

EXHIBITIONS

New and upcoming exhibitions at London's Barbican and Tate Britain, and *Modern Women*, a new section at Frieze Masters, each assert the significant place of women in recent art history



REDRESSING THE CANON

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Imagine a line being traced around a shadow, the sensuality of a lover's silhouette captured upon a rock, transforming their immaterial essence into something enduring. The love story and line drawing of Kora of Sicyon (c.650 BCE) were recorded in the writings of Roman historian Pliny the Elder. Rebecca Morrill cites this narrative in her introduction to Phaidon's *Great Women Artists* (2019), highlighting how some people believe the first 'named' artist to have been a woman.

Even writings as early as Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* (*Concerning Famous Women*) of 1361–62 featured numerous significant female artists, but the systemic exclusion of women from institutions that historically educated and promoted artists contributed to a male-dominated art-historical canon. E.H. Gombrich's *The Story of Art*, published

centuries later in 1950, doesn't include a single woman artist. Despite becoming the world's best-selling book on art history, it endorses a limiting and exclusionary viewpoint, justifying an art market intent on perpetuating the value of mostly cis, white male artists. In her seminal essay of 1971, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', Linda Nochlin investigates the sustained position of women as acknowledged outsiders and advocates for them to use 'as a vantage point their situation as underdogs in the realm of grandeur, and outsiders in that ideology ... [to] take part in the creation of institutions in which clear thought – and true greatness – are challenges open to anyone, man or woman, courageous enough to take the necessary risk, the leap into the unknown'.

The pluralizing of art histories, not only in terms of gender but also race and

non-Western practices, has been taken up by arts institutions with greater intent over the past decade, with exhibitions such as 'elles@centrepompidou' (2009–11), curated by Camille Morineau, being dedicated solely to women artists from the Centre Pompidou's collection. In 2014, Morineau founded the non-profit association AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions, establishing a research centre devoted to women artists and feminist art, and representing a diversity of voices to make women artists of the 19th and 20th centuries more visible. This year, Morineau has been invited to curate a new section at Frieze Masters, *Modern Women*.

Speaking ahead of the fair, Morineau considers the issues at play today. 'Lack of visibility is a complex issue,' she says, 'reaching far back into the past with the

erasure of women artists from art history and into the present day, where women are in the majority in art schools but systematically find fewer opportunities, less institutional recognition and less remuneration than their male counterparts.' Her curatorial approach for *Modern Women* decisively reinforces the aims of AWARE, seeking to sensitize people to the work of women artists from across the globe, and break down the traditional hierarchies in which certain media or geographies are privileged above others. It also builds on the second edition of the Spirit Now London acquisition fund, launched at Frieze Masters 2022, which was instrumental in enabling the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, to acquire a painting by Sylvia Snowden at the Spotlight section of the fair.

Spanning a century, from 1880 to 1980, *Modern Women* breaks with the idea

Above
Fina Miralles, *Relacions. Relació del cos amb elements naturals. El cos cobert de palla* (Relationship: The Body's Relationship with Natural Elements. The Body Covered with Straw), 1975. Courtesy: the artist, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona and Barbican, London

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Above
Fern Shaffer, *Nine Year Ritual of Healing* – April 9, 1998, 1998. Courtesy: the artist and Barbican, London. Photography: Othello Anderson

of modernism as a linear, progressive project, instead presenting ‘modernities’ that interweave different narratives – figurative, abstract, feminist – framing what Morineau describes as ‘a century that begins with the first wave of feminism in Europe and the US and covers the 1970s, integrating second-wave feminism and the beginnings of feminist art’.

There are ten stands in the section, each presenting a solo or two-artist show. Highlights include an exhibition of early works by Faith Ringgold at ACA Galleries, which demonstrates the artist’s commitment to the American civil-rights movement and the burgeoning feminist movement. The painting *They Speak No Evil* (1962) depicts six suited figures gazing out at the viewer with haunting, glassy-eyed stares, red ties echoing the weight of their phallic noses, while a stained-

glass window above dominates with an all-knowing eye. At Perrotin, Anna-Eva Bergman is celebrated as a pioneer of abstraction with her gold- and silver-leaf paintings, while archival materials and works by Jung Kangja – one of the first artists to stage feminist ‘happenings’ in 1960s South Korea – take centre stage at Arario Gallery. The photograph *To Repress* (1968) depicts the artist standing next to her installation, a steel pipe sinking into a bed of fluffy cotton, its weight loaded with symbolism.

Modern Women engages with the broader context of London’s art scene, with two large-scale exhibitions centring work by women artists in the autumn/winter programmes at Tate Britain and the Barbican. At the former, ‘Women in Revolt!’ is a major survey of feminist art by more than 100 women artists working

in the UK from the 1970s to the 1990s, looking specifically at the relationship between art, activism and the women’s movement, amid radical changes in society. At the latter, ‘RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology’ focuses on photography and film as related to the environment. It speaks to how women artists are frequently at the forefront of a politics of care, advocating for personal, political and planetary justice, which often resists the logics of capitalist economies.

Addressing why it is so important to highlight a century of work by women at Frieze Masters 2023, Morineau emphasizes that ‘*Modern Women* is the first time a fair has formally dedicated a section to women artists, with a proper title. Galleries and art historians, fairs and museums, all have to collaborate to make the art world a fairer place.’ As Audre Lorde’s

celebrated 1984 essay ‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House’ teaches us, it is the actual conditions of our lives that dictate how we move in the world. She says, ‘For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive ... It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world.’ Such *real connection* must re-shape not only the realm of art but, ultimately, too, the world beyond.

Modern Women is on view at Frieze Masters throughout the week

‘RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology’, Barbican, London, 5 October–14 January 2024

‘Women in Revolt!’ is on view at Tate Britain 8 November–7 April 2024

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