these famous gatekeeping institutions have opened their gates just a little'.<sup>711</sup>

According to Butler, in spite of the lack of negotiation, there have been recent changes in the Museum related to the movement and its criticism. For Butler, some of the important questions about capital, the governance of the institution and transparency that were highlighted by the Occupy Movement have influenced the Museum. In recent years, there has been more open dialogue and transparency on the subject of, for

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709 Boucher, 'Occupy Museums Targets MoMA Trustees',  
<http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/occupy-moma/>

710 Warsza and Malzacher, 'Occupy a Museum Near You!'

711 Ibid.

example, how acquisition funds are used and prioritized. In fact, during the interviews I conducted at the Museum, the interviewees were very communicative about funds regarding the acquisition of artworks for the Modern Women's Project.<sup>712</sup>

However, the fact that an established organization is negotiating with artists and acquiring protest work is problematic, as the Museum can potentially institutionalize criticism and politics. In 2013, two years after the Occupy Movement, MoMA gave the political protest its 'stamp of institutional approval'.<sup>713</sup> The Museum bought a collection of thirty-one Occupy Wall Street art prints, the posters that had plastered the city in support of the movement. According to Christophe Cherix, Chief Curator of Prints and Drawings, the Museum acquired the portfolio because it said something important in relation to New York; it was connected to other socially engaging works in the collection and was a way to engage socially with the public.<sup>714</sup>

Molly Crabapple, one of the artists who created the art prints, explained that although there is a risk of institutionalization when protest artworks are acquired by an institution, the reality is that 'we live in a capitalist system', and it is important to make a variety of compromises. For Crabapple, MoMA represented the establishment but it was a better option than other institutions, and she would rather have the work acquired by MoMA than by Morgan Stanley and placed in their lobby.<sup>715</sup>

### **Politics and self-criticism: Engaging with artists.**

For Marcoci, criticism and political protest can come from 'inside the institution' as well; in recent years the Museum has been fostering, promoting and sponsoring political activism.<sup>716</sup>

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712 Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

713 Benjamin Sutton, 'MoMA acquires Occupy Wall Street Print Portfolio', *Blouinartinfo Blogs*, 13 October 2013, <<http://blogs.artinfo.com/artintheair/2013/10/11/moma-acquires-occupy-wall-street-print-portfolio/>>

714 Ibid.

715 Amanda Holpuch, 'New York's MoMA acquires Occupy Wall Street art prints', *The Guardian*, 10 October 2013, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/10/moma-acquires-occupy-wall-street-art-prints>>

716 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

For Halbreich, this is related to MoMA being a place animated by self-criticism and, under the guidance of Lowry, useful self-doubt.<sup>717</sup>

Most of the self-criticism and changes in the Museum are also related to the involvement of artists.<sup>718</sup> In recent years, MoMA has been engaging artists who can raise new questions within the institution. MoMA, and specifically the Modern Women's Project, have had an important role in cultivating relationships with artists by commissioning political and feminist work. According to Halbreich, artists are necessary to change the Museum as museums are 'inherently conservative, because they care about the conservation of objects and maintaining historical continuity'<sup>719</sup> while artists have, according to Marcoci, 'a different sensibility'.<sup>720</sup>

Engagement with artists is also related to an openness towards performance-based projects at the Museum.<sup>721</sup> In the last six years, the Department of Media and Performance Art has introduced performance as a central component in Museum programming, especially after the addition of the words 'and Performance Art' to what had previously been known as the Department of Media in 2008.

Engagement with artists and performance has been clearly political and related to public engagement and involvement with the audience, making the Museum a site of collaboration and interaction with the public. For example, the performance *Combatant Status Review Tribunals, pp. 002954-003064: A Public Reading* (Friday, April 27, 2012) was a political performance by artists Andrea Geyer, Sharon Hayes, Ashley Hunt, Katya Sander and David Throne comprising of a four-hour public reading of an unedited transcript from 18 combatant status review tribunals held at the prison camp of Guantanamo Bay. The readings were meant to expose the lack of transparency that the US military had used in capturing, detaining and classifying so-called 'enemy combatants'.<sup>722</sup>

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717 Halbreich, 'The Museum Revisited', p. 278.

718 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

719 Halbreich, 'The Museum Revisited', p. 278.

720 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

721 Halbreich, 'The Museum Revisited', p. 278.

722 <http://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1197?locale=en>

In some cases, the engagement of artists in political performances has also acted as a bridge between MoMA's history and the present. The Museum has funded research projects and performances that focused on its archives and libraries to discover the institution's history of political activism. The artists have re-examined and revisited MoMA's archives to unveil its history and political past.

One of these projects was the performance *Archive as Impetus* (2013) by Xaviera Simmons. For eight months, Simmons mined the Department of Education, the library and the archive of the Museum, to examine the 'breadth and scope of its political action and activities'.<sup>723</sup> Simmons' research focused on MoMA's political engagements since its inception in 1929. The artist found many documents from the 1970s and 1980s which traced the Museum's history relating to political action, the women's movement, the war in Vietnam and the AIDS epidemic. Simmons researched artists' materials documenting the museum's interventions by the Arts Workers' Coalition and the Occupy Movement. She also researched the acquisition of artworks with political themes, such as Diego Rivera's mural *Agrarian Leader Zapata* (1931) or David Wojnarowicz's *A Fire in My Belly* (1986 -1987).



Figure 8: Xaviera Simmons (American, born 1974). *Archive as Impetus* (13-28 June, 2013), MoMA. Picture reproduced with permission of © Martin Seck.

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723 Sheetal Prajapati, 'Living History: Xaviera Simmons and Archive as Impetus', *Inside/Out: a MoMA/MoMA PSI blog*, 20 June 2013, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2013/06/20/living-history-xaviera-simmons-and-archive-as-impetus](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/06/20/living-history-xaviera-simmons-and-archive-as-impetus)>

Following her research, Simmons developed a series of in-gallery performances in which she used the documents researched to expose how the Museum had or had not engaged politically. The performance, presented several times per week in the Garden Lobby and in the Sculpture Garden – the public spaces of the Museum – was politically charged, disruptive and uncomfortable for the viewers. The intention of these performances was to create a bridge between the archives and the public and to make visible a little-known history of the Museum. The members of the public exposed to the performance were forced to think about the role of the Museum in furnishing an activist space. There was a wide range of responses: some viewers supported the performance while others became angry because she had disrupted their usual museum experience. Some people protested by saying that ‘politics has no place in art’, or covering their ears while others would come up and read the Guerrilla Girls’ or Art Workers’ Coalition’ manifestos.<sup>724</sup>

Another project which focused on the archive and the history of MoMA was Andrea Geyer’s *Three Chants Modern*. Geyer had a research residency at MoMA in 2012 and 2013. During this period, she had ‘*carte blanche*’ to conduct research at all of the archives and the library.<sup>725</sup> The result was *Three Chants Modern*, a two-channel video installation commissioned by MoMA, in which Geyer presented a revisionist history of the modernist project in New York and of the history of MoMA. During her residency, Geyer looked at the foundation of the Museum and at the network of women thinkers, social and political activists, artists and philanthropists who were the institutional pillars of the Modernist Project in New York in the early part of the twentieth century. Most of the research focused on the lives of three women who laid the foundations of MoMA: Lilly Bliss, Mary Sullivan and Abby Rockefeller. Geyer was interested in the tension between the commitment showed by these three founders and the historical lack of representation of women artists in the very same institution that they established.<sup>726</sup>

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724 Jordan Carter, ‘Embodying the Archive: Xaviera Simmons on Archive as Impetus’, in *Inside/Out: a MoMA/MoMA PSI blog*, 2 July 2013, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2013/07/02/embodying-the-archive-xaviera-simmons-on-archive-as-impetus-not-on-view](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/07/02/embodying-the-archive-xaviera-simmons-on-archive-as-impetus-not-on-view)>

725 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

726 Danielle Jackson, ‘Experiencing Andrea Geyer’s Insistence at MoMA’, in *Inside/Out: a MoMA/MoMA PSI blog*, 9 November 2015, <[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2015/11/09/experiencing-andrea-geyers-insistence-at-moma](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2015/11/09/experiencing-andrea-geyers-insistence-at-moma)>

During her research residency, Geyer was also involved in the project *The Hour*, which she developed in collaboration with the curators of the Modern Women's Project. This programme was an hourly gathering held once per month to discuss women artists and her research on the foundation of MoMA. Every month, Geyer would choose an artwork which would be discussed by the group. The artworks were selected from the Museum's collections and displayed by Marcoci during the reunions. Then, the participants would engage in discussions on the artists and read passages related to the artworks. However, this project was internal, with the sole participation of women artists, scholars and curators from the Modern Women's Project and was not advertised on the website of the Museum.<sup>727</sup>

