

ENGAGÉES

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Long ignored and denied recognition, women artists were dominated by patriarchal societies and eclipsed in art history. It wasn't until the social movements and feminist struggles of the 1960s that they gained visibility, not only as artists but also as women. This legacy had a profound impact on the artists of the time and on subsequent generations, paving the way for greater consideration of their demands and their art. In 2025, the Villa Datris Foundation invites you to discover the work of 64 committed artists from all over the world, exhibiting works that question major contemporary issues. Feminists, ecofeminists, human rights defenders, anti-racism campaigners and proponents of the freedom to control their own bodies, the artists chosen are involved in struggles that are still essential today. The exhibition highlights the invisibility of women and the persistence of their struggles, reminding us how crucial it is to preserve the rights they have acquired. ENGAGÉES' also aims to raise awareness of the many battles still to be fought.

Embryonising the fight!

Since the Renaissance, the path leading women to practise the arts and gain access to official recognition has been fraught with pitfalls. Under the Ancien Régime, the Royal Academy refused to allow them to study nude anatomy, a prerequisite for competing in historical painting. In response, competing academies opened in Paris. After the Revolution, they were able to compete for the Prix de Rome, compete in historical painting, exhibit at the Salon and enter state collections.

While the 19th century was quick to pit the sexes against each other and relegate female artists to the status of housewives, the very seeds of the notion of the avant-garde animated their state of mind. This desire for independence was reflected in the desire to distance themselves from the studio master with whom they trained.

Engaging the body, liberating speech

As the continent and its institutions were rebuilt in the aftermath of the Second World War, the women of the 1960s and 1970s became aware of their femininity in a shocking way. In the United States and Europe, feminism blossomed against a backdrop of frustration and fear. Women got involved when it came to questioning gender distinctions, which continued to be a fundamental category of our cultural system.

A site of subjugation since the dawn of time, language has become an art form for the “engaged”, an art form that induces action: words are plastered all over the place as much as they are published in secrecy. Whether the aim is to make a statement or to achieve the desired goal, language aims to deconstruct stereotypes, bring together multiple identities, address gender inequality and denounce power structures...

Committed, engaged, enraged

These pioneering activists are appropriating and transforming techniques that are said to be specific to women according to a 'natural order'. They dismantled the stereotype of 'biological necessity', weaving and knitting on such a scale that monumentality prevailed and fibre took on the powers of sculpture.

In retrospect, textile art embodies a profound, even existential liberation for artists who feel: committed (militant), engaged (married) and enraged (activist). This trilogy continued in subsequent generations, who responded to the issues of their times, with the incredulous question formulated by Linda Nochlin in 1971 in her essay: Why haven't there been any great women artists?

Visual activism, social activism

The result is a permeability of means of expression, a decompartmentalisation of mediums and sources. No longer just a model, muse and subject of the arts, women are reclaiming their bodies through performance. Skin, sensuality and sexuality span the historic years of happening. By joining forces with the image, performance contributes to the visual and social activism of art against violence.

Resisting, imagining

In the 1990s, artists turned their attention from political issues to ethical ones. Afro-American, Indian and African artists from North to South were interested in the convergences of the colonialist legacy. They are reopening the issue of history and places of memory, and reclaiming their visibility.

Through myth, ecofeminists are committed to protecting ecosystems and defending minorities. Through reparative cartographies and utopian architectures, art is taking the path of denouncing forms of mistreatment of living things and celebrating their astonishing resilience.

Exhibition curators: Danièle Marcovici and Stéphane Baومت