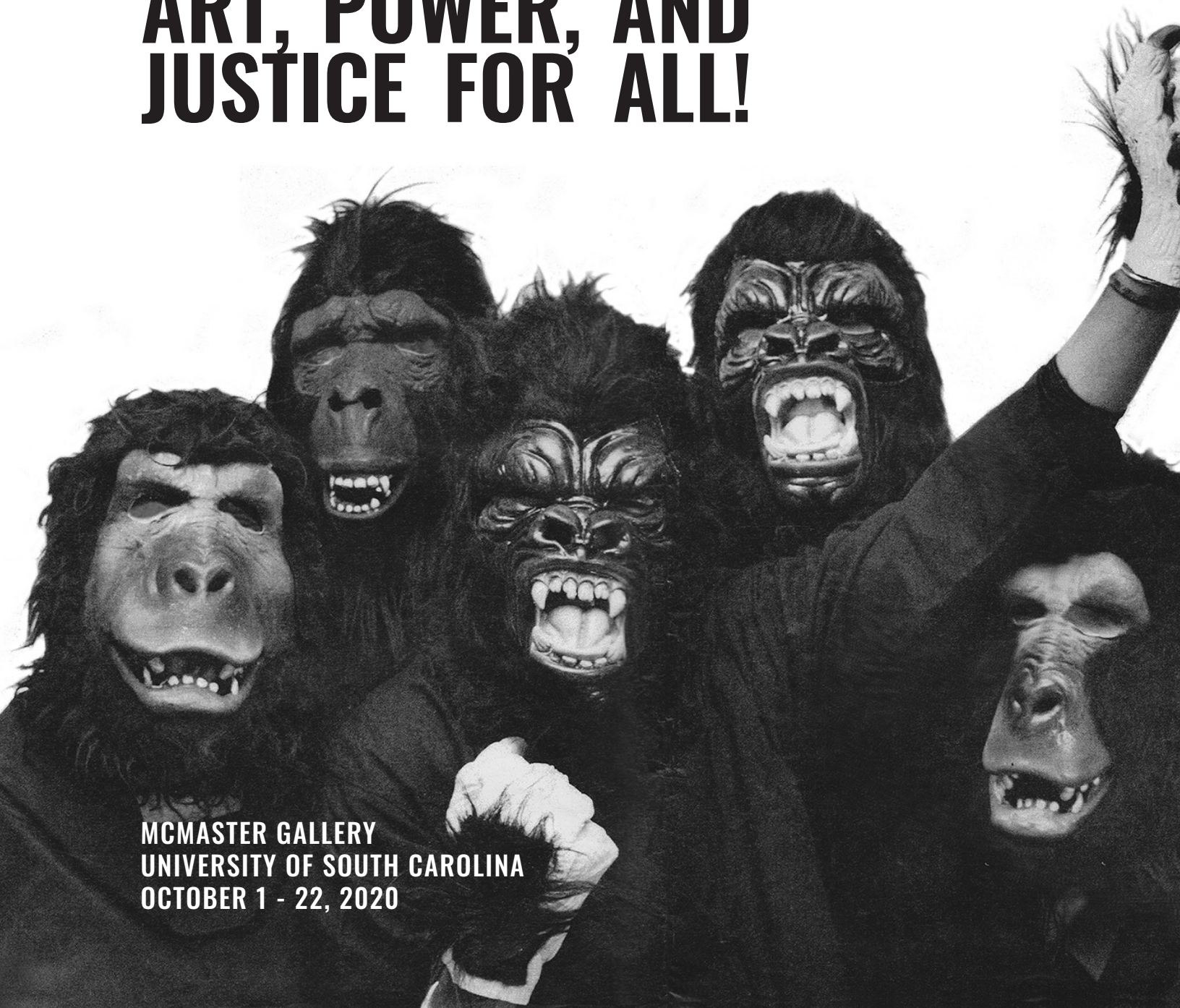


GUERRILLA GIRLS

**ART, POWER, AND
JUSTICE FOR ALL!**



**MCMASTER GALLERY
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
OCTOBER 1 - 22, 2020**

GUERRILLA GIRLS

ART, POWER, AND
JUSTICE FOR ALL!

EXHIBITION ESSAY BY ANNA TOPTCHI

Guerrilla Girls: Art, Power, and Justice for All!

October 1 - 22, 2020

McMaster Gallery

University of South Carolina

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(Above): Guerrilla Girls, *Benvenuti alla biennale femminista!* (from the series "Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: Portfolio 2"), 2005; Lithographic poster, 17 x 11 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay; © Guerrilla Girls, Courtesy guerrillagirls.com

MCMASTER GALLERY
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA



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INTRODUCTION



How do artists address discrimination and injustice in the arts? Compounded by centuries of systemic racism and sexism, cultural institutions have long overlooked and excluded women and artists of color from their practices and have underwritten an art history that excludes and diminishes their presence and work. This exhibition, *Guerrilla Girls: Art, Power, and Justice for All!* in McMaster Gallery at the University of South Carolina presents works by the Guerrilla Girls that prompt reflection on years of discriminatory practices towards women in the arts.

In acknowledging that art is produced by people of all gender identities across all cultures in the world, narrow curatorial practices and hierarchies of art and culture institutions must change in order to speak to and empower people of all genders, races, and socioeconomic classes. How do we build an equitable system that reflects and values diverse art production and makes it accessible to all?

“HOW DO ARTISTS
ADDRESS
DISCRIMINATION
AND INJUSTICE
IN THE ARTS?”

The Guerrilla Girls question and expose unsettling and inequitable trends in the art world. They ask us to question and think critically about who and what we see, and don't see, in the field of the visual arts. They criticize art institutions while remaining active within them, insisting that institutions confront curatorial bias, and discuss, debate, and reflect on the actions needed to instigate institutional change. Standing to face and examine exclusionary practices and injustices in the art world forces us to also confront the troubling realization that many social problems plaguing society today have been compounded and solidified into the institutions we've built, and that these wealth and power wielding institutions have reinforced patterns of bias and overlooked corrupt and exclusionary practices.

