# Against the Canon (Porto Alegre, 17-19 Oct 19)

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, Brazil, Oct 17–19, 2019
Deadline: Mar 1, 2019

George Flaherty, Chicago, IL

Against the Canon: Art, Feminism(s) and Activisms
Mercosur International Seminar

Organizers
Fundação Bienal do Mercosul – Bienal 12 Porto Alegre
Instituto de Artes, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, UFRGS
Curso de Artes Visuais, Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul, UERGS
Center for Latin American Visual Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, CLAVIS / UT

Realization
Fundação Bienal do Mercosul

The history of art has been written from perspectives and tastes that constituted a predominantly patriarchal canon of art. As the Guerilla Girls asked and pointed out: “Do women have to be naked to get into the Museum of Art of São Paulo? Only 6% of the artists in the collection are women, but 60% of the nudes are female.” This artist collective, formed in the United States in 1985, offers us posters with percentages that characterize the collections and exhibitions of all the museums of the world. Women are marginalized in the art world despite forming the demographic majority. In their different ways, feminist artists have intervened in the logic that articulates the canon of art. At first, they did so subtly; at the moment, their accusations and actions have taken force, accompanying, amplifying and activating the growing wave of international feminism.

To transform the world through art: such is the desire that fueled artistic activism during the long twentieth century. Feminist activism is, mainly, the voice of a general contempt for the male power that regulates the state of the world and art. It is an activism that operates from the realization of images, actions and critical discourses that intervene on the forms of power to erode it. We hijack this system when we participate in social struggles or when we render the invisibility of women in the art world visible. Since at least the eighteenth century we can find dissenting voices. They are voices that take a position on the status of women in general, on gender and sexuality regulations and on women artists in particular. Performing an archeology of Western culture, comments on art can be found in the writings of Germaine de Staël, Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Marie d'Agoult or B., attentive to the instruction of women based on their emancipation and even, as can be seen in the writings of Johanna von Haza, a questioning of gender and race identities.

Since the late 1960s, feminist artists have inscribed a specific and radical chapter in postwar art.

Their aesthetic proposals strategically stirred the patriarchal bases of taste and connoisseurship to work with techniques and materials sidelined by the hierarchical repertoire of Great Art (textiles, lace, embroidery, ceramics, porcelain, glitter, enamel--all marginalized by the dominant vocabulary of painting and sculpture), or with feminine themes (domestic space, maternity, abject body fluids). Feminist artists have staged rebellions of language and of iconography as spaces of activism: from the affirmation that the personal is political, to the denouncement of abuses, rapes and physical and psychological violence against women. These revolts form the core of the contemporary agenda, in which the fight against femicides is central, as are rights over one's body.

The experience of the Womanhouse space in Los Angeles and the work of Judy Chicago or Miriam Schapiro are just some of the scenes and the voices from which artistic feminism was activated in the early Seventies. Films, magazines and pedagogies were fields of artistic activism. So was the icnonography deployed in the pictorial and sculptural arts, as was the intense politicization of bodies that took place in performance, photography and video by artists like Esther Ferrer, Mónica Mayer, Maris Bustamante, Lea Lublin and Josely Carvalho. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and sociology, co-articulated with the successive agendas of feminism, shaped fields of knowledge from artists working to dismantle stereotypes about women and gender binarism. They gave and continue to give visibility to their actions in the public sphere with an urban graphic language of posters, stencils and statistics. In contemporary feminist activism we can mention the exhibitions of Ciu Xiuwen and Cui Guang Xia in China, the strategies of the Pussy Riots in Russia, the Mujeres Públicas o Nosotras Proponemos in Argentina, the Trabajadoras del Arte y la Cultura in Chile, the open letter to the art world “We are not surprised” from the United States, the open letter about machismo at the Arles photography festival in Europe, the work of Lady Skollie against the rapes in South Africa, or the graffiti of Panmela Castro about the high rates of violence against women in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, or the black and feminist activism carried out by Suely Carneiro in São Paulo since the 1970s.