However, most of the political performances at the Museum involved the audience. One of the most popular performances was Martha Rosler's *Meta-Monumental Garage Sale*, supported by the Modern Women's Fund. The show was part of the Museum's embrace of performance and a sign that the institution was trying to accept the criticism that it had underrepresented women artists. The garage sale was Rosler's first solo exhibition at MoMA, and it happened at the same time as an important acquisition of Rosler's works across departments sponsored by the Modern Women's Fund, including the important *Bringing the War Home*.<sup>728</sup>

Rosler had staged large-scale versions of garage sales in museums and galleries since 1973 and the one at MoMA was the latest presentation of this piece. During the garage sale, Museum visitors could buy second-hand goods organized, displayed and sold by the artist in the atrium. The Museum became a space of exchange between the public and Rosler, who oversaw the sale daily and engaged with visitors, haggling over prices. According to Sabine Breitwieser, Curator of Media and Performance Art, the show was a 'collective action' which involved people who donated objects and people who acquired them.<sup>729</sup> The donations, including clothes, books, toys, junk, strange items, art, costumes and records, came from Museum staff, the artists and the public. Among the

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727 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

728 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

729 in Judith Thruman, 'Modern Junk', *The New Yorker*, 20 November 2012, <<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/modern-junk>>

items sold were components from previous garage sales, as well as photographs of museum visitors posing with their new acquisitions.

For Breitwieser, Rosler's garage sales were originally political. They were conceived as a Marxist critique of the validation system at play in the art world, an examination of American culture as well as a reflection on waste, the discarded, the overlooked and the outmoded.<sup>730</sup> However, for Breitwieser, by staging this critique at MoMA, the Museum institutionalized the political activism of the piece, changing its meaning. The objects sold in the heart of MoMA could never be just garage sale items. Being at MoMA, the sale could not avoid being a performance, a conceptual installation and a metaphor in a place filled with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of objects that are no longer for sale. For Kennedy, when MoMA opened its doors to Rosler, her strongly political garage sale was dismissed as spectacle and another form of consumption.<sup>731</sup>

According to Marcoci, this performance was institutionalized because everything presented at MoMA will be institutionalized in a certain way. It was difficult to avoid some sort of antagonism between the institution and the political performance.<sup>732</sup> For Rosler, the Museum had historically insisted on its 'distance from the streets' and when she considered the history of MoMA she felt 'some sort of antagonism' with her piece.<sup>733</sup>

However, undoubtedly the show was a political performance and an institutional critique that 'resisted institutionalization'.<sup>734</sup> The performance piece transformed MoMA's atrium into a place for the exchange of goods. The sale was a provocation in a temple like MoMA; the act of holding a sale of unwanted 'junk' in an art gallery highlighted the irrationality of American consumerism and suggested that the valued artworks that usually fill the galleries were only 'junk' as well.<sup>735</sup> For Marcoci, Rosler had de-institutionalized and drastically altered the institution because the Museum – a non-

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730 Ibid.

731 Randy Kennedy, 'No Picassos, but Plenty of Off-the-Walls Bargains', *The New York Times*, 16 November 2012, <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/arts/design/martha-roslers-meta-monumental-garage-sale-at-moma.html?\\_r=>](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/arts/design/martha-roslers-meta-monumental-garage-sale-at-moma.html?_r=>)

732 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

733 Kennedy, 'No Picassos, but Plenty of Off-the-Walls Bargains', <[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/arts/design/martha-roslers-meta-monumental-garage-sale-at-moma.html?\\_r=>](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/arts/design/martha-roslers-meta-monumental-garage-sale-at-moma.html?_r=>)

734 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

735 in Thruman, 'Modern Junk', <<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/modern-junk>>



profit organization – was transformed into a commercial entity. In sum, MoMA institutionalized the artwork but it was also transformed by it.<sup>736</sup>

For Marcoci, in recent years the institutional change at MoMA has engaged both the artists and the public. The Museum has changed the expectations of the public by involving artists and by being critical and self-reflecting. In a way, the art presented at the Museum can change the way visitors think about the world when they leave the museum. Consequently, it would be possible for the Museum to make a difference in society and in the community because it can influence the way the public thinks visually, ethically and socially.<sup>737</sup>

### **The Brooklyn Museum, The Sackler Center and community engagement.**

The Brooklyn Museum's commitment to community and its interest in education were the main reasons Elizabeth A. Sackler chose it to house a feminist art centre. When Sackler decided to partner with an already-existing institution she made a list of the requirements she needed in order to offer the *Dinner Party* to a museum in New York. The three primary requirements were that the museum must have a commitment to women, community and education. Other requirements were a minimum amount of space, a desire among staff to push the envelope and the desire to lead in a whole new area of practice. In sum, Sackler wanted a museum with 'chutzpah' (audacity).<sup>738</sup> She then made a list of all the possible museums in New York, and the Brooklyn Museum fit every criterion.

In the following paragraphs, I will analyse the Museum's commitment to community, to audience engagement and to education and examine how these interests are related to the activities of the Center in education, political activism and community engagement.

Since 1997, when Arnold Lehman was appointed as director of the Brooklyn Museum, one of the institution's aims has been to involve the community and the audience.<sup>739</sup>

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736 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

737 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

738 Linda Stein, 'Breaking ground on feminist art: Elizabeth A. Sackler', in *On the Issues Magazine*, (Summer 2009), <[http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009summer/2009summer\\_Stein.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009summer/2009summer_Stein.php)>

739 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

Lehman motivated a radical change in the Museum's approach to its audience following a crisis in the 1980s in which attendance figures had dropped to 200,000 a year.<sup>740</sup> Until the 1990s, the Museum had focused on attracting visitors from Manhattan; however, Lehman abandoned the idea of competing with other Manhattan-based museums for visitors and tried to concentrate the Museum's efforts on Brooklyn. This engagement with the Museum's immediate neighbourhood, with 2.5 million residents at the time, coincided with Brooklyn's renaissance as an artistic centre and touristic destination.<sup>741</sup>

However, the Brooklyn's commitment to community was not new in the history of the Museum. In fact, it was founded as a community museum in 1893 by people from the neighbourhood. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the residents of Brooklyn and New York gave donations through which the Museum amassed its collections.<sup>742</sup> According to Kevin Stayton, by the 1930s the Museum was completely integrated within the community, becoming somewhat of a 'club house'.<sup>743</sup> Stayton explained that some of the oldest Brooklyn residents remembered early positive experiences at the Museum when visiting it with their families or schools: 'you hear stories about the mother and children being dropped off at the Museum while the father and son went to the ball game at (the baseball stadium) Eddets Field'. However, this complete assimilation with the community faded away in the 1960s and 1970s, when both the community and the Museum began to change.<sup>744</sup>

Since the late 1990s, the Museum has been trying to recover this spirit of integration with the community and to expand on it.<sup>745</sup> Lehman intended the Museum to be more friendly, more audience-focused and to 'represent everyone'.<sup>746</sup> His new programme was

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740 Randy Kennedy and Carol Vogel, 'Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished, Seeks and Audience', *The New York Times*, 12 April 2004, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

741 Ibid.

742 Kevin Stayton, 'The Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection', in *Brooklyn Museum Blogs*, <<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/author/staytonk/>>

743 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

744 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

745 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

746 Kennedy and Vogel, 'Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished', <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

based on the ‘museum’s opening’ to the community and on serving it; as a consequence, the public face of the museum became very relevant.<sup>747</sup>

One of Lehman’s objectives was to make the Museum a ‘meeting place’ that could be a part of people’s leisure time, a spot where Brooklyn residents could go on a date or to ‘celebrate an event’ instead of going to the movies or to the park.<sup>748</sup> According to Stayton, competing with other institutions for people’s leisure time was in fact necessary for the survival of the Museum, especially in New York’s museum world and in times of decreasing funding.<sup>749</sup> In order to achieve this meeting-place feel, the Museum was involved in a number of major construction projects from 2001 to 2012. One of the main elements of the modernization was a \$63 million new glass entrance with fountains that lent the Museum an inviting facade.<sup>750</sup>

The curators tried to make the Museum attractive to the public with activities and programmes, but art did not have to necessarily be involved. Museum leaders hoped that, eventually, people would come to the Museum and embrace the art in it too. For these reasons, the attempts to make the museum more attractive for the public met with significant criticism. For example, according to Randy Kennedy and Carol Vogel, some of the Museum members accused Lehman of being populist. Robert T. Buck, Lehman’s predecessor, was one of the main critics of the new direction of the Museum. Buck, who believed in ‘art for arts’ sake’, said he found the new direction of the Museum ‘disappointing’ but also inevitable, considering that it was related to ‘the changing nature of the museum world’. Lehman, who was ultimately supported by the majority of the board members, dismissed all criticism as traditionalist and elitist, holding these attitudes responsible for the previous decline of the Museum.<sup>751</sup>

In order to follow this new direction the Museum needed to create a new mission statement which focused on serving the public.<sup>752</sup> Museum officials hired an advertising

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747 Ibid.

