

Women's: Museum Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art

Elke Krasny

As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.

Virginia Woolf

Feminism must itself be grasped as an interruption, a mode of transformation, questioning, challenging and opening up futures not yet imagined but to be constructed from a belief in its poetic virtuality. (...) Are feminism and the museum as we know it compatible at any level?

Griselda Pollock

Too, whether acknowledged or not, feminism is structurally embedded in our deepest concepts of self and other; (...) Feminism is built into the ways in which we interpret and experience racial, ethnic, faith-based and other "identities" as we apprehend and relate to bodies in the world (including our own).

Amelia Jones

This

volume is a contribution to the emerging field of the contemporary historiography and cartography of curatorial knowledge production. It initiates a dialogue between the history of women's museums and the practices of politically conscious and activist feminist curatorial projects. Women's museums and feminist curatorial projects alike can now look back at the historical developments that led to their inception. In the future, additional research on women's museums and feminist curatorial projects will be necessary to trace in-depth the political agendas, aesthetic strategies, theories, ideas, ethics, and practices which shaped them in the past and continue to be part of their future direction and transformation.

Women's museums were first initiated in the 1980s. Their beginnings were strongly associated with the struggles and goals of the second-wave feminist movement. In 1981, the Bonn *Women's Museum/Frauenmuseum Bonn* was founded by Marianne Pitzten and a group of women working in the fields of art and history, thereby becoming the first women's museum. In 1982, the *Kvindemuseet Aarhus/Aarhus Women's Museum* in Denmark was started as a grassroots movement and has developed into state-recognized national museum devoted to researching, collecting, and exhibiting the lives and labors of women in Denmark. In 1988, the *Museo delle Donne Merano/Frauenmuseum Meran/Meran Women's Museum* in Italy was founded on the private initiative of fashion and accessories collector Evelyn Ortner, and is now run by the *Frauenmuseum Association*. Many more women's museums worldwide were

established in the years to follow. The broad range of objectives held by the many women's museums in different parts of the world defies being gathered under a single definition. As museums, each is distinctly marked by its location, context, and history. At the same time, these institutions are joined by complex transnational exchanges and cross-cultural collaborations. The current material and political conditions of globalization, neoliberalism, cultural competition, and austerity urbanism impact strongly on the exhibition culture politics and collection strategies of each women's museum. Put more simply, women's museums continue to assert their right to exercise control over the presentation of the historic, social, economic, and political roles of women. Many of them include artists' works or artists' interventions in their exhibition-making strategies. Quite a few of the world's women's museums struggle with dire economic situations and/or with complex political challenges. They have worked out a host of different strategies and tactics to endure over time. New women's museums continue to emerge. Most recent new initiatives include the *Museo de la Mujer in Buenos Aires/Buenos Aires Women's Museum* in Argentina, which was set up in 2006, or the website of the *Istanbul Kadın Müzesi/Istanbul Women's Museum* in Turkey which went online in 2011. Transnational networking, intensified debates, and frequent exchanges marked the first decade of the new millennium for women's museums. The *International Association of Women's Museums* was founded in 2012 at the *Fourth International Congress of Women's Museums* in Alice Springs, Australia. This new association is based in Bonn and headed by Bettina Bab, historian and long-standing curator at the *Women's Museum Bonn/Frauenmuseum Bonn*. The *Third International Congress of Women's Museums* was hosted by the *Buenos Aires Women's Museum, Museo de las Mujeres, Buenos Aires/Buenos Aires Women's Museum* in Argentina. The *Second International Congress of Women's Museums* was hosted by the *Bonn Women's Museum/Frauenmuseum Bonn*. In 2013, the *Association of Women's Museums* includes 50 different museums and 14 different initiatives. It is the successor to the *network of women's museums* (<http://www.womeninmuseum.net>), which was initiated at the *First International Congress of Women's Museums* hosted by the *Meran Women's Museum* in 2008.

Feminist art exhibitions date back to the 1970s, when they preceded the complex processes of (self)-institutional pushing for women's museums. Far from pretending to be comprehensive, I instead want to outline the contours of a historiographic cartography of the very first feminist art exhibitions, which were strongly related to the feminist movement and also the feminist art movement of the time. In 1970, the coalition of *Women Artists in Revolution* organized an all-female artists' show titled *X12, 12 Women Artists* in New York. In the same year, a collective of female artists called *Kanonklubben* put on the feminist group show *Damebilleder* (trans: Lady