The tipping point for the founding members of the Guerrilla Girls was an exhibition in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1984. *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* featured 195 works by 165 artists. The problem? Only 13 artists were women. Even worse, the curator of the exhibition told the public that artists who weren't selected for the show should rethink "his" career, thus failing to recognize the participating women artists.¹

In response to these failings, a group of women joined forces in 1985 to form the Guerrilla Girls: an anonymous collective made up, over the years, of artists, curators, critics, and even a museum director.² When they visited MoMA's exhibition in 1984 and noted its exclusion of women artists, they were "shocked that no one going into the museum cared. That was our 'A-ha!' moment. We realized that there had to be a new kind of activist art that would change people's minds about these issues."³ They united with the purpose of publicly ridiculing the art world for ongoing gender discrimination and protesting the lack of diversity and equity across centuries of art history. They began to bring attention to exclusionary practices in galleries and museums by plastering their paper posters around New York City's SoHo in the middle of the night (Figures 1 and 2), joining the public performative actions of other highly visible activist collectives such as ACT UP and WAC (Women Artist's Coalition).⁴

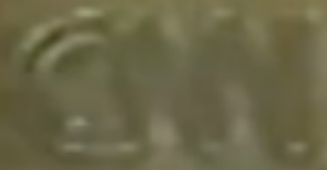
Since 1985, the Guerrilla Girls have used guerrilla tactics of interference and disruption to target unjust authoritarian powers through engaging graphics, completing hundreds of posters, books, and videos, and completing live actions and sticker campaigns all over the world.⁵ From their beginnings, over 55 diverse individuals across race and ethnic identities, sexual orientations, and ages have been members of the organization.⁶

Guerrilla Girls: Art, Power, and Justice for All! presents recent and historic works by the Guerrilla Girls that address complex issues of power and representation and inspire reflection on the power of art and the artist's role in calling for structural changes.

**LAST!
WILL NO LONGER
STATE AGAINST
WOMEN AND MINORITY
ARTISTS.***

Under the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988, an institution
discriminates in any of its operations will be denied federal
funds. We encourage women and artists of color to contact their
favorite museums. THEY NEED

and I and community to
GUERRILLA GIRL



(PG 03) FIGURE 1: Still from Guerrilla Girls, "Guerrilla Girls Images & Projects 1985-2017" (video).

(PG 05-06) FIGURE 2: Still from Guerrilla Girls, "Guerrilla Girls Images & Projects 1985-2017" (video).

NAMING AND RIDICULING



The power of the Guerrilla Girls lies in their subversive techniques and in the disruptive messages installed directly on the walls of the museums and galleries they criticize. Their activist interventions through flyposting, sticker-bombing, and bus and billboard advertisements (see Figure 3) have reached a wide audience and directly challenged individuals and institutions for their conscious and unconscious biases. Their earliest works appeared as simple, wheat-pasted posters on the streets of SoHo that broadcasted facts about the skewed gender representation in New York City museum and gallery exhibitions. *How Many Women Had*

**“WHY ISN’T THE
WORK OF WOMEN
ARTISTS BEING
SELECTED AT THE
SAME RATE AS
WORK OF MALE
ARTISTS?”**

One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year? (Figure 4), from 1985, revealed the number of exhibitions granted to women artists in 1984 in four of the largest museums in the United States. The Guerrilla Girls researched this statistic through an edition of *Art in America Annual*, a comprehensive artworld resource printed each year. The count revealed that only one of the top four museums in New York, the Museum of Modern Art, programmed a solo exhibition of a woman artist that year (a memorial exhibition for Lee Krasner who passed away in June of the same year). In 2015, the Guerrilla Girls revisited these museums for a "recount" and found that not much had changed: only 1 additional solo exhibition was granted to a woman artist in each of these institutions since 1984. The viewer is faced with a question: why isn't the work of women artists being selected at the same rate as work of male artists?

(PG 07) **FIGURE 3:** Billboard version of the Guerrilla Girls' 30th anniversary sticker (2015) for the exhibition *Person of the Crowd*, at Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (2017).

(PG 08) **FIGURE 4:** Guerrilla Girls, *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?*, 1985.

HOW MANY WOMEN HAD ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS AT NYC MUSEUMS LAST YEAR?