748 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

749 Kennedy and Vogel, ‘Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished’,  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

750 Ibid.

751 Ibid.

752 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

and branding company, LaPlaca Cohen, to help them produce the new statement.<sup>753</sup> According to Stayton, the old mission statement was characteristic of the late twentieth century and focused on collecting, preserving and presenting objects, in order of importance. The new mission statement had to present a ‘twenty-first-century mission’ whose priority was to reflect on what ‘the world looks like and not what it looked like 100 years ago’.<sup>754</sup> The Museum’s new mission statement was ‘to act as a bridge between the rich artistic heritage of world cultures, as embodied in the collections, and the unique experience of each visitor. Dedicated to the primacy of the visitor experience (...) and drawing on both new and traditional tools of communication, interpretation and presentation, the Museum aims to serve its diverse public as a dynamic, innovative and welcoming center for learning through the visual arts’.<sup>755</sup> Thus, the aim of the Museum was not to amass collections ‘that no one sees’,<sup>756</sup> but to actually serve the public, be a vital part of the community life and education and figure out how to present the collections to the public.<sup>757</sup>

However, to create the new mission the Museum had to understand who their target audience was. Museums officials made it clear to the consultants that they had to concentrate on people from the surrounding neighbourhood.<sup>758</sup> For Arthur Cohen, a principal of LaPlaca Cohen, the fact that the Museum was in Brooklyn, which had been considered a disadvantaged area until that time, was turned into an incredible opportunity that the Museum had ‘in their own backyard’.<sup>759</sup> The Museum’s officials relied on LaPlaca Cohen’s marketing research to work out who their potential audience was.<sup>760</sup> This was essential to better publicize what the Museum had to offer to their

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753 Kennedy and Vogel, ‘Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished’,  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

754 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

755 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/about>

756 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

757 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

758 Kennedy and Vogel, ‘Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished’,  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

759 Ibid.

760 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

audience and to market what was believed to be the chief strength of the institution: that it was considered by the public to be one of the city's most welcoming museums.<sup>761</sup>

The Museum officials were aware that by concentrating on Brooklyn they were focusing on a very diverse audience, characterized by different ethnic communities, religions and nationalities.<sup>762</sup> To understand this diverse and changing audience LaPlaca Cohen conducted research through focus groups and interviews. They found out that forty percent of visitors were members of different ethnic communities. They also discovered that the audience had changed in recent years; for example, the number of Hispanic visitors had increased by a third since 1995. Another result of the research was the discovery that people visiting the Museum were unusually young: fifty-five percent were between eighteen and forty-four years old.<sup>763</sup>

The idea of reaching out to the diversity of Brooklyn residents was very important at the time of the interviews I conducted at the Museum. According to Bleiberg, who lives in Brooklyn, the diversity of the neighbourhood is a characteristic that differentiates it from the rest of the United States. Brooklyn residents are used to the idea that there are many languages and ethnic communities: for Bleiberg, 'when you are in Brooklyn and you go to an ATM the first question is which one of the twelve languages you would prefer to use'.<sup>764</sup> According to Bleiberg, all the residents of Brooklyn pay taxes, and the Museum is a publicly-supported institution that has to serve everyone in the neighbourhood.<sup>765</sup>

Moreover, the curators made it clear to the consultants that the mission of the Museum was to reach out to people within the neighbourhood who were not ordinarily museum-goers and that by focusing on them the Museum would be different from other institutions in New York.<sup>766</sup> For example, according to Cohen the future of the Museum

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761 Kennedy and Vogel, 'Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished',  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

762 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013; Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

763 Kennedy and Vogel, 'Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished',  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

764 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

765 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

766 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013; Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

lay in attracting non-traditional and infrequent museum-goers.<sup>767</sup> However, at the time of the interviews I conducted, the issue of reaching out to this audience was still an important challenge. For Stayton, the objective of the Museum was to give infrequent museum-goers an experience which was comfortable, rewarding but also challenging.<sup>768</sup> Bleiberg explained that forty percent of the visitors were people of colour, most of them highly educated and who considered museums as an ordinary part of life. For Bleiberg, the challenge the Museum was facing was to reach out to people for whom museums were not their first choice of entertainment, people who had never gone to a museum and had little background in looking at art. During the interview, he expressed his concern that they were not successfully reaching out to these demographic groups as they were with typical museum goers, whether they were from ethnic minorities or not.<sup>769</sup>

### **Involving the community by involving artists.**

An important aspect of the Museum's engagement with the community has been the involvement of Brooklyn artists in several initiatives. For example, one of these projects was the Raw/Cooked series, a group of five ten-week-long exhibitions featuring under-the-radar Brooklyn artists. Launched in 2011, the initiative brought young artists living and working in Brooklyn into the Museum. Most of the artists created works inspired by objects from the collections, challenged the Museum's displays or offered institutional critique.<sup>770</sup>

Ulrike Muller, one of the artists from the Raw/Cooked series, was especially interested in the involvement and building up of community, as well as in queer theory and feminism. Muller orchestrated a collaborative drawing project based on the inventory list of the feminist t-shirt collection of the Lesbian Herstory Archive, a community-based institution in Brooklyn. She distributed textual t-shirt descriptions to feminists, queer

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767 Kennedy and Vogel, 'Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished',  
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/nyregion/brooklyn-museum-newly-refurbished-seeks-an-audience.html>>

768 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

769 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

770 [https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/raw\\_cooked\\_muller](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/raw_cooked_muller)

artists, friends and other interested New Yorkers and asked them to translate the texts into new images. When she had one hundred drawings and her project was almost complete, she was approached by Eugenie Tsai, Curator of Contemporary Art, to participate in the Raw/Cooked series.<sup>771</sup>

According to Muller, her project was based on a conversation between the institution – the Brooklyn Museum – and the counter-institution – the Lesbian Herstory Archive – which is located at a short distance to the Museum. At the same time, the project involved a community of participating artists, most of them Brooklyn artists, as well as her extended community of friends. The project also started an important conversation at the Museum on the lesbian feminist movement: Muller took symbolic lesbian, feminist and queer terms from the inventory and used them as search criteria to mine the Museum's collection. Finally, she displayed the collaborative drawings and nearly twenty-five museum collections objects, creating a visual dialogue between contemporary queer culture, the museum and activist feminist history.<sup>772</sup>



Figure 9: Installation view of *Herstory Inventory: 100 Feminist Drawings by 100 Artists* at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, (June – September, 2012). Installation with 104 drawings; single-channel audio; wall painting; and selected objects from the collection of the Brooklyn Museum. Picture reproduced with permission of © Ulrike Muller. Photo credit: © Christine Gant.

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771 Ulrike Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

772 Ulrike Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

For the closing up of the exhibition, Muller envisioned programming that acted as a bridge between the Lesbian Herstory Archive, the Museum and the community. During the closing weekend, Ann Cvetkovich – from the Lesbian Herstory Archive – discussed the history and current state of LGBT counter-archives at the Brooklyn Museum. After this event, attendees were invited to walk through Prospect Park to the Lesbian Herstory Archive for a reception there. Newly reprinted versions of 120 shirts from the archive's collections were sold at a benefit for the Lesbian Herstory Archive.<sup>773</sup>

Another project involving community and Brooklyn artists was *GO: a community-curated open studio project*. The initiative was designed to promote personal relationships between Brooklyn-based artists, the community and curators at the Museum. One of the objectives of the project was to shift the focus toward seeing a body of work in the galleries to seeing it in the studios with the artists present. At the same time, the project aimed at creating awareness of the art-making taking place in communities throughout Brooklyn and to promote collaboration between the public and the Museum curators.<sup>774</sup>