Portraits or Women's Images) in different locations throughout Copenhagen. What has most commonly been referred to as the first pioneering feminist group show, is the February 1972 project *Womanhouse* by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro. They used a 17-room, soon-to-be-demolished house in Hollywood, California to set up *Womanhouse*, a temporary feminist art exhibition and performance space. In 1975, Lucy Lippard organized *c. 7,500*, a show comprised solely of female concept artists, held at the *California Institute of the Arts* in Valencia. In 1975, VALIE EXPORT organized both a symposium and a multidisciplinary exhibition at *Gallery near St. Stephens Cathedral/Galerie nächst St. Stephan* in Vienna. The title of the project was *MAGNA.Feminismus: Kunst und Kreativität. Ein Überblick über die weibliche Sensibilität, Imagination, Projektion und Problematik, suggeriert durch ein Tableau von Bildern, Objekten, Fotos, Vorträgen, Diskussionen, Lesungen, Filmen, Videobändern und Aktionen, zusammengestellt von VALIE EXPORT/MAGNA. Feminism: Art and Creativity. A Survey of the Female Sensibility, Imagination, Projection and Problems Suggested through a Tableau of Images, Objects, Photographs, Lectures, Discussions, Films, Videos and Actions, compiled by VALIE EXPORT*. In the same year, *Magma: Rassegna internazionale di donne artiste/Magma: International Exhibition of Women Artists* organized by Romana Loda, took place in the *Castello Oldofredi* in Brescia, Italy. In 1976, the survey exhibition *Women Artists 1550-1950* by art historians Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris, was shown at the *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. In 1979, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* opened at the *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*. The eve of the opening witnessed Suzanne Lacy's large-scale participatory performance the *International Dinner Party*, in which the artist explored the potentials of an international women's community. Most of the organizers of these early feminist group exhibitions were artists who acted as what we have come to call curators. At the time, the initiators referred to their exhibition-making activities as organizing, compiling, or putting together. These pioneering feminist exhibition projects were not only marked by the political aim to position women as artists, authors, and simply creators and the search for feminist and feminine expressions in art-making, but also by international networking and transnational exchange. Today, critical contemporary feminist curatorial practices can be found both inside and outside of the art field and the art museum. These practices equally defy a single definition as they constantly redraw the lines of negotiation between art and politics in the curating and writing of art's histories, theories, and practices. At the heart of critical feminist curatorial practices lies the struggle of redefining and reinventing feminism on the battlefield of representational politics and of transgressing boundaries of conventional curatorship. These curatorial practices navigate the contested terrain of

exhibiting, aiming not only to address the legacy of historical feminism(s), but also to work out what is at stake for the future of feminism.

Feminism has come of age. Again, far from claiming to be comprehensive, I want to outline a cartography of contemporary feminist exhibitions in the first decade of the 21st century. Interestingly enough, emerging transnational redefinitions of feminism, new feminist struggles, and the return to the feminist art revolution of the 1960s and 1970s gave ample reason for several large-scale and profoundly researched curatorial projects, often staged in mainstream institutions. In 2004, Stella Rollig, who was the newly appointed director of the *Lentos Art Museum* in Linz, Austria at the time, dedicated her opening exhibition *Paula's Home* exclusively to the works of female artists. The two curators, Angelika Gillmayr and Elisabeth Nowak-Thaller, saw this project as a critical reflection of their institution and its legacy. The year 2007 was a prolific year in terms of feminist art exhibitions, including *Global Feminisms* at the *Brooklyn Museum*, New York, curated by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly. The two curators aimed for a transnational show dedicated to showing differences in order to make, in their own words, “feminism a plural noun” in defiance of the notion of “unitary feminism” and the construction of a “timeless woman”.¹ Connie Butler curated *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* at the *Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles*. The curator describes her ambition “to make the case that feminism’s impact on art of the 1970s constitutes the most influential international ‘movement’ of any during the postwar period.” Butler invokes “bell hook’s proposal to resignify the term ‘feminist movement’, to deliver it from its nomenclatorial fixity and reconnect it to the verb ‘to move’”.² The exhibition *Gender Battle* and the conference *Gender Battle. Lectures, theatre and debates about the rules of gender, sexuality and the impact of feminism in the art of the seventies* was curated by Juan Vicente Aliaga at the *Galician Center for Contemporary Art Santiago de Compostela Galicia, Spain*. The exhibition *L’Art au Féminin: Approches Contemporaines/Woman Art: Contemporary Approaches*, curated by Nadira Laggoune, was shown at the *Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain d’Alger, Algiers* as part of *Algiers, Arab Cultural Capital*. In 2009, *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, curated by Bojana Pejić, was shown at the *Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation Vienna/mumok Wien, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig* and in 2010 at the *Żacheta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw*. A team of 26 art historians, cultural theorists, and curators conducted the

1 Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (2007): “Curator’s Preface”, in: Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (eds.): *global feminisms. New Directions in Contemporary Art*, Merrell: London and New York, 11.

2 Cornelia Butler (2007): *Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria*, in: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organized by Cornelia Butler, edited by Lisa Gabrielle Mark, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 15.

groundbreaking research for the exhibition, and *Gender Check: A Reader* was published to “test and ‘correct’ propositions made in the hitherto dominant Western discourse on gender,” highlighting “the necessity of an in-depth and long-term approach to the issue of gender in Eastern European art.”³ In 2009, *Rebelle: Kunst en feminisme/Rebelle: Art & Feminism 1969–2009*, curated by Mirjam Westen, was shown at the *Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem/Museum for Modern Art Arnhem* in the Netherlands. The exhibition created a constellation of artists from different generations and continents set into a context. Photos, documentaries, and newspaper clippings showed the movements, social developments, and changing position of women in the world and, in particular, in the art world. Also in 2009, *elles@centre pompidou*, curated by Camille Morineau, was shown at the *Centre Pompidou*. The curatorial strategy paralleled that of the *Paula’s Home* exhibition in 2004, with all permanent collection galleries being dedicated solely to female artists. Around 500 works by more than 200 women artists were exhibited, displaying a different art history of the 20th and 21st centuries. All these different exhibitions are clearly indicative of the fact that feminism has become an integral part of the curatorial agenda in the first decade of the 21st century. The pioneering feminist group shows of the 1970s were, for the better part, organized by artists who doubled as curators, a term not yet used at the time. Exhibitions throughout the 1980s, the 1990s, and the most recent culmination in large-scale exhibitions in the 2000s bear witness to the long-standing emergence of a transnational field of expert feminist curatorial knowledge production. Feminist curators, researchers, and theorists have made significant crossings, shifts, and turns within the curatorial field. Equally important, they have recently begun the production of theoretical discourse and committed scholarship in the emerging field of the historiography of feminist curatorship. Again, I want to use the model of cartography to sketch an outline of the recent historiography of the emerging field of publications on feminist curatorship. In 2006, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* dedicated a special issue to curatorial strategies, and the same year n.paradoxa-editor Katy Deepwell contributed the essay *Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s* to the volume *New Museum Theory and Practice*, edited by Janet Marstine. In 2007, Griselda Pollock’s *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* was published. In the 2010 edition of *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Amelia Jones, we find Connie Butler, Amelia Jones, and Maura Reilly (in dialogue)