Guggenheim	0
Metropolitan	0
Modern	1
Whitney	0

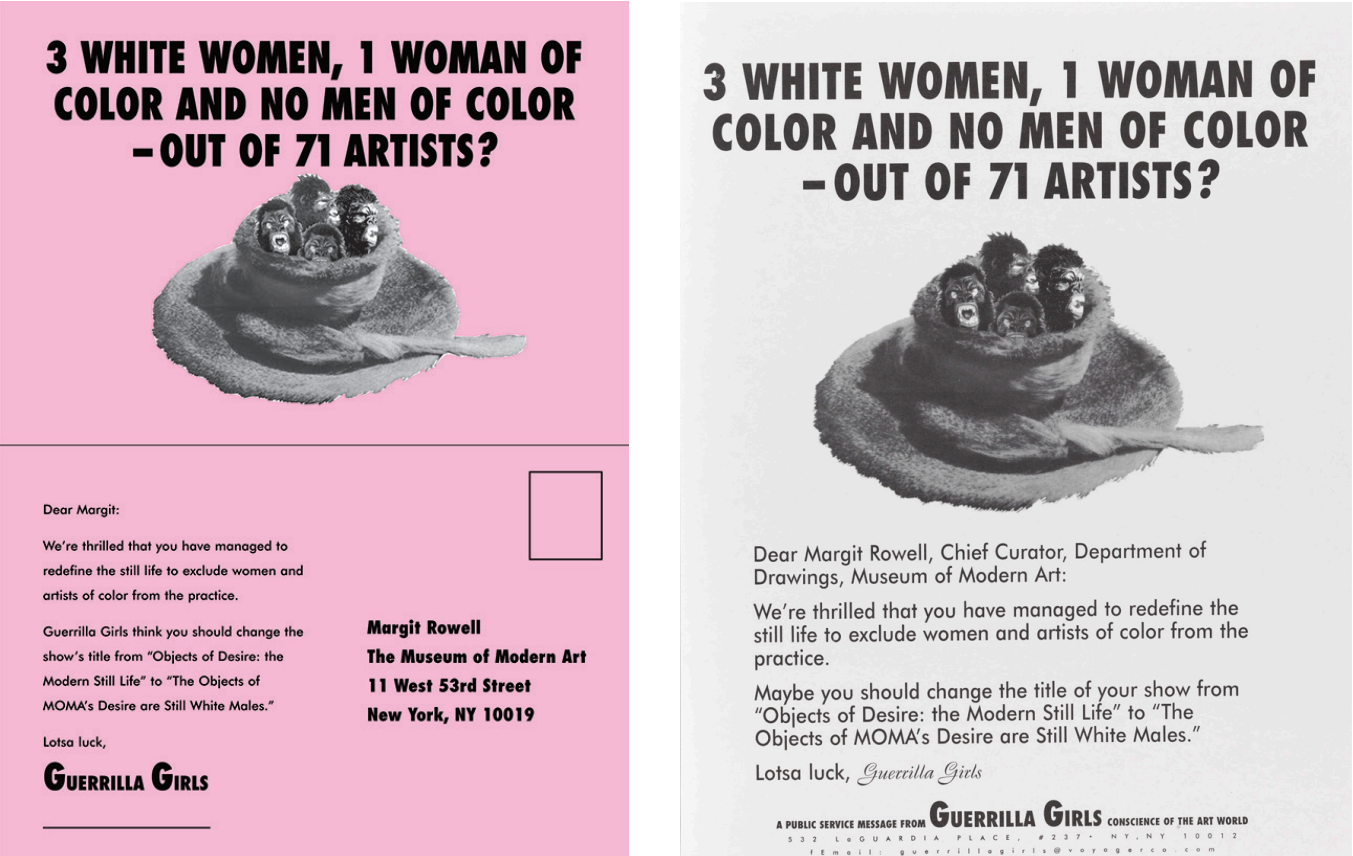
SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1985-86

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM **GUERRILLA GIRLS**
CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

The Guerrilla Girls challenge the very essence of institutional, curatorial, and collection practices. The message at the core of their work is tied in with social, racial, and political issues engrained in society--the art works of female and BIPOC artists do not appear in appropriate numbers in the top artistic and cultural institutions in the world.

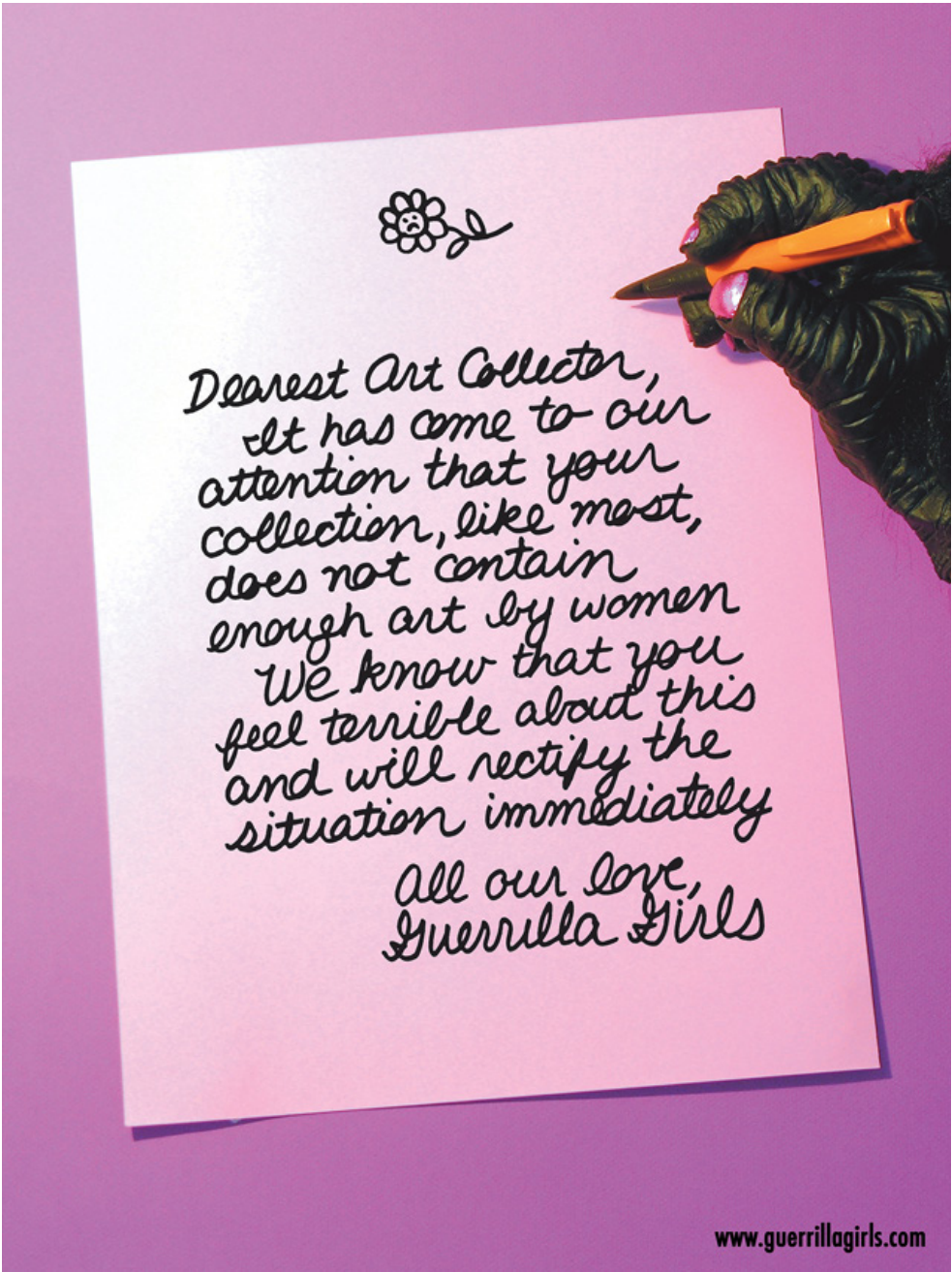
Many works by the Guerrilla Girls publicly ridicule and embarrass individuals and institutions that exclude women from their exhibitions and collections. In an original postcard design, *3 White Women, 1 Woman of Color and No Men of Color -- Out of 71 Artists?*, the Guerrilla Girls targeted the former Chief Curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Margit Rowell, for curating a 1997 exhibition of works by mostly White male artists.