Since the late 1970s, artistic activism linked to lesbian, gay, trans/intersex, queer/cuir aesthetics, focused on fluid sexualities, on feminized bodies and on the problematization of essentialisms, has been growing. They are visible in groups such as Chaclacayo or in the Museo Travesti of Giuseppe Campuzano, both in Peru, or in the proposals of Jota Mombaça in Brazil. These aesthetics are part of the proposed denomination of feminism: the feminine, the feminized, or any other marked body in the hetero-patriarchal regime of capitalism.

There is presently an intense and growing curatorial activism that focuses on exhibitions that contribute to the creation of a corpus of works of artists made invisible by art histories, and by mapmaking at global or regional scales. This corpus can counter dominant narratives in which male artists constitute 80-90% of the story--a percentage that only recently began to change, precisely, from feminist artistic activism.

The general aims of the seminar are:

1. Analyze case studies (for example, the analysis of a single work based on research in primary sources and archives) to reveal points of contact and divergence between the strategies followed by comparable artistic feminism(s).

2. Propose critical genealogies and maps of local, regional and global feminism(s).

3. Share theoretical and methodological approaches that allow us to visualize the specificity of these interventions and their negotiations with the dominant culture(s).

4. Discuss the transformations that have occurred in recent years from exhibitions of women artists or focused on queer/cuir and trans subjectivities, as well as the reactions they produced in the form of debate, demonstrations or different forms of censorship.

These problems can be considered from the following topics related to feminism(s) in the field of art:
- Views of the past and on the present. Genealogies and specific cases of artistic activism between the XVIII and XXI centuries
- Intersectional Feminisms / Black Feminisms in the Art World
- Feminisms of equality and difference. Affirmative policies. Ghetto or inclusion in art stories?
- Question the canon. The concept of quality as ideologeme, or unit of ideology
- Activism of the image. Actions inside and outside the museum. Urban interventions: posters, stencils, graffiti, polls, handkerchiefs and flags.
- Curatorial activism. Exhibitions as historicization and visibility strategies.
- Academic activism. Strategies of feminist art histories: from case studies to maps and genealogies.
- Activisms and pedagogies. Academia, curricula, courses and seminars: the power of bibliographies.
- Chromatic activisms. Iconography and colors of the action.
- Editorial activities: magazines, books, essays. Write to transform.
- Activism of the text: manifestos, commitments, letters, statements.
- Activism and international networks. Alliances beyond borders. Signatures and accessions.
- Activisms and policies of cultural fronts. Partners and allies.
- Activisms of the concepts. Gender / feminism: symbolic capital, politics and contexts.
- Polemics, censorship and self-censorship. Art, state, religions. Expressions in “the states of exception”.
- Scandals in art. Negotiation with institutions and with public speeches.

The seminar will be organized over 3 days, in 4 daily sessions of 4 speakers each, who will have 15 minutes to make their presentations, followed by 30 minutes of debate. Depending on the number of papers selected, simultaneous panels may be organized.

Proposals are welcomed from doctorate and master students, graduates, professors, curators and cultural and artistic activists.

The conference languages will be Portuguese, Spanish and English.

Deadline for submitting proposals: March 1, 2019

Instructions for submitting proposals:
The paper can be written and presented in Portuguese, Spanish or English. Please indicate in the beginning of the proposal the language in which the presentation will be made.
Abstract of 800 words in Portuguese, Spanish and English, and a brief bio, also in Portuguese, Spanish, and English of no more than 60 words.

The proposal will be considered submitted when the author receives a confirmation of receipt by email.

Presentation of proposals: seminario.internacional@bienalmercosul.art.br

Final papers and presentations:
- The length of the papers may not exceed 2,000 words.
- The deadline for the submission of papers is August 15, 2019.
- The program will be distributed at the end of September 2019.
- It is expected that all the speakers will have read the papers of their panel members and are ready to make comments and participate in the discussion. The papers will be circulated in advance only among the members of each panel.
- Each speaker will have a maximum of 15 minutes to present their work and the visual materials that accompany it. We hope that this process will facilitate an active discussion between the panelists, the moderators and the audience.

The final papers will be published in digital format, on the website of the Fundação Bienal do Mercosul.

Reference:
CFP: Against the Canon (Porto Alegre, 17-19 Oct 19). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 11, 2019 (accessed Nov 19, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/19846>.