3 Christine Böhler and Rainer Fuchs (2010): “Preface”, in: Bojana Pejić, Erste Foundation and Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (eds.): *Gender Check: A Reader. Art and Theory in Eastern Europe*, Verlag der Buchhandlung König: Cologne, 9.

on *Feminist Curating and the "Return" of Feminist Art*. Also published in 2010: *Feminisms Is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, edited by Hedlin Hayden and Sjöholm Skrubbe. In 2012, *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*, edited by Katrin Kivimaa, appeared; and in 2013, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry. The cartography I am attempting to outline here relies on thinking spatially instead of thinking solely in temporal terms. This kind of "exploration of chronology through cartography"⁴ was introduced by Marsha Meskimmon. "Thinking spatially, however, we can admit the coexistence in time of locationally distinct narratives and connect disjointed temporalities thus asking vital questions concerning networks of relation, processes of exchange, and affinities of meaning." This way of thinking leads to the assumption of a curatorial vantage point from which an uncharted territory of possible dialogues and alignments between women's museums and independent feminist curatorial agencies can be both traced and projected. Such an approach relies on dialogical and contradictory constellations, rather than monological linear sequences.

Seen from a more distanced or meta-vantage point, women's museums and feminist curatorship do share a common horizon of past feminist struggles and of being part of feminist movements working toward shaping and reshaping a future feminist project. On the ground though, they barely ever intersect in dialogue or even in joint knowledge production. This lack of exchange led me to the belief that it is indeed possible to initiate dialogue and to create temporary alignments between activists, artists, curators, educators, historians, museum directors, researchers, theorists, and scholars who are actively involved in women's museums or in the field of feminist curating. Yet, I would like to point out that it is only from this curatorial meta-vantage point that I was actually able to envision meeting on the conflicted yet common ground of feminist struggles and feminist politics. This volume is the result of this exchange, born of two symposia held at the *Vienna City Library at City Hall/Wienbibliothek im Rathaus* in 2010 and at the *Meran Women's Museum/Frauenmuseum Meran/Museo delle Donne Merano* in 2011. The first was curated by myself under the title *Women's: Museum. From Collection Strategy to Social Platform/Frauen: Museum. Zwischen Sammlungsstrategie und Sozialer Plattform*. The second was organized together with Astrid Schönweger, curator of the *Women's Museum Merano* at the time, under the title *Women's:*

Museum. Presenting and Cooperating/Frauen: Museum. Präsentieren und Kooperieren. Both of the symposia were part of the EU project *Women's Museums – A cultural gender concept for Europe*.

The *Vienna City Library at City Hall* was a welcoming hosting institution and I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Director Dr. Sylvia Mattl-Wurm and Public Relations Officer Suzie Wong for their most generous and continuous support. My curatorial goal for the symposium was to promote open-minded and rigorous debate and theoretical reflection on both women's museums and politically conscious strategies of feminist curating in a transnational, transdisciplinary, trans-generational, and transinstitutional way. The emerging field of curatorial knowledge production, in and out of the museum, was central to the idea of the symposium. The three panels of the symposium were titled *Women's: Museum. Collection Strategies and Interventions into the Canon*, *Women's: Museum. From Curating to Social Platform*, and *Women's: Museum. Intervening into History. Between Collecting and Educationg*. I would like to thank all the speakers at the Vienna symposium for their significant contributions to the presentation of women's museums and the discussions on feminist strategies in art, art history, history, theory, education, research, and curating. The keynote address was held by Mansoureh Shojaee, a leading Iranian women's rights activists, who has lived as a writer-in-exile in Germany since 2011, and initiated an unrealized project for an *Iranian Women's Museum* together with Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Panelists and moderators included Gudrun Ankele, editor of *Absolute Feminismus*; Petja Dimitrova, artist and activist for anti-racist strategies and president of the *Austrian Artists' Association/IG Bildende Kunst Österreich*; VALIE EXPORT, artist; Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, a pioneer in feminist art history and professor at the *University of Applied Arts Vienna/Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien*; Stella Rollig, director of the *Lentos Art Museum Linz, Austria/Lentos Kunst Museum Linz, Österreich*; Silvie Aigner, art historian; Carla Bobadilla, artist and curator focusing on immigration and post-colonialism; Stefania Pitscheider Soraperra, director of the *Women's Museum Hittisau, Austria/Frauenmuseum Hittisau, Österreich*; Astrid Schönweger, former curator of the *Meran Women's Museum* and coordinator of the *womeninmuseum network*; Petra Unger, cultural mediator and initiator of *Vienna Women's Walks/Wiener Frauenspaziergänge*; Karin Schneider, historian and educator; Vida Bakondy, historian; Eva Geber, author and co-editor of *AUF – A Women's Magazine/AUF – eine Frauenzeitschrift*; Li Gerhalter, feminist historian at the *Collection of Women's Estates Vienna* at the *Department of History, University of Vienna/Sammlung Frauennachlässe Wien am Institut für Geschichte der Universität Wien*; and Marion Thuswald, peace activist and educational scientist at the *Academy of Fine Arts Vienna/Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien*.

4 Marsha Meskimmon (2007): "Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally", in: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organized by Cornelia Butler, edited by Lisa Gabrielle Mark, The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, p. 323.