The Guerrilla Girls encouraged their supporters to mail Rowell thousands of postcards (Figures 5 and 6) while urging her to change the title of the exhibition to reflect the truth: that she left out women and artists of color without addressing or acknowledging the roles they played in the true history of still life painting. The Guerrilla Girls argue that the issue in these cases is not one of "quality" (how "good" is the art of White vs. non-White artists); the issues are of race, gender, and oppression.



Directly naming a person of authority in the hierarchy of power is a tactic that personalizes the message and demands response and reflection from the person or institution that is confronted. Calling out the curator for her overwhelming selection of White and male artists created an embarrassing situation for Margit Rowell and the Museum of Modern Art. When joined by others who mailed thousands of postcards that arrived at Margit Rowell's desk, the Guerrilla Girls applied pressure on MoMA to own up to a repeated pattern of selection and exclusion -- deeply internalized and systemic practices that were not based on the quality or achievements of the art works under consideration, but on the male gender and White race of the artist. How many times do we need to call out museum curators, board members, and directors for racism and sexism before we witness any substantial change?

Dear Art Collector (Figure 7), from 2007 is a letter penned from the Guerrilla Girls to the "Art Collector," a term that typically connotes those with incomes large enough to develop collections of art, but it also includes those with smaller purchasing patterns who have bought prints or original works and have supported the livelihood of an artist in some way. Knowing that women and women of color lack coverage, opportunity, and support in the arts, how does viewing this message help us think about our own patronage and support of artists in our lives? The Guerrilla Girls sign off with a sarcastic note that the art collector, now enlightened, should acknowledge their mistake and collect the work of more women artists. Let's all support the work of more women artists!



(PG 09) FIGURES 5 AND 6: Guerrilla Girls, *3 White Women, 1 Woman of Color and No Men of Color -- Out of 71 Artists*, 1997.

(PG 10) FIGURE 7: Guerrilla Girls, *Dear Art Collector*, 2007.

HUMOR AND SARCASM

FIGURE 8: Guerrilla Girls, *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

**Working without the pressure of success.
Not having to be in shows with men.
Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs.
Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty.
Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.
Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.
Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.
Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.
Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.
Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger.
Being included in revised versions of art history.
Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius.
Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit.**

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD
5 3 2 L A G U A R D I A P L A C E , # 2 3 7 • N Y , N Y 1 0 0 1 2
w w w . g u e r r i l l a g i r l s . c o m

The Guerrilla Girls' humorous, investigative, and inquisitive works are guided by illuminating statistics and informed by contemporary institutional politics, art history, and feminist theory. They believe in an intersectional feminism that supports the equal rights of people of all genders and have set out to reclaim the negative connotations of feminism that arose in the 1960s and 70s. Through activist art posters, live actions, stickers, videos, and books, they demand the recognition and addition of women artists to the canon of art history.

The Guerrilla Girls use humor and sarcasm to tackle larger sexist and racial biases in the art world.⁸ Their work, *The Advantages of Being a Women Artist* (Figure 8), pokes fun at numerous "advantages" for women artists -- mostly, a list of opportunities they would never have to worry about receiving. This work uses sarcastic language in a list of claims that exposes the gendered social roles women have struggled to overcome. One of these "advantages" is "not worrying about the pressures of a successful career," because women have been less likely than men to be supported by art galleries, collectors, or museums. Likewise, women artists wouldn't suffer "the embarrassment of being called a genius" because a Eurocentric art history has shown us that this title was reserved for dead, White, and male artists. By pointing out the rigid gender roles that women have worked to overcome since this work was created in 1985, the viewer is hit with the realization that the art world, which has been run by men, has always favored men. The Guerrilla Girls introduce these claims with bold bites of sarcasm and ask us to consider the greater historical struggles women have faced.

On the issue of corruption in the arts, the Guerrilla Girls ask us, "How can we trust art museums to preserve the history of our time when they're run by super-rich art collectors who invest in art, then oversee what the museums show and collect?"⁹ *Advantages of Owning Your Own Art Museum* (Figure 9) from 2016 and *Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums* (Figure 10) from 1990 point out entangled issues of wealth and power in the museum world that preclude the equal treatment and representation of artists, and the frequent corruption one finds when investigating the connections and con-

flicts of interest between museum directors, board members, and donors. *Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums*, written on the image of a stone tablet that references the biblical Ten Commandments, lays out numerous pseudo ethics for art museums to follow that are based on studies of their behaviors and mishaps. One item states that museums shall not allow a museum trustee (a major sponsor of the museum who has a high position of power either by occupation, wealth, or connection) to also be in control of an outside art auction house, two positions with a major conflict of interest that use one another to mutually reap benefits in both institutions (No. I). The Guerrilla Girls think conflicts of interest don't belong in the art world: private art collectors should not have a say in museum committee meetings and the type of art that gets collected by the museum. Otherwise, an institution that is meant to promote and reflect the breadth of human creation is limited to what a wealthy art collector wants, and how it can increase the value of their own collection. This is mirrored by *Advantages of Owning Your Own Art Museum*, which lists the types of biased actions that occur when large and expensive private collections of art turn into private museums around the world. When a handful of individuals decide what type of art is selected and excluded, and the history that's told about it, work by the rest of the world's diverse artists is excluded.