For the initiative – which was inspired by a long tradition of open studio events that take place each year throughout Brooklyn – 1,861 Brooklyn-based artists registered online. Then, members of the community were encouraged to visit the artists' studios and to nominate artists for inclusion in a group exhibition to be held at the Museum. The public only needed to visit at least five studios to nominate artists for the exhibition.<sup>775</sup> Museum staff could not nominate artists, just visit their studios and offer support at information spots. On the 8 and 9 September 2012, an estimated 18,000 people made approximately 147,000 studio visits in order to nominate artists. Eugenie Tsai and Sharon Matt Atkins, Curator of Exhibitions, visited the studios of the top-nominated artists and selected works from five of them – Adrian Coleman, Oliver Jeffers, Naomi Safran-Hon, Gabrielle Watson and Yeon Ji Yoo – for the exhibition at the Museum. Finally, the organizers of

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773 Ulrike Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

774 'GO, a Community-Curated Open Studio Project (December 2012 - February 2013), *Bloggers Brooklyn Museum Community: Bloggers*, 29 November 2012,

<<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/tag/GO/>>

775 Ibid.



*GO* had a public conversation about the successes and challenges of the project, attended by project staff, artists and voter participants.<sup>776</sup>

The project involved the community while at the same time it began to explore the art community of Brooklyn and let the thousands of artists in the neighbourhood know that the Museum was interested in them. The experience was, according to Bleiberg and Stayton, very successful with more artists and more community members participating than expected. For example, one of Bleiberg's friends, an artist living in Brooklyn, became a Museum member at the end of the project. Her experience had been very positive because, although she was not selected, it brought people to her studio and made her come to the Museum.<sup>777</sup>

Although the Sackler Center does not run programming relating to the community, the curators have been involving Brooklyn artists such as Patricia Cronin, Lorna Simpson and Wangechi Mutu in exhibitions. However, there seem to be challenges in involving these artists and accommodating their needs, perhaps because there are very few members of staff at the Center. One of the artists interviewed, who wished to remain anonymous, thought that the Center could do more to involve Brooklyn artists. The artist had felt neglected by the Center and expressed feelings that the Museum was not interested in the project presented.<sup>778</sup>

### **The Sackler Center and political activism.**

According to Bleiberg, Sackler chose the Brooklyn Museum because her ideas and Lehman's ideas were running a parallel course and because the Museum was 'unconventional, unusual and open minded'.<sup>779</sup> Both Sackler and Lehman had similar ideas about diversity, freedom of speech and the incorporation of the voices of those who are underrepresented and who are not traditional museum-goers. Lehman's ideas responded to Sackler's views on a centre for feminist art and to her interest in political

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

<sup>777</sup> Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

<sup>778</sup> Anonymous 2, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

<sup>779</sup> Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

and social issues. However, the Center's commitment to social issues is mainly related to its main founder and benefactor while the curators are less involved in her activist and political programming. For example, during the interviews, Grayson and Morris explained that activism and politics were 'Sackler's concerns'.<sup>780</sup>

The Center was founded by Sackler as her largest art project, but also her largest social activist work. Sackler defines herself as a 'social and arts activist',<sup>781</sup> who with 'her means' is able to be involved in large scale social activism. However, she does not define herself as a philanthropist, as her activity is not a 'check-writing exercise', but rather it is about participating in the cultural landscape.<sup>782</sup>

Sackler's activism and political interests are related to her education and her childhood, which was 'steeped in justice and equality'.<sup>783</sup> Coming of age in the 1960s, she participated in the protests of the civil rights movements, and in those years she began to be interested in social activism.<sup>784</sup> The first project that brought her international acclaim was her pioneering activity in repatriating Native American ceremonial materials, publicly purchasing three *katchina* masks at auction at Sotheby's and returning them to the Hopi and Navajo Nations.<sup>785</sup> She then established the American Indian Ritual Object Repatriation Foundation in 1992, and continues to educate on the importance of repatriation, and on ethics and morality in the art market and beyond.<sup>786</sup>

For Sackler, feminism is a way of life in order to reach a world of equity, justice and equality. In her view, oppression, inequality and prejudice still engulf most women in the world. The objective of feminism is to reach a state in which all women have equal opportunities and are saved from 'bigotry and rescued from the horrors of rape and the sex-slave market'.<sup>787</sup> The Center, as a forum for dialogue about feminism, is a place where the principles of equality and justice reside. For Sackler, the Center is 'not an end,

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780 Morris, Personal Interview 20 February 2013; Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013..

781 Elizabeth A. Sackler, 'Benefactor Statement',  
[https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/benefactor\\_statement/](https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/benefactor_statement/)

782 'The Matron of Feminist Art', in *The Social Enterprise*, 13 October 2010,  
<https://thesocialenterprise.wordpress.com/tag/elizabeth-sackler/>

783 Ibid.

784 Elizabeth A. Sackler, 'Benefactor Statement'.

785 'The Matron of Feminist Art', in *The Social Enterprise*,

786 Elizabeth A. Sackler, 'Benefactor Statement',

787 Elizabeth A. Sackler, 'Benefactor Statement'.

but a beginning',<sup>788</sup> as its goal is to move towards a more equitable and just future and provide an opportunity for the moral principles and values of feminism to be a desirable prospect.<sup>789</sup> According to her, we will not reach a post-feminist era until we live in such an equitable and just world. In that case, there will not be a need for a feminist art centre; it could just be the Elizabeth Sackler Gallery.<sup>790</sup>

Sackler has been involved in social and political activism at the Center. One of her initiatives was the Sackler Center First Awards, a commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the Center. The awards honoured fifteen women who made a remarkable achievement and contribution in their respective professions. Only one of the women honoured had anything to do with the visual arts.

Moreover, for the first anniversary of the Center, Sackler organized panels such as *Funding a Revolution*, formed by women – Carol Jenkins, Helen LaKelly Hunt, Barbara Dobkin and Jennifer Buffett – who discussed their goals, methods and activist philanthropy.<sup>791</sup> Additionally, Sackler has organized panel discussions, all of them funded by the Sackler Foundation, related to issues such as sex trafficking and violence. For example, *Sex Trafficking and the New Abolitionists*, led by Gloria Steinem in 2008; *Gender and Genocide: Sexual Violation of Women during the Holocaust and Other Atrocities*, also moderated by Gloria Steinem, in March 2011. She has also organized panels on other feminist topics such as *Yes They Did! A Celebration of Women who Dared*, in February 2009, and *Redstockings, Riot Grrls, Three Generations of Feminism in Conversation*, in March 2010.

At the same time the Center is an arts activism institution, whose objective is to influence museum and galleries and to give feminism the acknowledgement of the art world. According to *Dinner Party* creator Judy Chicago, the long term goal of the Center is to inspire future generations of feminist artists. Chicago explained that she would joke with Sackler that when the Center opened 'you will be surprised how many women who never

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788 'NY1 Exclusive: Brooklyn Museum to Open Feminist Art Center', NY1, 21 March 2007.

789 Lynn Hershman, 'Transcript of Interview with Elizabeth Sackler', *SULAIR*, 6 February 2007 <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-elizabeth-sackler>>; Elizabeth A. Sackler, 'Benefactor Statement'.

790 Elizabeth Sackler, 'Benefactor statement'.

791 Linda Stern, 'Breaking Ground on Feminist Art: Elizabeth A. Sackler', in *On the Issues Magazine*, Summer 2009, <[http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009summer/2009summer\\_Stein.php](http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2009summer/2009summer_Stein.php)>

wanted to associate with feminism will say “I’m a feminist artist, I’ve always been a feminist artist”.<sup>792</sup> For Sackler, her vision for the future is of a young girl walking down the hall and seeing an ‘*Elizabeth* gallery of feminist art with a work of art by a *Judy*’.<sup>793</sup>

Ultimately, the mission of the Center is to influence museums worldwide to engage with feminist art and to be a model for other institutions to imitate. For Sackler, when other institutions ‘see the success of the Center, they will think they can, too, set up centres of their own for feminist art or women’s art within their existing institutions’.<sup>794</sup> Undoubtedly, seven years after its founding, the Center has had a major impact around the world, opening up the dialogue about feminist art and increasing its value. For example, it was a viewing of *The Dinner Party* at the Sackler Center which inspired Camille Morineau’s idea of *elles@centrepompidou*.<sup>795</sup>

### **The Brooklyn Museum: Engaging the audience through collections.**

An important ongoing conversation at the Brooklyn Museum is related to the involvement of its diverse and underserved audiences through the Museum’s collections. The curators are facing a challenge, trying to find a balance between audience engagement and the fact that the Brooklyn is a traditional art-and-object-based museum.

