

Women in abstraction (Paris, 19–20 Mai 21)

Cinema 1, Centre Pompidou, May 19–20, 2021

Deadline: Jul 10, 2020

AWARE : Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions

Call for papers

Women in abstraction. Another History of abstraction in the 20th century

This symposium is organised in the frame of a partnership between the Musée National d'Art Moderne and the Département Culture et Création – Centre Pompidou and the association AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions. It is part of the programming in parallel to the exhibition Women in Abstraction. Another History of Abstraction in the 20th Century, which will take place from 5 May to 6 September 2021 in the large gallery on the 6th floor of the Centre Pompidou, then at the Guggenheim Bilbao from 8 October 2021 to 30 January 2022.

With a few notable exceptions, such as the exhibition Karo-Dame – Konstruktive, Konkrete und Radikale Kunst von Frauen von 1914 bis heute presented at the Aargauer Kunsthaus in 1995, the fundamental role that women played in the development of abstract art has long been underestimated. While the Centre Pompidou has been helping to redress the balance since the thematic hanging of its collections under the title *elles@centrepompidou* in 2009, the latest historiographical advances illustrated by numerous recent publications, monographs and thematic exhibitions make it possible to reassess the importance of the contribution of women artists to the different currents of abstraction, while at the same time questioning the historical patterns of the past. Thus in 2016, the Denver Museum of Art highlighted women working in the Abstract Expressionist movement in the exhibition Women of Abstract Expressionism. The following year, Hauser, Wirth & Schimmel opened in Los Angeles with its inaugural exhibition Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women 1947-2016, presenting the sculptural work of thirty-five artists from various eras. The MoMA for its part presented Making Space: Women Artists and Post-war Abstraction. That same year, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art honoured abstract works by African-American women artists in the exhibition Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960's to Today. The success of the exhibition Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future at the Guggenheim in New York that attracted more than 600,000 visitors reveals that an interest in the female pioneers of abstraction goes beyond academic circles. In France, the 2019 exhibition Femmes Années 50, Au fil de l'Abstraction, Peinture et Sculpture at the Musée Soulages in Rodez revisited the École de Paris in the 1950s. This research is also increasing in Asia. The Tapei Fine Arts Museum presented The Herstory of Abstraction in East Asia in 2019. For the first time, Women in Abstraction will propose a history of abstraction since the 19th century articulating women's specific contributions to this new visual language.

Curated by Christine Macel, with Karolina Lewandowska in charge of photography, this exhibition aims to highlight the contributions of a hundred or so women artists to abstraction up to the

1980s, with a few unprecedented forays into the 19th century. By focusing on the careers of artists, sometimes unjustly eclipsed, the exhibition proposes to question the established canons and write another history of abstraction. It highlights the decisive turning points that marked this evolution, evoking both the research undertaken by artists, individually or in groups, and exhibitions that contributed to the recognition of women abstract artists.

The exhibition *Women in Abstraction* resonates with the missions of AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions, co-founded in 2015 by Camille Morineau. The purpose of the non-profit organisation is to create, disseminate and index information about women artists from the 20th century through partnerships with cultural institutions, universities and research centres. With an international outreach, the main actions of AWARE are the developing of events to make these artists visible, the composing of a documentation centre, as well as publishing and the daily enrichment of a website entirely dedicated to women artists of the 20th century (awarewomenartists.com).

This symposium aims to bring together researchers from diverse backgrounds to collectively reflect on rewriting the history of abstraction by re-evaluating women artists' contributions to the various abstract art movements. Firstly, it will make it possible to question the history of art conceived as a succession of pioneering practices. By examining the meaning of the term "abstraction" according to the various periods, geographies and media employed, the symposium will seek to demonstrate its complexity. Finally, it will be an opportunity to study the circulation of abstract practices in the world in order to open the debate on the canons established by Western modernity.

In order to provide a framework for reflection, the Scientific Committee will pay particular attention to proposals relating to the following areas:

- a questioning of the specific (in)visibility of women linked to the field of abstract art
- a critical rereading of the canons of abstraction established by the history of art of the 20th century, taking into account its spiritualist, decorative and scientific roots
- a reflection on the de-hierarchisation of the arts and the apprehension of abstraction beyond the field of visual arts (decorative arts practised by artists, dance, photography, film)
- a questioning of the place of collective practices (groups, societies, sororities) in the history of abstract art
- a re-evaluation of the contribution of minorities, particularly African-American and Hispanic minorities, to abstraction, as well as a study of Aboriginal painting and other indigenous abstract practices
- a re-evaluation of the geography of abstract art in order to question the hegemony of the Western model
- a relationship between abstraction and militant engagement, integrating a reflection on the possibility of feminist and political abstract art

Papers may take the form of case studies problematized by artistic movements, individuals, groups or geographical area, as well as historiographical and multidisciplinary analyses of female or female-identifying artists from the end of the 19th century to the 1980s.

Presentations will last 20 minutes and will be illustrated with slide presentations. They will be filmed and recorded, and some of them may eventually be published as articles in a publication

dedicated to the event or on the websites of the organizing institutions.

The proposals are to be sent in PDF format to womeninabstraction@gmail.com before 19 July 2020 and must include an abstract (in French or English) of approximately one page (maximum 2,000 characters), a title, 4 to 8 images, and a Curriculum Vitae.

Accepted proposals will be communicated by the end of September 2020.

Presentations can be in French or English.

Organising Committee

- Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, Director; Jean-Max Colard, Head of the Speech Department, Culture and Creation Department – Centre Pompidou
- Christine Macel, Chief Curator in charge of the Department of Contemporary Creation and Prospection; Laure Chauvelot, Head of Research, Musée National d'Art Moderne – Centre Pompidou
- Matylda Taszycka, Head of Research Programmes, Fanny Verdier, Digital Contents Supervisor, AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions

Scientific Committee

- Musée National d'Art Moderne – Centre Pompidou:
Christine Macel, Chief Curator in charge of the Department of Contemporary Creation and Prospection; Karolina Lewandowska, Curator, Photography Department
- AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions:
Camille Morineau, Director ; Matylda Taszycka, Head of Research Programmes
- External Members:
Eric de Chassey, Art Historian, General Director of the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA);
Charlotte Foucher-Zarmanian, Art Historian, CNRS researcher – LEGS laboratory (UMR 8238); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Art Critic and Curator

Reference:

CFP: Women in abstraction (Paris, 19-20 Mai 21). In: ArtHist.net, May 30, 2020 (accessed Aug 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/23158>>.