

on global warming, released only days after Jonas's installation opened. The article continues: 'there is only a dozen years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5°C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty'. With a fate held by half a degree, forests will blaze and seas will rise. These greens will turn a fiery red and then blacken into ash.

Time in the gallery has moved on and Jonas, covered head-to-toe in grass and flowers, dances amongst the foliage projected onto her body and the wall behind her. We watch, immersed. If we look to our right, we find quivering blades of grass alive in the framed drawings of birds, reflected in the glass and thus returning the birds to their habitat. The grass escapes the projection and finds its way around the room where the garment hangs like a spectre. It haunts, a bodiless soothsayer warning through its hollow core of future losses. 'Hers are [...] specters approaching from the times that lie ahead', Marina Warner has written on Jonas.² Of course, it was the prescient soothsayer Tiresias who warned Oedipus of a terrifying truth, a truth he denied and to which he turned a blind eye.

The title of another of the artist's recent projects might grant us insight into who once held that crinkled shape in place: 'I Know Why They Left' (2019). We have this assumption confirmed in the smaller video as we see the garment cloak the artist in its rigid folds; from the forest clearing to the gallery – artist as seer? Jonas has rejected such labels throughout her career, but maybe now, now in a world where we find a manic denial of the realities of climate change, it is the artist who can present these impending realities, who can warn and begin to hold power

accountable. We need an 'instrument of verifying reality' to hold denial in check, the Italian psychoanalyst Franco Fornari argued in the 1960s.³ Jonas and her spectres begin this vital work.

The garment looms over our shoulder wherever we stand in the small, rectangular gallery space. We are implicated in this reality, and whether we take heed of this warning is, as with those befallen in the tragedies of old, on us. Again, time has moved on in the gallery and in one of the videos Jonas is now behind the scrim, her presence barely noticeable. She hovers, waiting. We too wait, sequestered in the small space and surveyed by its sentinel. Jonas is veiled, protected from whatever is happening outside. A short time passes. She lifts up the veil and peers outside. Is everything still there? Yes, it seems so. For the time being at least.

- 1 Jonathan Watts, 'We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN', *Guardian*, 8 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-1.5c-warns-landmark-un-report> (accessed 18 October 2019).
- 2 Marina Warner, 'Joan Jonas: The Taste of the Clouds', in Jane Farver (ed.), *Joan Jonas: They Come to us Without a Word*, Cambridge, MA, 2015, p. 30.
- 3 Franco Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War*, (trans.) Alenka Pfeifer, Garden City, NY, 1974, p. 160.

Michael Green

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'Sixty Years', Tate Britain, London, April 2019 – present; '100% Women', Richard Saltoun, London, March 2019 – February 2020

2019: British museums and galleries are celebrating women artists, again. Tate Britain's

collection display *Sixty Years*, showcasing women artists working since 1960, celebrates not only the artists' individual contributions to British art, but the diversity of British art itself. Similarly, in March 2019, Richard Saltoun Gallery opened its 12-month programme *100% Women* with a presentation of Rose English's early work from the 1970s and 1980s.

But 2018 was also the year for women artists. A record number of monographic shows by women artists were recorded, as museums threw their weight behind a UK-wide campaign marking the centenary of the Representation of the People Act. Lubaina Himid, Joan Jonas, Frida Kahlo and Tacita Dean were all given the public museum treatment (in Dean's case, three times over), and while these shows did not explicitly engage suffrage or women's equality, their mere existence was pointed to as evidence of progress. Before the centenary, there were other reasons to celebrate. 2017 was the year for women museum directors (who would of course, be champions for art by women), and in 2016 Tate Modern completed a major expansion, opening a new building, half of which would be dedicated to art by women.