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According to Stayton, one of the ways of serving underserved audiences is to correct the balance of the collections in areas that have been historically neglected, such as African-American art and women’s art.<sup>797</sup> Additionally, in the last fifteen years, the curators have created exhibitions that are targeting groups of people who have been underrepresented at the Museum: women, African Americans and LGBTQ people. In the future, the

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<sup>792</sup> Michelle Kort, ‘Home at Last’, *Ms. Magazine*, Winter 2007, <<http://www.msmagazine.com/winter2007/homeatlast.asp>>

<sup>793</sup> Carey Lovelace, ‘A Feast for Feminist Art’, *Ms. Magazine*, Fall 2004, <<http://www.msmagazine.com/fall2004/feministart.asp>>

<sup>794</sup> Stern, ‘Breaking Ground on Feminist Art’.

<sup>795</sup> Camille Morineau, ‘Private Collections of Work by Women Artists: An Overview’, in *ArtPress*, 383 (November 2011), 60-63, (p. 60).

<sup>796</sup> Corinna Kirsch, ‘Brooklyn Museum Catherine Morris on “Six Years”’, in *ArtfCity*, 3 August 2012, <<http://artfcity.com/2012/08/03/brooklyn-museum-curator-catherine-morris-on-six-years/>>

<sup>797</sup> Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013

Museum will also plan exhibitions for other groups, such as Americans of Latin descent, Asian Americans and the Russian community in Brooklyn.<sup>798</sup> At the same time, the Museum curators have focused on programming exhibitions that are attractive to the public, by choosing subjects that have a broad appeal. According to Bleiberg, ‘I do not do exhibitions for my colleagues; I do exhibitions for the broad public’.<sup>799</sup> For example, the Museum programmed popular shows in the early 2000s such as *Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes and Rage* in 2000 and *Star Wars* in 2002.

For Stayton and Bleiberg, another way of answering the ‘diversity question’ is interpretation. When the museum curators create interpretation the objective is to make the objects accessible to an audience who has no prior experience in visiting museums or looking at art. According to Bleiberg, they are careful with the vocabulary that they use. If they have to use a technical term – such as iconography – they have to define it, explain what it means or find another way to explain the main idea without using the term. They also have to write short, concise labels and didactic panels of no more 80 words. After conducting research on the subject, they found that more people will read the caption if the message is short than if it is articulated in 300 or 400 words.<sup>800</sup>

However, for curators it can be a challenge to present artworks in an accessible way while at the same time conveying the message they are trying to express. In their 2004 article, Kennedy and Vogel expressed concerns that the museum officials were taking the accessibility theme too far and that the curatorial staff and collections were being underused. For the authors, the new explanatory labels were too short and simple, designed for no more than a third-grade reading level.<sup>801</sup> Bleiberg explained that it was a challenge to explain why the object was important and what part the object played in the story they were trying to tell in less than 80 words. The curator expressed his frustration at times about not being able to tell a fuller story, but ‘nobody wants to hear the story, that’s what I am told’.<sup>802</sup> Stayton agreed that it could be difficult for the

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798 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

799 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

800 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

801 Kennedy and Vogel, ‘Brooklyn museum, newly refurbished’.

802 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

curators to write such short labels when there are too ‘many messages that they want to convey’.<sup>803</sup>

At the same time, for Bleiberg the lack of interpretation is related to the issue of reaching out to infrequent museum-goers. On the one hand, the Museum is trying to be accessible and non-hierarchical, avoiding being a voice of authority which tells its visitors what they should be doing or thinking. However, the lack of interpretation can be a challenge when visitors do not know what they are supposed to do when they are in a museum, and they can be disoriented when the museum does not give much information away.<sup>804</sup>

In recent years, the Museum has focused on redesigning its galleries and reinstalling its major collections with the objective of making art more accessible to every visitor. The aim of these reinstallations is to follow the Museum’s mission of communicating with the public, and creating something for them and not for the museum communities.<sup>805</sup> However, according to Stayton, reinstalling the collections is related to the fact that in the last thirty years the Museum has been installing climate control in the building and this fact has dictated which galleries come down and which ones are being reinstalled.<sup>806</sup> Changes in the reconfigured galleries have included experiments with design, such as vivid wall colours, graphic effects and multimedia components. Bleiberg was sceptical about this new way of presenting art; for the curator, the experiments with sound and video had had limited success, and he was concerned that these experiments could potentially distract visitors instead of involving them.<sup>807</sup>

One of the main examples of reinstallation was the permanent gallery *American Identities*. In 2001 the museum de-installed the traditional American Art Gallery and reinstalled an experimental gallery, *American Identities*. For this reinstallation the Museum curators made connections across all of the Museum’s collections, mixing decorative arts and fine arts and breaking the boundaries of American art, Asian art, Ancient art, Contemporary art and art of the Native Americans. The new gallery was not

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803 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

804 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

805 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

806 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

807 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

chronological but organized around eight themes, through which the viewers could explore historical moments and the crucial ideas of American visual culture.<sup>808</sup>

In 2012 the museum organized *Connecting Cultures*, a long-term reinstallation of the collections in the Great Hall of the Museum. The objective of this gallery was to introduce visitors to all of the Museum's collections. At the same time, the aim of the gallery was to stimulate thinking on how to make connections between the Museum galleries, which remain largely traditional, divided into Asian Galleries, American Galleries and Egyptian Galleries.<sup>809</sup> For Stayton, *Connecting Cultures* brought all of the collections together, allowing a glimpse of the different kinds of art presented at the Museum. The gallery broke down traditional categories and encouraged new ways of thinking about art. In May 2013, the Museum curators conducted a visitor study on *Connecting Cultures* to see if the visitors understood the main ideas. Feedback from visitors was positive: out of 62 people who completed the interviews, 85 percent recognized the main idea.<sup>810</sup>



Figure 10: Installation view of *Connecting Cultures* (April 2012 – October 2016), Brooklyn Museum. Picture reproduced with permission of © Tom Freudenheim.

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808 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

809 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

810 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

For Bleiberg, *Connecting Cultures* was not intended for curators but for people who were new to the art world. The objective of the exhibition was to interest museum visitors in art and to encourage them to discover more so that eventually they would become more sophisticated consumers of art. However, for Bleiberg the balance between interpretation and accessibility was not resolved in the gallery. On the one hand, the exhibition was non-hierarchical and presented very little interpretation – just a series of questions – to guide the visitors, without guiding them in any direction. The advantage of the lack of interpretation was that the visitors could have a reaction to the artwork presented which was independent of culture and the knowledge of the Museum curators. On the other hand, the gallery was not intellectually sophisticated. In fact, for Bleiberg some of the objects were superficially assembled in relation to each other and the richness of the story was lost. Bleiberg wondered whether this lack of interpretation in the assemblage of objects would actually confuse the visitor, for whom the differences among objects would not be obvious. For Bleiberg, it was also important to understand the ways in which the objects were different and to expose the richness of the story, which was not obvious in the museum display.<sup>811</sup>

For the first nine months after the unveiling of *Connecting Cultures*, the curators experimented with welcoming methods of approaching the audience. Whenever the museum was open, a member of staff sat at the welcome reception desk for two hours and engaged with visitors; Lehman was the first museum member to occupy a desk in the installation. Visitors had the opportunity to meet diverse museum staff and interact with them. The intention of this initiative was to provide a human connection with the Brooklyn Museum that allowed visitors to understand what the exhibition was about. Visitors could give feedback about the installation, and were ‘astonished’ at the friendly and open spirit of the Museum.<sup>812</sup>

Stayton and Bleiberg disagreed on the success of this initiative. For Stayton, it was ‘rewarding’ to talk to people while they were experiencing the works of art. According to him, it was useful for the curators to see first-hand how people experienced

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811 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

812 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.



