Time After Time: Art and Feminisms in the '80s and '90s (Padua, 15-16 Oct 26)

Università di Padova, Oct 15–16, 2026
Deadline: Jun 21, 2026

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The international conference Time After Time: Art and Feminisms in the 1980s and 1990s aims to carry out an overview of current research on the relationships between art and feminisms in the 1980s and 1990s and seeks to provide a valuable opportunity for exchange and dialogue among researchers working on these topics. Since the early 2000s, studies on feminisms and gender issues in art history have proliferated in Italy. While the topic has been extensively explored in relation to the 1970s — a period of great momentum for the women's movement in the West — the 1980s and 1990s have received considerably less scholarly attention. This gap concerns not only the relationship between art and feminisms, but art history as a discipline more broadly, largely due to an insufficient historical distance that has only recently grown enough to allow for dedicated research into these two decades. Far from homogeneous or uniform, the two decades are marked by discontinuity and differ above all in the artistic languages they favoured: while the 1980s saw the predominance of painting and sculpture, the 1990s were characterized by performance, photography, installation and video. To this must be added 1989 as an undeniable historical and artistic watershed: the year in which the exhibition Magiciens de la terre at the Centre Pompidou in Paris symbolically inaugurated a new era of globalization and openness in the art world. Regarding the Italian context, from a gender perspective, the 1970s were shaped by the strength of the women's movement — in all its varied and heterogeneous facets and theoretical positions — which was able to engage the masses in significant ways and to radically transform the position and role of women in society. These changes also affected the art system, within which many women artists claimed new spaces and greater visibility. Yet already by the late 1970s, and more markedly with the onset of the 1980s, this climate appeared to have shifted: the transformative force of feminisms faced a social and cultural backlash — a term introduced by Susan Faludi in relation to the Reaganite United States — against the gains made in the previous decade. For women artists, this often meant experiencing — without necessarily being aware of it — a contraction of their access to the market and of the spaces they had claimed only a few years earlier.

The backlash did not, however, prevent women artists who rose to prominence in the 1990s from achieving, at least on the surface, a presence and participation comparable to that of their male colleagues. Most emerging women artists of these two decades, convinced that feminism had achieved its goals and that equality had been secured, chose to distance themselves from gender issues. If this brief reconstruction reflects the Italian context in general — currently under investigation in studies forthcoming for publication — and despite the existence of substantial research on the Anglo-American context, a number of questions remain unresolved regarding other cultural

contexts. What was happening globally during the same period? Did a relationship between art and feminisms exist in the 1980s? To what extent did the backlash affect feminisms in other Western countries, and in what forms? And how robust was the elationship between art and feminisms in the 1990s, a decade marked by a renewed theoretical vitality of feminist thought in Europe and the United States? This call therefore aims to stimulate research into the intersections between art and feminisms from a global and transnational perspective, within a chronological framework — the 1980s and 1990s — that remains largely underexplored to this day.

The goal of this conference, which proceeds from a commitment to rereading art history and its mechanisms of historicization, is to examine the extent to which feminisms have shaped art and its narratives. By way of example and without limitation, contributions are welcome on the following topics within the indicated period (1980s and 1990s):

- feminist re-readings of the art-historical context;
- studies on women artists, art critics, gallerists and other professionals in the field;
- critical debate;
- organizations, movements and associations of women artists;
- exhibitions, events and conferences addressing art and gender issues;
- methodological, theoretical and interpretive questions;
- transnational exchanges, connections and dialogues;
- the relationship between art and feminisms from postcolonial perspectives.

The conference will be held at the University of Padova on 15 and 16 October 2026 and will feature Griselda Pollock (University of Leeds) as keynote speaker. Scholars wishing to participate are invited to submit their proposals by 21 June 2026 to artandfeminisms@gmail.com. Submissions should include a biography in English or Italian (1,500 characters, spaces included), the title of the paper, an abstract in English or Italian (2,000 characters, spaces included), and five keywords in English or Italian.

Notification of acceptance will be sent by 24 July 2026.
The organizers are unable to cover travel or accommodation expenses.

Scientific Committee: Giovanni Bianchi (University of Padova), Laura Iamurri (University of Roma Tre), Federica Muzzarelli (University of Bologna), Raffaella Perna (Sapienza University of Rome), Laura Schettini (University of Padova)

International Conference curated by: Greta Boldorini (University of Padova), Angela Maderna (University of Roma Tre)

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