The 2011 symposium was titled *Women: Museum Presenting and Cooperating/ Frauen: Museum Präsentieren und Kooperieren*. It was generously hosted by the *Meran Women's Museum*, Italy/*Frauenmuseum Meran*, Italien/*Museo delle Donne Merano* and I wish to express my sincere thanks to the museum's director Sigrid Prader and Astrid Schönweger, curator at the time, for their thoughtful organizing and welcoming hospitality. I would like to thank all the contributors to the Merano symposium; Astrid Schönweger and Thea Unteregger, who presented their curatorial concept for the new permanent exhibition at the *Meran Women's Museum*; Bettina Bab, curator at the *Bonn Women's Museum/ Frauenmuseum Bonn*; Nicoletta Favout, curator of the exhibition at the *Waldensian Women's Museum Angrogna*, Italy/*Museo delle Donne Valdesi Angrogna*; Rudolfine Lackner, president of the *Austrian Association of Women Artists*, Vienna/*Vereinigung Bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs VBKÖ Wien* at the time of the symposium; Silvia Eiblmayr, renowned feminist art historian and former director of the *Galerie im Taxisplais/Taxispalais Art Gallery* in Innsbruck and co-curator of the Austrian pavilion at the *Venice Biennale 2008* together with VALIE EXPORT; Elisabeth von Dücker, Hamburg-based curator and initiator of the first German exhibition on the facts and myths of sex work; Betrun Jeitner, representative of the *Fürth Women's Museum/Frauenmuseum Fürth*; Elena Morbini, vice-president of the *Network of Women and Labor Bolzano/Rete Donne e Lavoro Bolzano*; Antonella Nonni, architect invited to design a new museum for Rigoberta Menchu in Guatemala; Sigrid Prader, director of the *Meran Women's Museum*; Martha Verdorfer, president of the *Women's Archive of South Tyrol/ Frauenarchiv Südtirol/Archivio delle Donne dell' Alto Adige*; and Martha Jimenez Rosano, Bolzano-based art curator working on interculturalism and immigration. A few of the second symposium's speakers, Elisabeth von Dücker, Nicoletta Favout, and Rudolfine Lackner, also agreed to contribute to the book.

To some degree, this compilation brings the two symposia back to life, while also going far beyond their original scope. The three panels of the Vienna symposium have been turned into the structure forming the three parts of this book. Excerpts from the transcripts of the panel statements serve as opening remarks leading into the issues discussed in each section. This volume does not favor any one kind of writing. Different texts, transcripts of spoken lectures, email dialogues, fictitious conversations, interviews, practice-based accounts, theoretical reflections, and scholarly essays form a cross-section that is heterogeneous not only in the lines of thought pursued, but also in the formats chosen. I would like to thank all the contributors, those who were part of the symposia and those who accepted my invitation to write new pieces. The latter include Barbara Blasin, Angela Dimitrakaki, Susanna Gyulamiryan, Amelia Jones, Igor

Marković, Suzana Milevska, Lara Perry, and Dorothee Richter, each of whom addresses critical and timely issues of feminist curatorial practice and theory from a different vantage point.

The first part of this volume addresses *Women's: Museum. Collection Strategies and Interventions into the Canon*. It introduces issues of feminist agency in art history and theory and posits feminist curating as an ongoing, ultimately unfinished political project grounded in critical claims and interventionist ruptures. Renowned feminist art historian Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, who sees art history as a representational theory drawing on semiotics and psychoanalysis, reflects on *Women: Art History and the Museum*. She opened the debate at the symposium by correlating issues of canonization with regard to the migration of scholarly work into the work of museum custodians or curators, "So how can these findings be presented in museums? How can the very real imbalances produced by hegemonic cultural politics be represented? How can art by women, but not only by women, be shown without reproducing or even cementing these gender designations? Clearly, there is no easy answer. On the one hand, it is about the artist's gender, but it is also about the actual art pieces and about specific qualities of artistic representation. Just as there are female artists that replicate unbroken gender stereotypes, there are also exhibitions on art by women that affirm the same gender stereotypes (often unintentionally)." Stella Rollig spoke about her position as a feminist director "of a big museum, an institution of high culture". She turned to the Deleuzian notion of "becoming" as an ideal way of feminism. Her contribution succinctly points to the inherent pitfalls of the logic of pioneering or achievements of firsts for women prevalent in much of feminist historical writing. The exhibition *elles@centrepompidou*, held in 2009, is referred to by the *Centre Pompidou* as the first ever worldwide for a museum to exhibit only female artists from its own collection. Yet Stella Rollig had already used the very same curatorial strategy for her opening exhibition *Paula's Home* at the *Lentos Art Museum Linz* five years prior to the *Centre Pompidou's* undertaking, showing only female artists from the museum collection. Her intervention was a programmatic shift marking the beginning of her directorship at the *Lentos Art Museum* in Linz. Feminist theorist and performance artist Gudrun Ankele spoke about the manifestos collected in her anthology *Absolute Feminism*, tracing the radical utopias of a feminist project through the singularity of poetic and/or political manifestos. Ankele problematized the feminist canon based on the logic of the suffrage struggle for women's rights and privileged collective action over subjective and individualized utopianist radicalism. She challenged museums to incorporate "different standpoints of identity, for example gender, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, age, health, etc."

Her plea is for a feminism as a “balancing act” between a still necessary “identity-based quota” and the need for its critique “from a theoretical perspective”. I would like to express my heartfelt sadness about the sudden demise of Gudrun Ankele, who died before this publication reached completion.