*Connecting Cultures*, in order to know how to reinstall other galleries in the future, which ideas from the gallery they could use in other galleries, which of them did not work and which experiments could be refined.<sup>813</sup>

However, Bleiberg was unsure about the success of the experiment and did not think it had been useful. All Museum staff had to participate in the initiative. Some of the staff, for example the Museum's accountants, felt uncomfortable discussing art with the public. When Bleiberg participated in the initiative, it was difficult for him to ascertain whether someone coming into the gallery wanted to engage in a conversation or not. At times, he felt like he was bothering people who came to the Museum, especially tourists, and most of the time he sat at the desk while everyone 'ignored him and kept walking'.<sup>814</sup>

### **The Brooklyn Museum and the Sackler Center: Engaging the public through the Department of Education.**

Finally, an important way of engaging the audiences of the Brooklyn Museum and the Sackler Center has been through the Department of Education. In recent years, the programmes of the Department have been less didactic and academic, with an emphasis on workshops and activities. One of the most successful and popular programmes is *First Saturdays*. On the first Saturday of every month, the Museum opens to the public from 5 pm to 11 pm. There are free events on every floor such as live music, salsa dancing, face painting, lectures, films, curator talks and poetry reading. *First Saturdays* are attended by families, children, couples on date nights and young visitors dressed as if they were going to a nightclub.<sup>815</sup>

For Stayton, the objective of *First Saturdays* is to encourage the community to come to the Museum for free and to 'taste the waters' of what it is like to be in a museum; visitors do not have to look at art if that is their choice. The objective is that visitors will find the museum a 'comfortable' place where the community is accepted and welcomed. Stayton

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813 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

814 Bleiberg, Personal Interview, 14 February 2013.

815 Kennedy and Vogel, 'Brooklyn Museum, Newly Refurbished'.

hoped that the public will ultimately begin to see the art experience as a part of what the institution has to offer.<sup>816</sup>

Most of the engagement with the audience at the Sackler is conducted through education programmes. From 2007 to 2011 these programmes were run through the Department of Education at the Brooklyn Museum. However, in July 2011 the Sackler hired a programme coordinator, Jessica Wilcox, who works in collaboration with the curators of the Sackler and with the Department of Education at the Museum. According to Wilcox, most of the programmes she plans for the Sackler are following the model of the Department of Education.<sup>817</sup>

Wilcox works in close collaboration with Morris and Grayson, the Curator and Assistant Curator of the Center respectively. The three of them attend the same meetings, in which they discuss exhibitions and programmes, which consequently evolve at the same time. Thus, the programming of the Center is more curatorial in nature than that of a traditional educational department programme. However, this way of working is also possible because it is a very small team of three people.<sup>818</sup>

At the Sackler, the education programme tries to complement aspects that were not developed fully in the curatorial programme. For example, the programming related to *Materializing Six Years*, an exhibition on Lucy Lippard's curatorial trajectory based on the book *Six Years*, filled the gaps that the exhibition did not touch. One of the programmes, *Dematerializing after Pop*, revolved around Latin American conceptualism and the concept of dematerialization. These elements were presented in the exhibition but they were not completely developed. For this reason, the programming was complementary to the exhibition and developed some aspects that were not completely visible to the visitors.<sup>819</sup>

The Sackler Center was envisioned by Sackler as a learning environment, with an educational function clearly stated in the mission, which is 'to maintain a dynamic and

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816 Stayton, Personal Interview, 19 February 2013.

817 Jessica Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

818 Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

819 Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

welcoming learning environment and to educate new generations about the meaning of feminist art'.<sup>820</sup> However, both Wilcox and Morris were critical of the concept of 'educating' the audience on feminist issues. Wilcox explained that the programming was focused on involving people in participatory programmes rather than on educating them, and that they avoided presenting information in a didactic way. According to Wilcox, most of the programmes at the Center were presented in a conversational format, in which they encouraged 'speculation' and a dialogue between the artist and the audience.<sup>821</sup> Rather than writing a definitive history, the curators tried to ask questions relating to artworks or texts and they invited people to form their own opinions on the information presented. Whenever they gave new information to the audience, it was with a desire to uncover history or artists that had been underrepresented.

At the Sackler, the relatively small size of the programming space favours the participatory experience of the public. For Wilcox, the lecture space has a very 'intimate feel'. As a consequence, the audience is at the same level and close to the speakers, artists or academics. This intimate, levelling feeling encourages participation, gives people permission to ask questions, to participate in the debate and to develop discussions. At the same time, the programming space is next to the galleries, so it is possible for the public to visit the galleries immediately after the discussions.<sup>822</sup>

The Center also designs programmes in the in Martha A. and Robin S. Rubin Pavilion, a more public space with a different feel, but which is also sponsored by the Sackler Foundation. According to Wilcox, most of the public do not identify this space as part of the Sackler Center, but it can potentially serve as a good introduction to the Center. For Wilcox, the curators often use programmes in this space as a means of attracting visitors to the Center. For example, as part of the programmes for *Materializing Six Years*, the Center worked with artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in the pavilion. Images of Ukeles' 1974 performance *Interviewing Passersby on the Sidewalk About Their Maintenance Lives* were part of the exhibition. Ukeles envisioned a programme at the glass pavilion which was a re-performance of her original work. In her new performance *Maintenance/Survival/and its Relation to Freedom*, Ukeles updated her original work

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820 <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa>

821 Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

822 Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

for the contemporary moment by interviewing the audience and inviting visitors to join her in public conversations. According to Wilcox, this performance was a good way to bring museum visitors into the exhibition and into the Sackler Center.<sup>823</sup>

The Department of Education at the Brooklyn Museum has its own calendar of events separate from that of the Sackler.<sup>824</sup> However, there is significant collaboration between Wilcox and the Department of Education in which they inform each other of their activities. According to Wilcox, there is an ongoing conversation between the Sackler Center and the Brooklyn to plan educational programmes that can be related to each other.

Wilcox has worked closely with the Department of Education on different programmes, offering her voice and opinions and bringing a feminist perspective to a series of programmes which are not directly related to the Sackler. For example, some of the programming Wilcox organized, involving Brooklyn artists A. K. Burns and Katherine Hubbard, was presented in *First Saturdays* in collaboration with the Department of Education. Wilcox collaborated in a participatory project with these artists and their programme *Brown Bear: Neither Particular, Nor General*. This programming was part of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition, which started at the Smithsonian and travelled to the Brooklyn Museum. Wilcox invited the artists to adapt a programme they had developed at the Recess Gallery to the topic of *Hide/Seek*. Their project, which took place in the Great Hall, focused on the idea of the literary salon as a site for public engagement and a place for discussion which intellectually shapes one's identity. This idea was combined with a hair salon, a place which also shapes our physical identity. For the project, the artists offered free queer haircuts or styling to visitors who volunteered themselves, in a barber's chair located in the middle of the exhibition space.<sup>825</sup>

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823 Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

824 Morris, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

825 Wilcox, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

## **Conclusion.**

The three museums studied are related to society in different ways, influenced by their history, their resources, their neighbourhoods and their audiences. However, all of them are trying to involve the community and be more participative. Aarhus is a museum interested in community building and audience engagement since its founding in 1982. The Museum is completely involved with its community, which has participated in all museum activities throughout the Museum's years of operation. The Museum has maintained a commitment to its community and to social engagement to the present day.

MoMA is slowly opening up to the community by developing a variety of programmes and initiatives, especially through the Department of Education. In recent years, the Museum is incorporating criticism, reconsidering its history and fostering disagreement and social and political activism, especially by involving artists in political projects and performance art.

One of the main interests of the curators of the Brooklyn Museum is the involvement of the community and audience engagement. The Museum is especially focused on involving audiences within the neighbourhood. However, one of the main challenges the Museum is facing is to find a balance between accessibility and scholarship. The Sackler Center, housed at the Brooklyn Museum, is a place which has not participated in the community involvement of the institution but which is characterized by important social and political activism.

# Conclusion

## Summary of the Research.

This thesis aims at changing perspectives on curatorship, museums and the Western art historical canon. In the past forty years, feminist scholarship has challenged museum hegemonies, but has mainly focused on the underrepresentation of women artists and on giving access to women artists to collections and exhibitions. In this research project, I am contributing to scholarship on feminist curatorial projects, by defining feminist curatorial practices and by reflecting on how to install feminist and women's art. Secondly, the museum contributes to maintaining the hegemony of the art system via installations, exhibition, catalogues and acquisition policies. Therefore, by challenging the hegemonies and discriminatory practices in the museum it is possible to challenge the main narratives of the Western art historical canon, which still privileges white, male, Euro-American artists.

In this research project I have explored the relationship between feminist curatorship and art institutions. There are significant tensions in this relationship as feminism and professional practice have opposing political demands. Institutions preserve and present artworks and thus categorize, classify, consolidate and regulate the subversive.<sup>826</sup> Also, museums are by definition hierarchical in nature as members of staff have different levels of responsibility. These factors are in direct contradiction with the values of the feminist political project, which are founded upon criticism of power structures, cooperation and openness towards alternative voices and stories.