“HOW CAN WE TRUST ART MUSEUMS TO PRESERVE THE HISTORY OF OUR TIME WHEN THEY’RE RUN BY SUPER-RICH ART COLLECTORS WHO INVEST IN ART, THEN OVERSEE WHAT THE MUSEUMS SHOW AND COLLECT?”



FIGURE 9: Guerrilla Girls, *Advantages of Owning Your Own Art Museum*, 2016.

GUERRILLA GIRLS' CODE OF ETHICS FOR ART MUSEUMS.

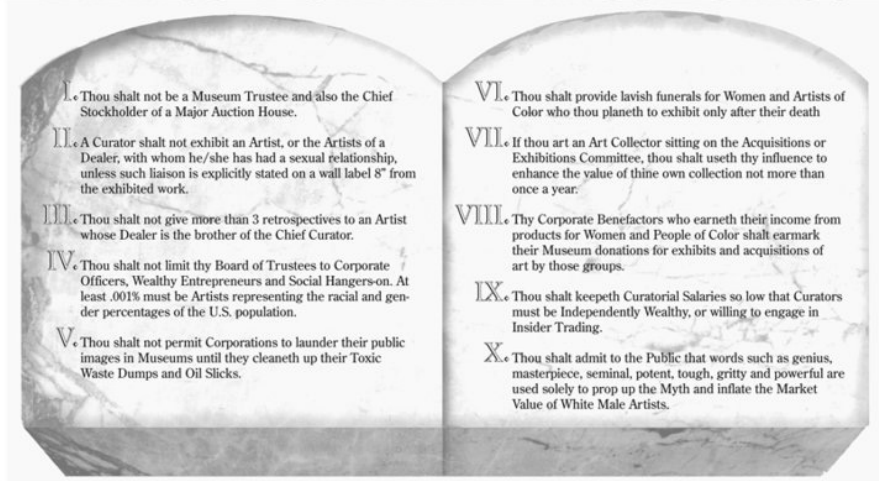


FIGURE 10: Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls' Code of Ethics for Art Museums*, 1990.

TRUTH IN NUMBERS



FIGURE 11: Guerrilla Girls, *Women in America Earn Only 2/3 of What Men Do*, 1985.

The Guerrilla Girls gather statistics to inform and educate through text-based messages that have appeared as posters, billboards, stickers, projections, and more. By making statistics on earnings and representation in the arts more visible, ordinary New Yorkers in 1985 were suddenly exposed to information that galleries and museums wouldn't openly admit. One of the Guerrilla Girls' earliest works, *Women in America Earn Only 2/3 of What Men Do* (Figure 11), clearly states in the group's signature bold, black text that women make a fraction of a man's dollar, and the fraction is even lower in the arts. Gender discrimination means lower salaries are paid for the same jobs that men are already doing, and this ratio is even worse for Black women, Indigenous women, and women of color. In 2018, White women in the United States earned 82 cents to every dollar White men made, with Black women earning even less, at 61 cents to the man's dollar.¹⁰ In the art world, this statistic is even lower, dropping to just a third of the earnings of male artists. Even though men and women attend the same art schools, work in the same social circles, and commit full-time to their creative practices, women are consistently paid

“THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS, AND WITH THIS A LACK OF ADEQUATE PAY, WAS EVEN WORSE WHEN THE GUERRILLA GIRLS STARTED 35 YEARS AGO.”

less for their art and culture work. If we look at the disparity between the highest-earning work of art made by a woman and a man, they are separated by hundreds of millions of dollars (the most expensive work of art made by a woman sold at auction is Georgia O'Keeffe's *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1*, which sold for \$44 million¹¹ in 2015; the most expensive work of art by a male artist sold at auction is Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi*, which sold for \$450 million¹² at auction in 2017). With numbers like these, it's impossible to ignore the real consequences of years of discriminatory practices towards women.

The lack of representation of women artists, and with this a lack of adequate pay, was even worse when the Guerrilla Girls started 35 years ago: "Then, most art galleries showed fewer than 10 per cent women or none at all. This discrimination has a trickle-down effect: women and artists of color don't get their fair share of exhibitions, don't get equal prices for their work, and aren't collected by museums the way they should be."¹³

Part of the Guerrilla Girls' goal is to realign museums and galleries on a path towards fair treatment and representation of women artists and artists of color. They call themselves the "conscience of the art world," sending shocks into the cultural sphere in the form of public service messages designed to interrupt unfair systems.

Known to occasionally update their poster statistics to reveal change over the years, *How Many Women Had Solo Shows At NYC Museums?* (Figure 12) from 1985 tallied that one exhibition at a top museum was given to a woman in 1985, but that not much had changed by 2015 – the count had grown by one additional woman artist exhibition in each museum over the course of thirty years! While the last recount was five years ago, we should ask ourselves: what is the real reason women artists aren't selected for exhibition in these museums at the equal rate of male artists? In 1971, art historian Linda Nochlin tackled the question of why we're exposed to less work by women artists in her essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" It is not because women haven't made great art (they have!), but it is because individuals have created institutional and social systems that have prevented women from creating art, being accepted as serious artists, and being supported as artists.¹⁴

HOW MANY WOMEN HAD ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS AT NYC MUSEUMS LAST YEAR?

Guggenheim	0
Metropolitan	0
Modern	1
Whitney	0

1985
A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS
CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1985-86

HOW MANY WOMEN HAD ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS AT NYC MUSEUMS LAST YEAR?

