Satirical Warfare: Guerrilla Girls' Performance and Activism from 1985-1995

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SATIRICAL WARFARE: GUERRILLA GIRLS’ PERFORMANCE AND ACTIVISM
FROM 1985-1995

by

Stephanie L. Rhyner

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ABSTRACT

SATIRICAL WARFARE: GUERRILLA GIRLS’ PERFORMANCE AND ACTIVISM FROM 1985-1995

by

Stephanie L. Rhyner

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015
Under the Supervision of Professor Jennifer Johung

In the spring of 1985, a group of seven female artists sat down in the loft of “Frida Kahlo” after the failed protest of MOMA’s show An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture, which featured a total of 169 artists, 13 of which were female. On this day, the Guerrilla Girls were formed and called themselves “the conscience of the art world.” The Guerrilla Girls entered the 1980s in a crucial period for feminism and activism, which included a change from second to third wave feminism, the forming of groups like ACT-Up against the government’s treatment of the AIDS epidemic, and NEA controversies. For this thesis, I will be interrogating the Guerrilla Girls’ actions, focusing specifically on their emergence in 1985 and work up until 1995, framing them in the theoretical terminology of performance theory. Although this group is first and foremost an activist group, each one of their actions, which include posters, speeches, letter writing campaigns, books, protests, and exhibitions, are all part of their performance as activists in opposition to art world discrimination. The methodology for this paper will include a discussion of three sections, which will allow me to interrogate feminist street art and activism through performance theory: female sexuality as represented in public and cultural performance, satire and play in the display of posters, and the performance of gender. This theoretical terminology (gender performativity, play, satire, public
performance, etc.) when used to frame a particular Guerrilla Girl poster, outfit, mask, or action allows us to understand that particular object in this more complex context of 1980s feminism and performance and to see the Guerrilla Girls not only as activists, but also performance artists.
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I also thank my parents, Chris and Nancy Rhyner, and my sisters Alicia and Sarah, for continuing to support me during these two years. I know that they did not always understand what I have been working on or why, but I know they will always
support me in all of my choices. I would also like to mention my best friend of 16 years, Lisa Koslowski, for continuing to be my rock everyday no matter what.

I dedicate this project to the continuation of art history in public colleges like UW Milwaukee that inspire and challenge the way students look at their world and the art that surrounds them.
In the spring of 1985, a group of seven female artists sat down in the loft of “Frida Kahlo” in SoHo to discuss their anger at Kynaston McShine, a curator at MOMA, for stating that any artist not involved in the exhibition “An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture” should reexamine his career. These women decided to take action, and thus formed the anonymous activist art collective the Guerrilla Girls and called themselves the “conscience of the art world.” With subversive postering and protests, this group captivated the streets of New York to thwart the male-centric art scene. The Guerrilla Girls became notorious in less than a year. In 1985, they were asked to put on the exhibition “The Night the Palladium Apologized” and their work was highlighted in exhibitions as early as 1987 with “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney” (Figure 1). Why, however, did the Guerrilla Girls become an integral part of the art scene dialogue in less than a year, while similar groups like Art Workers Coalition and Guerrilla Arts Action Group only 10 years prior had disbanded after less than six years of activism? The Guerrilla Girls came in a thriving period of activism and performance with a combination of elements that the art world could not ignore: performance, public caricature, anonymity, playfulness, satire, and honest statistics and facts. Critics, scholars, and curators today, including those who were mocked in early posters such as Mary Boone (Figure 2), state that the Guerrilla Girls were catalysts for change in the artistic community of the 1980s.

This group is an important part of 1980s feminism, performance art, and activism. The 1980s marked a profusion of scholarly work and art and was a time of varied debates about pornography, sexual representation, power, lesbian and gay subjectivities, race, and

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class, all amid culture wars, NEA controversies, and AIDS activism. The Guerrilla Girls were formed at a time when second wave feminism was being replaced by third wave feminism amidst the feminist sex wars. Feminism was taking part in numerous debates about pornography, sexual representation, and the individual versus the collective. Activism was also thriving with groups like ACT-UP, which was formed in 1987 to protest the government’s treatment of the AIDS epidemic. Performance art, according to RoseLee Goldberg, was moving primarily into theatres and museums, as the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s and 1970s had been replaced by a move back towards costumes, set, lighting, cabaret, vaudeville, and opera to critique and experiment with the conventional concepts of theatre.  