In a pre-recorded audio statement, VALIE EXPORT looked back at her 1972 preparation of the exhibition *MAGNA. Feminism, Art and Creativity*. Current surveys and genealogies of curating, by Paul O’Neill in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* in 2012, or by Hans Ulrich Obrist *A Brief History of Curating* in 2008, firmly establish the curator-as-artist and conjure the image of the curator as a freely roaming independent cultural producer. Interestingly enough, VALIE EXPORT’s exhibition and symposium *MAGNA. Feminism, Art and Creativity*, which ranks among the pioneering feminist artist-as-curator projects is conspicuously omitted in these recent historiographies of curating. Other positions of feminist artists turned curators before the notion of curating existed are likewise blatantly absent in these volumes. Not only did VALIE EXPORT’s curatorship originally aim for an exhibition clearly international in scope, she also programmed a symposium that was unusually transgressive and transdisciplinary for its time, including art theory, philosophy, visual art, music, and literature. In conversation with Rudolfine Lackner, former president of the Austrian Association of Women Artists, VALIE EXPORT stresses the tensions between the women’s movement and the women’s art movement or, in short, the conflict between feminist art and feminist politics and their possible alliance. “I created the concept for *MAGNA. Feminism, Art and Creativity* in 1971 with the goal of exhibiting international female artists. At that time, I used the term “women’s art” to clearly indicate that this was about the artistic expression of women. It was still very important to explicitly draw attention to this. I also wanted to invite radical feminist women’s movement groups from Germany, Holland, and Great Britain, but they didn’t want to participate, saying that art is too bourgeois. I tried to explain to them that art is not just bourgeois, that it can also be revolutionary.” Artist and activist Petja Dimitrova opened by discussing how her work is based on criticizing the material conditions of exclusion and on counteracting sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression. Her plea is one for a feminism that goes beyond a female-centric or gender-specific logic of representation. She radically sketches out a different type of collection altogether, “Entire projects and concepts, entire exhibitions as curatorial concepts, as theses (...) and not associated with only one artist.” Not only are interventions into the canon seen as an ultimately essentially ongoing project of feminist transformation, but the idea of the collections is also

critically questioned, leading to the utopian conceptualization of actual collecting curatorial practices going far beyond the monographic focus on a single artist’s position. Only then would the focus shift to communication and the convergence of different standpoints thus incorporating real tension and unresolved conflict within archives and collections. Dimitrova contributed a new series of drawings for this volume titled *We talk – We act – We move! Can we? Yes we can... even more than occupy...*

Renowned feminist art scholar and curator Amelia Jones and contemporary materialist and feminist art historian Angela Dimitrakaki generously agreed to conduct a written email dialogue. In *Viable or Merely Possible? A Dialogue on Feminism’s Radical Curatorial Project*, Jones and Dimitrakaki critically discuss the potentials, pitfalls, and shortcomings of major feminist exhibitions in the first decade of the 21st century, including *Global Feminisms* (USA 2007), *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (USA 2007), and *elles@centrepompidou* (France 2009). According to Jones and Dimitrakaki, a radical curatorial project comprehends not only the “organisation of social actions” but also “queer feminist durationality” and is above all in need of “history writing” as a “form of knowledge production”. They speak of the dangers of the institutional incorporation of feminism and recall feminist activist projects that have resisted institutionalization. “Yet there’s always the question of whether we want radical feminist ideas and art to become part of institutions – when shows are done, feminist art is inevitably institutionalized, for better or worse. This is the conundrum of avant-garde politics and history.”

Asserting that curating is both an intellectual and a collaborative project, renowned curator and writer Dorothee Richter assumed the role of the interviewee and created a fictitious partner with whom she engages in conversation. *Feminist Demands on Curating: Dorothee Richter in Conversation with False Hearted Fanny* understands feminist curating above all as a political project. Richter critiques the artist-as-genius. She scrutinizes the logic of inextricable hierarchy, which, according to her, must be constantly questioned. She puts forward a psychoanalytically motivated critique of the curator-as-author in its current hegemonic genealogy. “Equality has no visibility, but it is produced by practices. In regard to putting on feminist exhibitions, this would mean that feminist demands must be articulated in different social spaces, in order to be politically effective.”

Feminist and women’s historian Lara Perry, who initiated the international research network on *Transnational Perspectives on Women’s Art, Feminism and Curating* which was funded by the *Leverhulme Trust*, points out that “feminism has registered in the world of art museums and galleries” only in a “transitory and partial” way and addresses remaining institutional

disadvantages. In her essay *Feminism in and out of the Art Museum*, the issue of hierarchy is central to her argument. She analyses the very genderedness of the exhibition space and its installations. Perry critiques the mounting and hanging of museums' exhibitions and their resulting narratives.

Art historian, curator, and visual art and culture theorist Suzana Milevska, whose work was awarded the *Igor Žabel Award for Culture and Theory* in 2012, and who was appointed for the first *Endowed Professorship for Central and South Eastern European Art Histories* at the *Academy of Fine Arts Vienna* 2013/2014, writes on locally situated feminist curatorship. In her essay *With Special Thanks to: Balkan Curator, first person feminine*, she invokes the Deleuzian concept of becoming. "However, sticking with Deleuze's concept of 'becoming', I want to stress that two movements are necessary for 'becoming-woman-curator': first, there must be an isolation from the majority, as a female curator, and then there must be an isolation from the minority, as a feminist curator." Milevska perceives curatorial practice as a distinguished form of "agency for the social transformation of professional relation between the genders" and points out the historic ambivalences and contradictions between socialism, equality, and feminism in former Yugoslavia.