Women artists were first celebrated in 1976 when Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris curated the original survey show of art by women at LACMA titled *Women Artists: 1550-1950*. Since this landmark exhibition, surveys of art by women have abounded, and each time the year for women artists is invoked anew. While Nochlin and Sutherland Harris acknowledged that they did not seek to resolve the erasure of women artists from art history in one exhibition – "Neither of us believes that this catalogue is the last word on the subject" – it is unlikely that they anticipated that the problems which

charged *Women Artists* with such urgency would still be motivating exhibitions in 2019.¹

Yet in offering the model of exhibition-as-corrective, their project opened up the possibility for endless shows to be produced in its image – as long as art history's gaps could continue to be proven, those gaps would necessitate filling in. As a result, the exhibitions that followed in the wake of *Women Artists* extended its proposition, rather than breaking with it: for example, the Brooklyn Museum's 2007 exhibition *Global Feminisms* sought to "respectfully update" *Women Artists* by looking at art outside the West.²

When celebrating women artists, there are three possible curatorial avenues: a survey of feminist art, a survey of art by women, and a monographic show of a woman artist. These categories could be further refined into two feminist strategies: resurfacing elided women artists and historicising artworks from the 1960s onwards that engaged feminism. *Women Artists*, which took place precisely as feminist art was being developed as a practice, occupied itself explicitly with the former by ending its survey at 1950. *Sixty Years*, in bringing together feminist art and art by women, conflates the two strategies; the perils of such an approach becomes particularly clear when works divergent in both subject and form – for example, Gillian Wearing's 1996 film *Sacha and Mum* and Mary Martin's 1966 abstract sculpture *Inversions* – are hung side by side, united solely by virtue of their both being executed by women. Such an approach not only risks ahistoricism: it makes the essentialist leap that all art by women is inherently feminist, a gesture that is reductive both for women artists and feminist art.

100% Women, by contrast, focuses solely on feminist art. The English exhibition is the

first in a series of monographic presentations of artists who participated in the feminist avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. In privileging physical objects, such as ceramics, photographs and collages, rather than the more ephemeral mediums of performance and video associated with both English and her peers, the exhibition makes an important intervention in how feminist art is presented. That this intervention comes from a gallery is unsurprising – ceramics sell better than performances – yet market concerns do occasionally have reverberations in art history, not least because gallery presentations influence museum acquisitions. To this end, the success of the *100% Women* programme is not its celebration of women artists, but its ability to elevate the market value (and thus widen the scope) of feminist art.

Yet monographic exhibitions of women artists do not avoid the flattening incurred in survey presentations entirely, particularly when, like *100% Women*, they form part of a larger programme. Similarly, the press release for *Sixty Years*, which lists the eight monographic exhibitions of women artists Tate will mount in 2019, suggests that these exhibitions are themselves part of the wider project. Anni Albers, Natalia Goncharova and Dorothea Tanning; Sol Calero, Anna Boghiguian and Otobong Nkanga, suddenly form components of one large display, or, as the curators described the artists in *Women Artists*, “a *musée imaginaire* where, by some extraordinary circumstances, all the artists happen to be women and not men.”³ The ‘extraordinary circumstances’ that unified the artists in *Women Artists* was their marginalisation. This narrative doesn’t quite fit for the artists populating Tate’s exhibition programme, some of whom *did* (and continue to) enjoy success relative to

their male contemporaries. The novelty of Nochlin’s *musée imaginaire* has worn thin.

Sixty Years and *100% Women* are the latest plot points on a long history that began in 1976. The growing list of exhibitions and programmes celebrating women artists attests to the persistence of the problems Nochlin sought to address forty years ago, namely the exclusion of women from both the museum and the market. But, if the problem persists despite the proliferation of such exhibitions, at what point does the strategy of celebrating women artists have to be called into question? Is it possible that the solution *upholds* the problem? As long as the category of ‘woman artist’ endures, so too will their marginalisation. Perhaps it is time to stop celebrating women artists and start celebrating art by women.

- 1 Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, Los Angeles, 1976, p. 11
- 2 Maura Reilly, ‘Introduction: Towards Transnational Feminisms’, in Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly (eds.) *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, Brooklyn, 2007, p. 17
- 3 Ibid.

Chloe Julius

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**‘Utrecht, Caravaggio and Europe’,
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Liesbeth M. Helmus, Munich, 2018,
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3133-8, £45.00.**

In 2003, Caravaggio’s *Basket of Fruit* appeared on the front cover of a scientific journal under the title: ‘Emerging Infectious Diseases’.¹ It is