Guggenheim	0 1
Metropolitan	0 1
Modern	1 2
Whitney	0 1

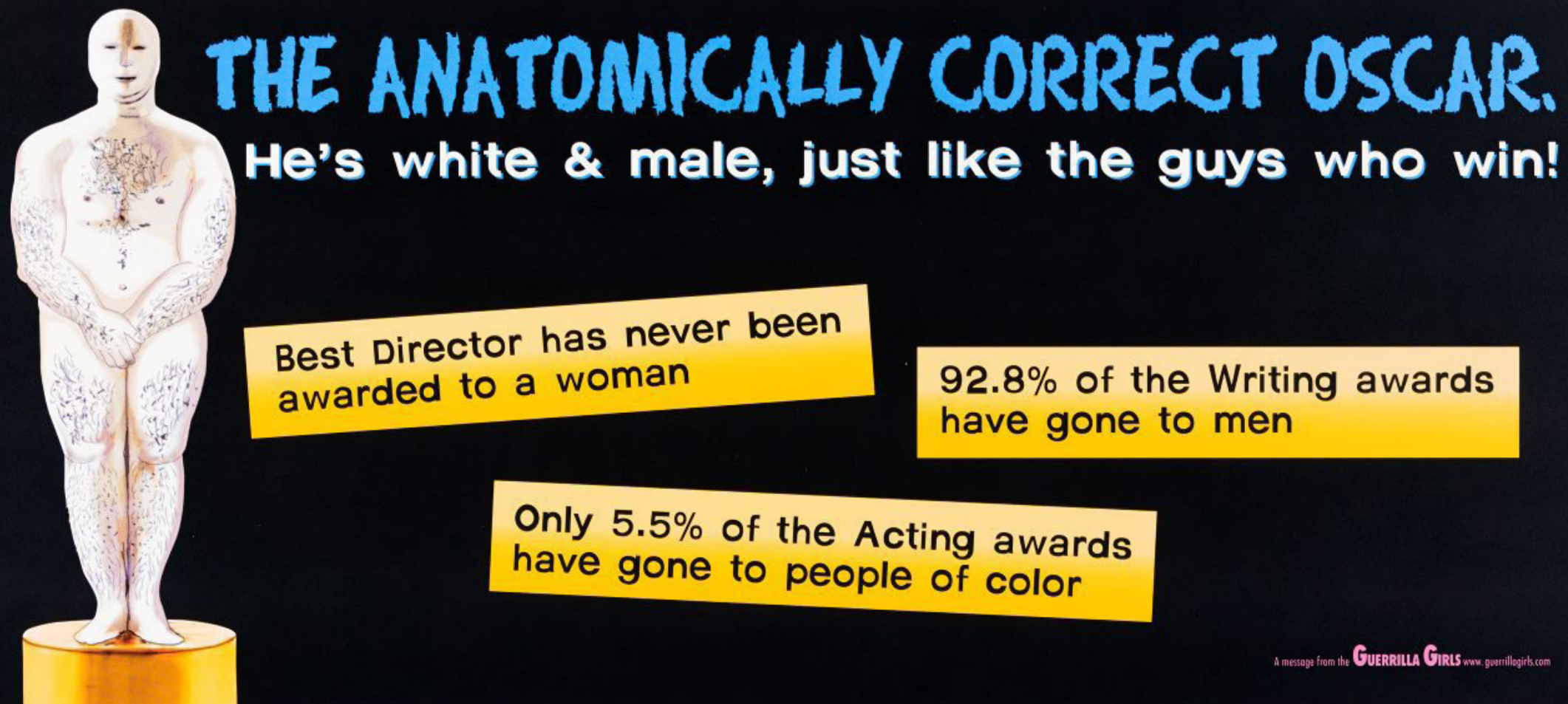
2015
A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS
CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

SOURCE: MUSEUM WEBSITES

FIGURE 12: Guerrilla Girls, *How Many Women Had Solo Shows At NYC Museums?* 1985, and *Recount*, 2015.

Fifty years after Nochlin's feminist essay, women artists and artists of color are struggling to overcome the consequences of discriminatory practices: patriarchy, racism, and sexism. Recent research reveals that museums still share the belief that they will only be considered relevant and important if they collect and display the art of a limited number of White men who society has cultivated into "geniuses" for the sake of preserving a biased and narrow history and trustee-backed financial security. Coupled with a "lack of research about female artists," the public is continually exposed to the same artists who are already well known and institutionally represented, while many talented and brilliant artists go under-researched, underappreciated, and under-exhibited in a history of art that actually benefited from their work and creativity.¹⁵