Art critic and curator Susanna Gyulamiryan works through the contradictions and shifts of women's art in post-Soviet Armenia. She speaks of the specific historical situation of feminism in this former republic of the Soviet Union. In her essay *Representing Women's Art in Armenia: Categories and Contradictions*, she coins the term "uninformed or unconscious feminism". Gyulamiryan also cites the conceptual artistic actions of a group of courageous young artists, Arpi Adamyan, Shushan Avagyan, and Lusine Talalyan, who collaborate under the programmatic title *Queering Yerevan* despite the prevailing, and at times violent and physically dangerous, homophobia.

The contributions to the first part of this book question the relationships between museum, institutionalization, institutional critique, and canonization. They clearly underline how this complex set of interactions has become a profoundly troubled one through critical contemporary feminist curatorial practices. This also shows clearly that curatorial agency is a crucial aspect of the way art history is being written and taught. Equally, curatorial knowledge production becomes the foundation for museums' collections. This means that it is all the more important to understand how feminist curators become active agents by shaping the understanding and distribution of artistic production, both on a global scale and through a locally situated and locally adaptive and meaningful practice. The impact of art history's discursive formation and the ultimate canonization of the field are decisive factors for the formation

of curatorial knowledge and decision-making. Yet, in today's practice, it is very often the other way round. Artistic practice enters the recognition of art history through curatorial practice and exhibition-making.

The second part of this volume, *Women's: Museum. From Curating to Social Platform*, presents case studies of different women's museums in Austria, Italy, and Iran, particularly stressing the importance of the social dimension of museums in small-town and rural contexts. These practice-based accounts of women's museum directors and curators center on socially involved curating, on the human rights issues, and on how museum work creates an impact that reaches far beyond the walls of the museum. These accounts are complemented by an example of a Vienna-based feminist immigrant-artist-curator and her strategies of emancipatory self-organized curating.

Astrid Schönweger, long-term curator of the *Meran Women's Museum/ Frauentmuseum Meran/Museo delle Donne Merano*, chose to introduce the story of the new permanent exhibition at her museum. As an activist and coordinator of the *womeninmuseum* international women's museum network, Schönweger emphasizes the importance of networking. She discusses the history of transnational networking and supportive affiliations between women's museums on a global scale. She stresses the importance of women's museums challenging overly narrow concepts of what museums could or should be. Schönweger describes dedicated museum work that transcends the conventional fields of and becomes an active player in human rights struggles, development work, labor issues, and international solidarity. She highlights the importance of transnational collaboration and support. The *Meran Women's Museum*, for example, has a longstanding exchange and collaboration with the *Henriette-Bathily Women's Museum/Musée de la Femme Henriette-Bathily* on Gorée island in Senegal. "The activist approach we took at the *Meran Women's Museum* fed our desire to build a strong international social platform together with other women's museums."

Nicoletta Favout, curator at the *Waldensian Women's Museum* presents a biography-based strategy of exhibition-making. In her essay *Roots and the World. The Waldensian Women's Museum*, she illustrates how she based an exhibition on women's biographies. The museum is housed in the small building of a former school in Angrogna, a municipality in the Alps of the province of Turin, Italy. The history of the religious and cultural minority of the Angrogna Waldensians, part of a Christian movement, dates back to the 12th century. "The *Waldensian Women's Museum* was initiated in 1990 by the women's society of the *Waldensian Church of Angrogna*. They chose to focus on the innumerable activities carried out in the home, in the fields, and in the areas designated for women by the church."

Stefania Pitscheider-Soraperra, director of the *Frauenmuseum Hittisau*, Austria's only women's museum, emphasizes the social dimension and political importance of museums as a cultural institution. *The Hittisau Women's Museum* is located in a small town of 2,000 residents in the high mountains of the Alps in Vorarlberg. It is "the only women's museum in the world that shares a building with the fire department." Pitscheider Soraperra points out the hybridity of uses and their genderedness within the significant contemporary architecture that houses the museum. Traditional gender roles in rural areas require diplomacy and situated feminist curatorial practices. "It is not easy to meet all the demands made on program design and curatorial work in a small museum in a rural area with very limited operating budget. The museum is located in a geographically remote region – far from any large urban centers and in a region whose economy is dominated by a mix of agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism." *The Hittisau Women's Museum* provided opportunities for women to volunteer involvement, which in turn led to an enormous increase of participation by museum volunteers in local politics and the local council.

Mansoureh Shojaee is a leading Iranian women's rights activist and an ecofeminist. Shojaee has been based in Nuremberg as a writer-in-exile since 2011. This program by the *German P.E.N.* association provides a safe haven for persecuted writers. Shojaee describes her work as a founding member of the *Campaign for One Million Signatures* and as an activist librarian involved in projects "such as the *Local Ecological Libraries*, *Indigenous Women's Libraries*, and the *Women's Libraries*." Following a suggestion by Shirin Ebadi, she began campaigning for the foundation of a *Women's Museum in Iran* in 2008, but it was subsequently forbidden. "Based on my past experience working with women in remote rural areas, I suggested that the museum include two distinct divisions: sociological and anthropological."

Carla Bobadilla takes her cues from a personally motivated urgency as an artist who immigrated to Austria from Chile. She initiated curatorial collaborations working on the intersection of post-colonialism and anti-racism. Bobadilla underlines the importance of her situated work as an immigrant-artist-curator (not necessarily in this order) and speaks of "curatorial self-organization and of the issues of how women are represented and how immigrant women self-organize."

The contributions to the second part of this book speak of the situatedness of the work of women's museums, expounding on the specificity of working in small town and rural contexts, and involvement in local politics and the international human rights movement. Since their inception, many of the women's museums have had an interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary, mandate. Women's museums showcase women's art

and feminist art; they build historical collections or curate exhibitions on women's history, on anthropology, and on the history of feminism. Yet, more often than not, the community work and the museums' outreach goes beyond the narrow confines of the conventional definition of what a museum ought to be. Women's museums often strive for active community involvement. They claim curatorial agency beyond the curating of exhibitions and stress the role of political and social empowerment through participation in museum work. Some women's museums are involved in advocating women's rights on an international scale. Women's rights activism and solidarity-based networking are a distinguishing aspect of the museum work of women's museums.

