

The Sun

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A Sprawling, Riotous Argument Museums

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What electric, various, and searching art women have been making over the past 17 years. I don't know what "Global Feminisms" will tell you about feminist thought around the world, but this sprawling and magnificently in-your-face exhibition will certainly clue you in to the range and power of art made by women since 1990.

Organized for the Brooklyn Museum by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, to inaugurate the new Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, the show also coincides with the 30th anniversary of the museum's exhibition "Women Artists 1550–1950" (also co-organized by Ms. Nochlin) of 1977. While the latter exhibition was a historical survey, "Global Feminisms" includes work made since 1990 by more than 100 artists, none born before 1960.

Of course, it is a show for argument. You can quibble with its selection: There are any number of artists absent who seem to deserve an invitation to this feast. Still, the selection is generously diverse, with 50 countries represented as well as every genre of contemporary art.

It encompasses the brutally painted topographies of Jenny Saville's "Fulcrum" (1999), a huge study of obese female bodies, the whimsy of Amy Cutler's multiple self-portrait in gouache, "Army of Me" (2003), and the bitter humor of Angela de la Cruz's

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"Self" (1997), in which a brown-stained canvas on a wall faces a similar canvas smashed and sitting on an old armchair.

Feminism here is interpreted broadly enough to accept Julika Rudelius's three-channel video, "Tagged" (2003), a film of young men talking about clothing, as well as "Fountain" (2000), a nearly hour-long DVD by CananSenol, of two breasts dripping milk. It can take the form of wry realism, as in Melanie Manchot's 2003 photograph of a topless older woman, laughing under a blue, cloud-strewn sky, and Catherine

Opie's justly famous "Self-Portrait/Nursing" (2004), a photograph of the heavy-set, tattooed, and scarified artist — insistently not looking like a Madonna — nursing a blond child. Or the feminism can be as fantastical as Patricia Piccinini's "Big Mother" (2005), a naked, 69-inch-high silicone-and-fiberglass baboonwoman (an imaginary genetic hybrid created for surrogate motherhood) nursing a human child next to two studded, blue-leather diaper bags.

Although the politics on display here tend toward the personal, they have a wide decibel range. In Tracey Rose's photograph "Venus Baartman" (2001), a nude black woman crouching in a field poses as the 19th-century Venus Hottentot. "I Am Milica Tomic" (1998–99), a single-channel video, presents the artist, a woman in a white cocktail dress, confessing Serbian crimes — and with each crime a bloody wound appears on her body. Subtler are, for example, Kara Walker's silkscreen prints from the "Emancipation Approximation" (1999–2000) series, biting silhouettes playing on historic racial stereotypes.

If not with the selection, you might argue with individual pieces. Certainly there will be those who take issue with Mary Coble's single-channel video "Binding Ritual, Daily Routine" (2004), wherein a woman with a Mohawk wraps her bare chest with duct tape, and then painfully tears it off, or with Sigalit Landau's video of a naked woman using a barbed-wire hula hoop.

No doubt others will want to dispute the very premise of the show. However, the organizers have beaten them to the punch, having astutely put together an exhibition that argues with itself. The discussions are often implicit and visual, but can also point to examples from the printed artist statements. Next to Lee Bul's spidery, sci-fi sculpture, "Ein Hungerkünstler" (2004), is the statement: "If my work addresses or makes use of my perceptions ... as a woman, then that is because my gender in an inescapable part of who I am, and it necessarily plays a part in shaping my aesthetic concerns and methods. But it is by no means the only or the most important factor." Similarly, Iskra Dimitrova's statement begins, "I cannot say that my identity as a woman is a direct subject in my work."

I would make the case that, whatever else it is, "Global Feminisms" is a riot of compelling artworks that happen to have been made by women — a riot you will want to attend. But no matter what your argument, do yourself a favor: See the show before you make it.

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