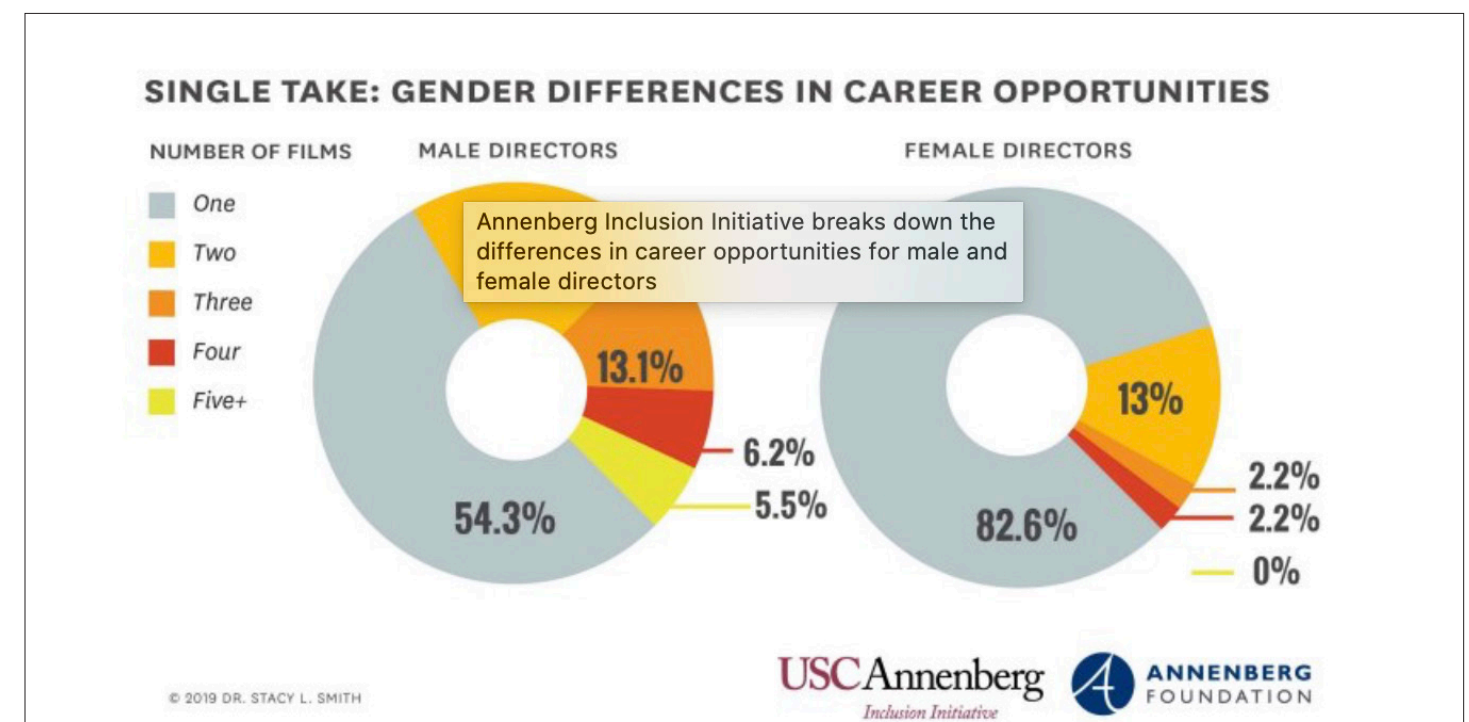
Museums across the United States collect the art of African American women at appallingly low rates (just 3.3% of female artists' work in museum collections). Curators struggle to convince museums to purchase the art of overlooked female artists who don't have auction records to support the amount they are asking to be paid for their art. Many works are donated to museums by wealthy donors who "buy art that reflects the established canon, reinforcing the status quo." This cycle largely repeats itself, as museums then market to the tastes of wealthy and influential art collectors and pull the blinds on ideas of equitable, diverse, and inclusive collections.



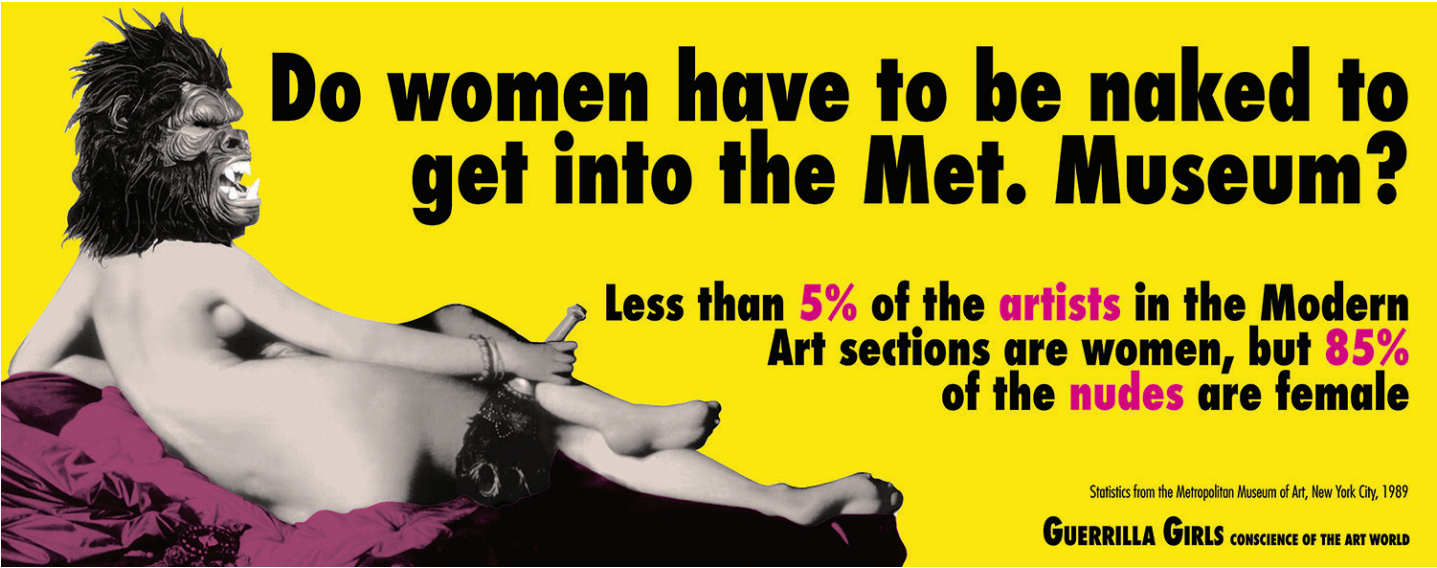
(LEFT) FIGURE 13: Guerrilla Girls, *The Anatomically Correct Oscar*, 2002.