The third part of this volume is concerned with *Women's Museum. Intervening into History. Between Collecting and Educating*. It brings together issues of women's history, feminist scholarship, strategies of history writing and collecting, and the overarching theme of why a new feminist turn in archiving, collecting, and educating is necessary.

Eva Geber, author and co-editor of *AUF – a women's magazine/AUF – eine Frauenzeitschrift*, presents the themes and issues of the magazine, which closely resemble an inventory of feminist theory and feminist struggles. Founded in 1974, *AUF* was one of the first magazines of its kind. The acronym *AUF* stands for *Aktion Unabhängiger Frauen (Action of Independent Women)*, a group that preceded the magazine by two years. Their motto is feminist, autonomous, and anti-hierarchical. Geber stresses the necessity to recurrently publish on the same issues, such as national fascism, migration, or violence. The same issues, she argues, do not remain the same over time, the conditions are changing and so the same questions become different questions and have to be critically addressed anew. *AUF* "has always been concerned with women's social and political issues, problems, and demands, as well as being a medium for socio-political education." *AUF*, built for the most part on volunteer work, has for decades provided a platform for feminist theorists and scholars in Austria and for international knowledge exchange. Eva Geber's own work as an author and writer has been paramount in rediscovering the positions of the women's movements of 20th-century Vienna, in particular her editorial work on the seminal writings of pioneering feminist philosopher Rosa Mayreder in the late 1980s.

On the occasion of a bottom-up exhibition project, which was shown at the *Wien Museum/Vienna Museum*, historian Vida Bakondy researched the lives of immigrant women who were recruited as part of the foreign workers agreements between Austria and Turkey in 1964, which was followed by a similar agreement between Austria and Yugoslavia in 1966. The history of immigration was ominously absent from the official narrative of the history

of the City of Vienna offered by the municipal *Wienmuseum/Vienna Museum*. The conventional perception of foreign workers is gendered, marginalizing female immigrants within the history of immigration, sometimes almost forgetting the very existence of female immigrant labor. “Statistically, more men than women did immigrate to Austria, but I was astonished at how many requests for female workers were listed in the recruitment files in early years, even in the early 1960s.” The exhibition *Gastarbeiteri. 40 Jahre Arbeitsmigration/Gastarbeiteri. 40 Years of Labor Migration* took place at the *Wien Museum/Vienna Museum* in 2004 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Agreement on the Recruitment of Foreign Workers between Austria and Turkey. It was a curatorial effort by the *Initiative Minderheiten/Minorities Initiative* and only accepted by the museum following their initiative. To this very day, these historical events have been neglected in Austria’s official culture of history and remembrance.

Ridding History of its Drama is a conversation between VALIE EXPORT and Rudolfine Lackner focusing on the complexities and contradictions of the politics of remembrance about the *Austrian Association of Women Artists/Vereinigung Bildender Künstlerinnen Österreichs VBKÖ*. The history of this association is both paradigmatic and symptomatic for the local history of Vienna’s feminist art movement, and feminist politics in general. Founded in 1910, the early years of the *Austrian Association of Women Artists* was marked by progressive politics, followed by a conservative turn and Aryanization during the Nazi period, silence and continuity during the post-war period, and a recent rediscovery by a critical and queer-feminist perspective in the 21st century. VALIE EXPORT points out that in 1971, when she began to conceptualize *MAGNA*, there was no looking back, no search for the possible continuation of a Viennese feminist art movement, only the search for contemporary perspectives on an international scale. “I was already familiar with the *VBKÖ* while researching for my exhibition *MAGNA. Feminism, Art and Creativity*, in the 1970s. However, I didn’t draw them into the project because I only wanted to exhibit and present contemporary art, not the early history of the women’s artistic and political movements.” The terror of Nazism and the decades of its aftermath also precluded an easy identification with earlier emancipatory feminist politics and feminist art movements.⁵

5 In 2013, the new board of the *VBKÖ* consisted of Elke Auer, Veronika Dirnhofer, Lina Dokuzovic, Hilde Fuchs, Nina Höchtl, Ruby Sircar, Esther Straganz, and Julia Wieger. On the *VBKÖ*’s website, they address the complex historical entanglements. “Organizations such as the *VBKÖ* demonstrate the complexities and contradictions of contemporary feminist history-writing: This is where the emancipatory history of an artistic women’s movement, dating back to the days of imperialism and which still has yet to be inscribed into official art history, meets the history of the collaboration with the Nazi regime. Through knowledge gaps – resulting from historical and internal fractures in the association’s own

Art and cultural historian Elisabeth von Dücker describes the original motivation behind her feminist curatorial strategies as being the result of her involvement with the political women’s movement in Germany in the mid-1970s. Dücker emphasizes that, to her, “the issue of gender politics is an issue of democracy”. Her curatorial strategies included interventions into the hegemonic logic of narrating the history of labor. She exemplified these in her groundbreaking work on the the spatial and economic genderedness of labor, gender politics, and gender hierarchies at the *Hamburg Museum of Labour/Museum der Arbeit* in the years between 1985 and 2007. Currently, von Dücker dedicates her curatorial activism to the *FrauenFreiluftGalerie Hamburg/Women’s OpenAirGallery Hamburg*.