However, in my thesis I have explored how both feminism curatorship and institutions influence each other. Feminism problematizes and challenges the museum, while the institution often responds with resistance, containing and ghettoizing feminism. MoMA curator Roxana Marcoci compared this process to an immigrant arriving into a foreign

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<sup>826</sup> Dimitrakaki and Perry, 'How to be seen', in *Politics in a Glass Case*, p. 1.

country: ‘when an immigrant comes to another country he will be assimilated into that culture but inevitably the immigrant will change that country’s constitution and structure. (The country) will be changed by people who bring their own traditions and beliefs’.<sup>827</sup>

The present moment presents an interesting manifestation of this relationship due to the number of feminist projects located in institutions which have taken place since 2007.<sup>828</sup> There has been a burst of feminist visibility, and feminist art projects have been the subject of intense institutional, curatorial and critical attention. However, for authors such as Dimitrakaki and Perry or Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe, feminism has not achieved its main objective of realising structural change in the art institution.<sup>829</sup> For these authors, in this process of musealization feminism has lost its purpose of criticising the institution. Instead, it has been borrowed by the museum and added as a new curatorial category but has not challenged the institution’s established functions.<sup>830</sup> Moreover, for Dimitrakaki and Perry, feminist curatorship has tended to focus on providing access for women artists to collections and exhibitions.<sup>831</sup> There has not been a theoretical analysis focused on the political, social and economic implications of the feminist curatorial act in art institutions.

In this research project I have focused on the feminist curatorial project as an intervention in museums. I have proposed that institutional thinking and structures need to be reformulated by feminism: the mere inclusion of women is not sufficient, nor is it adequate to add feminism as another category to the museum. Feminism necessitates reconceiving the institution and its hierarchies in a fundamental way, according to its political imperatives.

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827 Roxana Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

828 Dimitrakaki and Perry, ‘How to be seen’, in *Politics in a Glass Case*, p. 7.

829 Dimitrakaki and Perry, ‘How to be seen’, in *Politics in a Glass Case* in p. 2; Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe, ‘Preface’, in *Feminisms is still our name*, p. XV.

830 Dimitrakaki and Perry, ‘How to be seen’, in *Politics in a Glass Case*, p. 8.

831 Ibid. , p. 8.

In my thesis, I have proposed a redefinition of feminist curatorial practices. I have suggested that feminist curatorship is about destabilizing the power structures of the museum, challenging patriarchy and hierarchy and questioning received truths. This change has to be achieved by museum workers who can subvert hierarchical structures and restructure organizations and practices while operating inside those art institutions. These curators have the opportunity to dismantle the structures of museums while including new voices in the museum's discourses, thereby empowering communities and marginalized groups.<sup>832</sup>

I have also contended that feminism can destabilize and radically restructure the museum on three levels. Firstly, this occurs by questioning the museum's selection, organization and classification of objects in exhibitions and acquisitions and by giving other voices and other stories access to the museum. Secondly, this occurs through challenging power structures and hierarchies and implementing a collaborative model, focused on power-sharing, conversations and democracy as a central strategy. Thirdly, this occurs by transforming the museum into a more social, participatory and community-oriented space.

In order to study the relationship between feminist curatorship and art institutions I have focused on three museums: the Women's Museum in Aarhus, The Museum of Modern Art in New York and The Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. While it is important to acknowledge the fact that the long-term impact of feminism within these institutions is difficult to evaluate, this research has contributed an in-depth analysis of a significant moment in its development, which also provides insights into how this might change in the future. I conducted most of my interviews in September 2012, February 2013 and June 2013, but there have been changes in these institutions since then and change will probably continue in the future.

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832 Proctor, 'Feminism, Participation and Matrixial Encounters', in *Politics in a Glass Case*, p. 51.



## Women's Museum in Aarhus

The Women's Museum in Aarhus is a small-scale, grassroots museum with feminist values at its core. Over the years, the Museum has surveyed a lost history of women, the marginalized and the forgotten; however, in recent years it has focused on gender, global issues and immigration. The Museum was founded on feminist principles of community involvement and has prioritized collective strategies, democracy and collaboration with other organizations; this collaborative approach has been both a tool for survival and a feminist strategy.

Over the years, the Women's Museum in Aarhus has been influential in the community and in society. For Sandahl, the concept of a museum founded by women and focusing on women has had a significant impact on society and on other women's museums internationally. For her, "once you say the concept 'woman's museum' you have named and defined this absence of women in the public discourse". According to Sandahl, the museum 'created waves beyond its actual physical scale and it took a symbolic place in the consciousness of society and in the consciousness of the museum world'.<sup>833</sup>

At the Women's Museum in Aarhus, the community work and outreach programmes go beyond the borders of the conventional definition of what museums ought to do. The curators have stressed the importance of the participation of women in museum work, advocating for women's rights, engaging in community involvement and focusing on the political and social empowerment of the women in the community. Also, the Museum has maintained its embeddedness in society throughout its years of operation; in the early years it focused on women in the community working in the museum and on the Women's Museum Society. In recent years, it has shifted its focus to projects within the community and social outreach programmes.

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<sup>833</sup> Sandahl, Personal Interview, 17 October 2012.

After the Museum grew and became consolidated and registered as part of the established museum world, it experienced difficulties in maintaining its commitment to feminist values of collaboration and democracy. The Museum changed from being collaborative and anti-hierarchical to more professionalized. Additionally, change has been ongoing since I conducted the interviews for this research project. When the interviews took place, there was a collaborative directorship of three curator-directors, Merete Ipsen, Bodil Olesen and Lene Mork; at the present moment there are just two museum directors, Ipsen and Olesen.

### The Sackler Center

The Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum is a unique place as it is the only feminist centre in a major museum in the world; also, it is a place for feminist art, not women's art. The Center has been influential in recent debates about feminism, programming influential exhibitions such as *Global Feminisms* and hosting The Feminist Art Project events.

The Center is a permanent feminist space, which represents an important intervention and an enduring commitment to feminist values in the Brooklyn Museum. Consequently, it is a permanent opportunity to rethink the Museum, its history, identity and politics. For Reilly, with the Center 'feminism is here to stay, we are now in an institution and we are not going anywhere'.<sup>834</sup> The fact that the Center is a physical space for feminism in the Museum gives feminist art and ideas an important visibility in an elite American institution. According to Grayson, 'just reading the map and going on the elevator you can see that there is a Center for feminist art, which makes visible for the public the idea

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834 Lynn Herschman, 'Transcript of Interview with Maura Reilly', *Stanford University Digital Collections* (February 6, 2007) <<https://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-maura-reilly>>

that feminism is something that the art museum is involved with [...] and hopefully raises some questions to the visitor'.<sup>835</sup>

However, nine years after the foundation it seems that, despite the efforts of curators and museum staff, the Center has not achieved its full potential and there has not been a real embeddedness of feminism within the institution. For example, there is limited collaboration with curators from the Brooklyn, and acquisitions of artworks, educational programmes and audience and community involvement have been minimal.

According to Muller, feminism as a category was missing in the museum and it was added to the institution; feminism was not used as an opportunity to rethink the structure of the Brooklyn.<sup>836</sup> For Reilly, the main reason for the lack of embeddedness was the fact that the museum staff were not prepared for feminism; additionally, there was a lack of communication between curators from the Brooklyn Museum and Sackler Center curators. According to Reilly, Brooklyn curators were challenged by the concept of feminism and feminist art and struggled with the implications of housing a dedicated space for feminist art.<sup>837</sup>

To summarize, it is difficult to foresee the future of the Center, whether there will be more changes at the Brooklyn and whether the Sackler Center will be truly embedded within the institution. However, the fact that the Center is a permanent voice for dialogue in the Museum means that it still presents an opportunity to exercise a significant impact upon the history of the Brooklyn.

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835 Grayson, Personal Interview, 20 February 2013.

836 Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

837 Jones, 'On feminist art history and curatorial practice: An interview with Maura Reilly, Connie Butler and Amelia Jones', in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, pp. 34, 35

## MoMA

MoMA is an international icon, an institution which has created a vision of modern art which other museums look to as an example to be imitated.<sup>838</sup> However, MoMA is also an elitist, masculinist institution which has been historically criticised for creating a vision of art which excluded the modern participation of women.<sup>839</sup>

The Modern Women's Project was the first attempt by a North American Museum to examine its collections by highlighting the production of modern and contemporary women artists. The Project constituted an important effort to change the institution by achieving an equal representation of women in the collections. For Figura and Umland, programming and change have been gradual and constant; according to them, one big statement exhibition or symposium was not going to affect permanent change.<sup>840</sup> For Marcoci, change should be a process, a way of living and an everyday effort; permanent and structural change takes time because it involves 'changing perspectives, expectations, changing people's mentalities and changing the way we understand history'.<sup>841</sup> Only by implementing permanent structural change is it possible to uncanonize the canon, accept different kinds of visibility and open up to feminist, postcolonial and critical museological ways of representing the histories of art.

To realise this type of change, the curators have focused on acquisitions, exhibitions and displays of the collections, making sure that women artists have been integrated into the museum and featured prominently. Also, there has been a change of mentality: curators involved in the project are more self-critical and aware that the stories the Museum has told are incomplete. They have questioned the history of the Museum, rediscovered its collections and diversified the stories they are telling.