(BELOW) FIGURE 14: Single Take: Gender Differences in Career Opportunities. Source: Time.com, USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

In 2002, the Guerrilla Girls investigated the diversity imbalance in nominations for awards at the Oscars in Hollywood. *The Anatomically Correct Oscar* (Figure 13) brings in a report that shows women and artists of color aren't acknowledged or awarded for their artistic work and contributions: as of 2002, Best Director has never been awarded to a woman, 92.8% of the Writing awards have gone to men, and only 5.5% of Acting awards have gone to people of color. In 2010, Kathryn Bigelow was the first female director to win an Oscar, ten years after this poster was created. Yet, in 2020, she remains the only woman to have received Best Director, out of a total of five women ever nominated for this award. The Academy Awards are known for a set of rules and criteria that keep women out of the director's branch of the organization (in 2012, 77% of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was male¹⁷), leading to unbalanced issues of power and representation, especially when women's voices are not being heard. The gender differences in filmmakers' career opportunities are stark: according to research completed by the Annenberg Institute, women receive fewer opportunities than men to direct films beyond their debut feature (Figure 14).^{18 19}

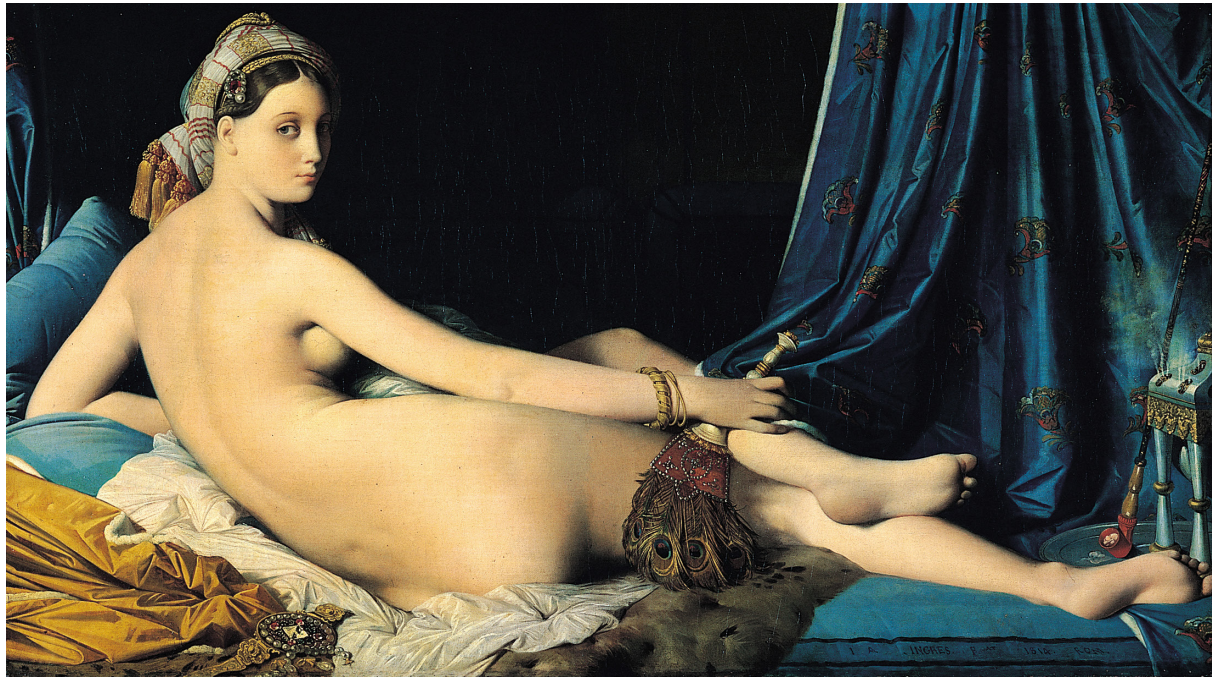


Their 1989 work, *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum?* (Figure 15), is a graphic design created by hand prior to computer editing software. To create the work, the Guerrilla Girls used an image of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*, (Figure 16) and superimposed a Guerrilla Girl mask onto the reclining nude's face, creating a collage of colorful cut-out projection slides and text. "[W]e had to cut the whole thing out, cut the mask out, cut the picture out, print them up exactly the same size, collage it all together. It was insane." ²⁰



(ABOVE) FIGURE 15: Guerrilla Girls, *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum?*, 1989

(BELOW) FIGURE 16: Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Grande Odalisque*, oil on canvas, 1814.
Source: Wikimedia Commons



This work reveals the discrepancy between the number of nude women appearing in works of art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the number of female artists whose work is displayed: "less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." The Guerrilla Girls explain how they came up with this statistic, and how it pinpoints discriminatory and patriarchal practices in the art world:

EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART AT THE SMITHSONIAN (2008):

FRIDA KAHLO: We went through the classical, the Roman and the Greek sculpture galleries, and most of the naked figures were male. That was the Greek aesthetic. Then we went through the Early Christian, and, of course, we couldn't find {much} flesh at all. We went through Baroque and Renaissance, and the only fully frontal naked figure that we could find was baby Jesus. [...] And {the complete nudity of the baby Jesus} played into the humanity of Christ. It was important for painters to show that he had genitals. But when we got to the modern art section, {beginning in the 19th century when} sex replaced religion as the major preoccupation of European artists, did we get some {great} statistics! So then came the idea, {compare the number of women artists to the number of naked women in the paintings}.

MS. KOLLWITZ: Then, how to do it? How to make that into {an effective statement}? Again, that's a perfect example of what we do. Okay, so we do a poster saying there are more naked female bodies than artists at the Metropolitan Museum. Boring. Yucko. But we came up with this {headline}—"Do Women Have to be Naked to Get into the Metropolitan Museum?" And you can't forget it if you've seen it.

The Guerrilla Girls advocate for structural change through bold and persistent public messaging that grabs attention, provokes inquiry, and opens up dialogue about complex issues. In raising awareness of discriminatory practices, the Guerrilla Girls disrupt unfair systems of power and oppression. Their works are a cause for reflection on how museums, galleries, and individuals play into systems of oppression and who is left out of the conversation in the history of art. They share tactics to help us combat injustice in all art institutions, and beyond. Reclaiming art, power, and justice for all will mean breaking down and rebuilding systems that are equitable, truthful, and democratic. How will we, individuals with complex backgrounds, histories, and privileges work together to shape a world that includes and values the contributions of individuals of all genders and races?

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