Feminist historian Li Gerhalter presents the *Collection of Women’s Estates Vienna* at the *Department of History, University of Vienna*. The almost 200 estates from the 19th and 20th century contain a wide range of different textual materials ranging from household records to typed notes and diaries. Gerhalter stresses that the materials of the collection challenge historical paradigms. Currently, they aim to expand the collection by actively searching for the estates of female emigrants from Austria and female immigrants to Austria. “An important further aspect of the collection of personal documents is the differentiation and expansion of the definitions of document genres, which for a long time were determined by strict literary criteria. Along with this came judgements of what, for example, is a ‘good diary’ and what is not a ‘good diary’ and, accordingly, what is worthwhile to research.”

Artist Barbara Blasin initiated the *Zagreb Women’s Guide* together with critic Igor Marković. They used the format of a book, realized by the *Urban Festival* in Zagreb and a collective public manifestation of this new topography of women. They used the city as their public museum, activating it as a performance. Their goal was to create feminist politics of remembrance in public space. Blasin’s and Marković’s research led to the discovery of forgotten or virtually unknown biographies of Zagreb women, including a female chimneysweep in 1870, the first female conductor of the Zagreb Electric Tramway in 1911, a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, and a five-time, super-productive worker in the Ivančica factory in 1947.

Elke Krasny’s essay connects the political dimensions of space and memory, spaces of, by, and for women and their public demands. “Space is needed to carry on the discussion. And resources. Museums (could) have the capacity to act as a forum for the public. This includes women and men,

history – history-writing and research, in regard to National Socialism and the association’s class-specific and colonial entanglements, are more easily forgotten.” (www.vbkoe.org)

as well as many other differentiations. The conflicts could and would become programmatic if the diversity of histories led to other questions. The discontinuous history of women's movements, women's spaces, and women's stories would be a good starting point. There is no women's museum in Vienna. There are many women's museums in Vienna. Every museum could also be a women's museum, something we are still very far away from. Just how far away is up to the battles and the actions set to create spaces."

The contributions to the third part of this volume address issues of activist curating within the hegemonic logics and hierarchies of conventional museums. The need for a public for feminist historical scholarship and feminist artistic interventions into history leads to either the creation of self-organized platforms or to temporary alliances with existing institutions. The immigrant and globalized condition of contemporary, and much of historical, urban life requires expanded fields of research and innovative paradigms of interdisciplinary crossovers. Strategic alliances of feminism, postcolonialism, immigrant histories, and politics of remembrance form new alignments and unions. Spatialization, both in theoretical and practical terms, is key to making public many of the issues raised.

Feminism has come of age. For over forty years, the fields of art, art history, history, curatorship, and education have been marked by feminism's impact and continuing struggle for transformation. The 1980s and the decades that followed have witnessed the mostly self-instituted and activist foundation of women's museums and of women's museum initiatives in Germany, Italy, Senegal, the US, Canada, Vietnam, Korea, Sudan, Vietnam, Spain, Norway, Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, the Ukraine, Albania, and Switzerland, to name just a few. So far, no comprehensive comparative analysis or critical historiographical study on women's museums and their exhibitions and curatorial languages has been put forward. In 1997, Gerlinde Hauer, Roswitha Muttenthaler, and Anna Schober published their ground-breaking study *Das inszenierte Geschlecht: Feministische Strategien im Museum/Staged Gender: Feminist Strategies in Museums*, and Roswitha Muttenthaler and Regina Wonisch have since continued to publish critically on issues of gender and race in museum shows. In 2009, the *Frauenmuseen weltweit/Women's Museums Worldwide* exhibition catalogue was published under the editorial guidance of the director of the *Bonn Women's Museum/Frauenmuseum Bonn*, Marianne Pitzen. *Frauenmuseen weltweit* provides an overview of women's museums based on their own descriptions.

With regard to the *International Association of Women's Museums* founded in 2012 and to the transgressive⁶ contemporary feminist politics of curating, it is of importance to understand that they are deeply steeped both in the local and the global. Rarely do debates on women's museums and the contemporary strategies of feminist curating intersect or even find common ground. This publication enters the risky territory of in-between, bringing together voices from the different fields of curatorship at women's museums and independent feminist curatorial knowledge production. The conditions of the global art world call for critical feminist perspectives on globalization and interventions in neoliberalism. The writing of art's histories calls for critical materialist analysis and for strategies of articulation on intersectional differences as well as alliances based on similarity and inclusion. This said, it becomes clear that there can be no single position of women's museums or of activist feminist agency in curatorship. Rather, both the involved practices of women's museums and the political project of feminist curating are, above all, issues of analytical vigilance and of radically situated curatorial ethics. Curating is thus understood dually as dialogical bridging and nuanced differentiation between the fields of activism, art, art history, education, feminism, history, and theory. Further research and in-depth scholarship on women's museums and on the cartography and historiography of feminist curating are much needed for working towards a feminist future in curating, and beyond. This volume aims to make a contribution toward this future feminist project of transgressive curatorial agency by risking entrance into the uncharted territory of dialogue between women's museums and critical feminist curatorial practices.

6 The term transgressive is owed to Angela Dimitrakaki's and Lara Perry's *Politics in a Glass Case. Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*.

WOMEN'S
: MUSEUM
FRAUEN
: MUSEUM

CURATORIAL POLITICS
IN FEMINISM, EDUCATION,
HISTORY, AND ART

POLITIKEN DES KURATORISCHEN
IN FEMINISMUS, BILDUNG,
GESCHICHTE UND KUNST

EDITED BY
HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
ELKE KRASNY + FRAUENMUSEUM MERAN

LÖCKER

Women's:Museum
Curatorial Politics in Feminism,
Education, History, and Art

Frauen:Museum
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in Feminismus, Bildung,
Geschichte und Kunst

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