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838 Reilly, 'Toward a Curatorial Activism' *Cairns Indigenous Art Fair* (Brisbane, Arts Queensland, 2011), p. 10.

839 Pollock, 'The Missing Future', *Modern Women*, p. 34.

840 Figura, Phone Interview, 10 July 2013; Umland, Interview, 24 June 2013.

841 Marcoci, Personal Interview, 27 June 2013.

Although the Modern Women's Project has constituted an important change at MoMA, a conservative place in terms of presenting alternative narratives,<sup>842</sup> there has not been real embeddedness of feminism in the Museum. The Project has been ghettoized; it has been internal and curatorial and not well-publicized. Additionally, there has been a lack of collaboration with the Department of Education and its influence in terms of audience engagement has been limited.

In recent years, change at the museum has been ongoing through exhibitions and acquisitions of works by women. For example, in Spring – Summer 2015 the Museum featured women artists in three major solo shows: *Bjork*, *Yoko Ono* and *Zoe Leonard*. However, according to Reilly, in April 2015 the percentage of artworks by women displayed at the Museum was just seven percent.<sup>843</sup> Additionally, some of the curators that were part of the Modern Women's Group are no longer working at the Museum: Connie Butler left MoMA for the Hammer Museum, Alexandra Schwartz for the Montclair Art Museum and Deborah Wye and Barbara London retired. Consequently, it is difficult to predict the long-term viability of the project, whether more change will happen at MoMA and whether those changes will be structural and not just curatorial.

### **Future research questions and directions.**

Finally, I will explore potential questions and unresolved issues relating to the transformation of the art museum, to the future of feminist curatorial projects and exhibitions and to the fate of feminism in the Western art world.

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842 Cornelia Butler, Personal Interview, 21 February 2013.

843 Reilly, 'Taking the Measure of Sexism, in *Women in the Art World*,  
<<http://www.artnews.com/2015/05/26/taking-the-measure-of-sexism-facts-figures-and-fixes/>>

## Curatorship

Some of the challenges in feminist curatorial practices concern the presentation of feminist art in the museum. Firstly, feminist curators will have to face the challenge of writing the history of feminism without historicising it; that is, to avoid creating a canon when curating exhibitions.<sup>844</sup> For example, in feminist curatorial projects, one of the ongoing issues will be to present feminist art as a political art form and not as a historical object. Secondly, an important challenge will be to accommodate different generations of feminist artists and to present diverse, even conflicting, feminist projects and types of feminism in the museum. Moreover, feminist curators will need to present the forty-year-old history of feminism while at the same time presenting contemporary feminisms.

Another challenge in curating feminist exhibitions is the need to reject the binary system, which has lost ground in academia but is still present in curatorial projects.<sup>845</sup> Feminist curators will have to rethink the sex-biased premise and the dominance of Anglo-American perspectives, while also reflecting on notions of the performativity of gender and queer critiques. It will be necessary to leave dichotomies behind and to present transnational feminisms as well as conversations about class, disability and sexual orientation. One of the issues will be to present the diversity of feminisms when both institutions and language are still embedded in the language of dichotomies. Finally, feminist curators will need to reflect on the relationship and possible strategic alliances with queer and postcolonial curators and on how to negotiate these alliances.

These questions and challenges need to be tackled while acknowledging that there is still significant gender disparity in major institutions; there is scholarly recovery to be done and the purchase, inclusion and exhibition of women's work is still a priority. To sum up, feminist curators need to challenge the modernist narrative which has marginalized women but without falling into the oppositional binaries created by that story.

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844 Dimitrakaki and Perry, 'How to be seen', *Politics in a Glass Case*, p. 4 .

845 Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe, 'Preface', *Feminisms is still our name*, p. XV.

### Transforming the museum

Secondly, there are important questions and challenges regarding the process of the musealization of feminism and the structural transformation of the museum. One of the challenges for future researchers will be to investigate the dangers of the institutional legitimization of feminism and to rethink the ways in which feminism has been incorporated into the institution. Feminist curators will need to prevent feminism from being ghettoized and contained as a separate category in the museum. What happens when feminist curatorial projects are showcased in institutionalized spaces such as the museum or the exhibition? Do radical feminist ideas become neutralized when they are part of the institution?<sup>846</sup>

### The role of feminist art practice within the institution.

Moreover, in the future, it will be necessary to investigate feminist art practices within the institution and the contribution of feminist artists to changing institutional structures. Future researchers could focus on investigating the strategic alliances and collaboration between feminist artists, curators and museum directors.

When interviewed, Muller highlighted that, although feminist artists need to reclaim their space in the museum, the relationship between artists, curators and institutions does not necessarily have to be oppositional. According to Muller, the solution is working towards alternative possibilities, increased cooperation, compromise and conversation, rather than working against the museum.<sup>847</sup>

However, one of the main challenges for future researchers would be to explore how artists, who are operating within the hegemonies and hierarchies of conventional

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846 Dimitrakaki and Perry, 'How to be seen', in *Politics in a Glass Case*, p. 1.

847 Ulrike Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

museums, can resist the institutionalization of their own work, and how they can protect themselves from institutional recognition.<sup>848</sup>

### The role of activism

Moreover, it will be necessary to investigate, recover and exhibit forms of feminism that have been neglected in the process of the institutional recognition of feminism, especially political, critical and activist-driven versions of feminism. According to Jones, institutions have legitimized feminism but have selected artworks and artists that are viable in the marketplace.<sup>849</sup> However, activist driven practices and less exhibition friendly and less marketable practices have been marginalized.<sup>850</sup> In the process of the musealization of feminism, the political and social implications of feminism have been neglected. It will be necessary to reflect on and define what a feminist activist curatorial practice is and can be, and also how to exhibit activist curatorial projects. According to Reilly, few curators thus far have thought of their practices as political or activist because they are working for the traditional canon or market, as opposed to working against it.<sup>851</sup> Subsequently, one of the challenges for feminist curators will be to curate politically by exposing oppressive power structures while working within institutions.<sup>852</sup> However, these ideas have not appeared yet in feminist curatorial literature nor has activist curating been acknowledged in recent curatorial practices.

Also, one of the questions for feminist curating is the future of grass-roots projects and minority curatorial projects. More research on alternative institutions and specifically on women's museums and their curatorial practices is needed. Apart from Krasny's

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848 Ulrike Muller, Skype Interview, 17 August 2013.

849 Mira Schor, Emma Amos, Susan Bee, Johanna Drucker, Maria Fernandez, Amelia Jones, Shirley Kaneda, Helen Molesworth, Howardena Pindell, Collier Schorr, Faith Wilding, 'Contemporary Feminisms: art practice, theory and activism – an intergenerational perspective', *Art Journal*, 58: 4 (Winter 1999), 9-29, (p. 18)

850 Amelia Jones, '1970/2007: The Return of Feminist Art', *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, <<http://x-traonline.org/article/19702007-the-return-of-feminist-art/>>

851 Jones, 'On feminist art history and curatorial practice: An interview with Maura Reilly, Connie Butler and Amelia Jones', in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, pp. 40.

852 Proctor, p. 49.



*Women's Museums*, there is no single publication on women's museums and their curatorial practices. Also, according to Krasny there is a need to initiate a dialogue between women's museums and the practices of feminist curatorship. So far, the dialogue between activists, curators, educators, and museum directors who are involved in both women's museums and in feminist curating has been limited.<sup>853</sup>

Finally, in the future it will be necessary to initiate and investigate possible networks and collaborations, exchanges and negotiations between feminist projects in established institutions and grass-roots projects. In this case, can the artistic practices from grass-roots projects reach mainstream institutions and professionalized feminist curatorial initiatives?<sup>854</sup>

#### The role of negotiation

Although there are considerable tensions between feminist curatorial practices and institutions, they both need to engage in dialogue. One of the main directions for future research will be to explore the constant process of negotiation, discussions and the balancing of the distinct institutional objectives of feminist curation and institutions. There must be compromise, negotiation and alliances with existing institutions and dialogue between feminist curators and museum directors and board members. The roles of consensus, power sharing, divergences and communication will be essential in maintaining this alliance, as well as openness and transparency.

This balance will allow the museum to incorporate feminism while ensuring sustainability. With this negotiation it will be possible to achieve an equilibrium of feminist ethical values and institutional and professional objectives. Consequently, museums will be able to realise effective transformative social power by transcending the conventional fields of art and becoming active players in human rights issues and

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<sup>853</sup> Krasny, p. 16.

<sup>854</sup> Kobolt, p. 40.

social activism. However, how to achieve this balance and involve curators and museum directors in these negotiations is an issue to be explored in the future.

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