For this thesis, I will be interrogating the Guerrilla Girls’ actions, focusing specifically on their emergence in 1985 and work up until 1995, utilizing the theoretical terminology of performance theory.  Although the Guerrilla Girls are first and foremost activists, all of their posters, speeches, letter writing campaigns, books, protests, and exhibitions are a part of their performance as activists in opposition to art world discrimination. My methodology for this thesis will include interrogating three sections, which will allow me to examine feminist street art and activism through performance theory. These sections include: poster ing and early exhibitions as public and cultural performance, satire and play in the display of posters, and their performance of gender

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3 In 2001, “Kathe Kollwitz” and “Frida Kahlo” began a lawsuit against other Guerrilla Girl groups which split them into three separate groups: Guerrilla Girls Inc., Guerrilla Girls Broadband, and the Guerrilla Girls. Beyond 2001, the Guerrilla Girls’ work becomes much more complex, as they become three separate entities with differing agendas. This discussion and performance of their work beyond 2001 merits another separate argument and thesis.
through fashion and masks. I will also ask questions such as: How do these three elements contribute to the oeuvre of the Guerrilla Girls? How are artists like the Guerrilla Girls working within and outside of these performed roles? Are they successful or counterintuitive? Do they force the public to ask new questions? How does the terminology of performance change the way that we view activism? I will engage with these three areas of performance theory in specific moments of Guerrilla Girls actions to answer and rethink some of these questions. This theoretical terminology (gender performativity, play, satire, public performance, etc.) when used to frame a particular Guerrilla Girl poster, outfit, mask, or action allows us to understand that particular object in this more complex context of 1980s feminism and performance and to see the Guerrilla Girls not only as activists, but also as performance artists.

In the first chapter, I will interrogate the Guerrilla Girls through the terminology of public and cultural performance. Early in their career, the Guerrilla Girls embraced public activism, with their posterering and participation in rallies and protests. These posters and actions were often a “gateway to the masses,” 4 which gave the Guerrilla Girls visibility in 1985. They also participated in more private protests, such as sending letters to particular critics and curators, which included giving awards such as “The Apologist of the Year Award” to the female critic Kim Levin for reviewing a show by David Salle without dealing with his misogynistic imagery. 5 Although they were originally street artists, the Guerrilla Girls began participating in shows and critiquing the institutions from within, such as “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney” in 1987 (Figure

1). On these walls, the Guerrilla Girls were asking for museums to question the standards for female participation in exhibitions such as the Whitney Biennial. In actions such as these, the Guerrilla Girls embraced these performances inside and outside museums to protest overt favoritism of male artists in art institutions.

In the second chapter, I will investigate the Guerrilla Girls’ work through the examination of the term “play.” As defined by Richard Schechner (2002), performance is “ritualized behavior conditioned/permeated by play.” 6 In the 20th century, psychologists and scholars became re-interested in the concept of play. These psychologists, who I will be discussing in my thesis, include J. Huizinga (1970), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975), Don Handelman (1977), Victor Turner (1986), and Brian Sutton-Smith (1997). While play can be discussed in the context of ritual, sports, and competition, the definition I will be utilizing is the use of play to subvert power through parody and satire. The Guerrilla Girls are also involved in what Schechner calls “dark play,” which is playing with satire and mockery to “subvert the meta-communicative message ‘this is play.’” 7 In this context, something is presented as a joke, when the artist is really employing this tactic to force the viewer’s attention on something more sinister and serious. This concept applies to the interrogation of works by the Guerilla Girls such as *The Advantages of Being a Female Artist* (1989) (Figure 3). This poster has a list of 13 advantages, which include “working without the pressure of success” and “being included in revised versions of art history.” While these are written as jokes, they comment on the severe lack of female artists in museums and art history. This chapter will substantiate the Guerrilla Girls’ place

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7 Ibid., 107.
in performance vocabulary, specifically looking at their posters and language, as they critiqued and invalidated the patriarchal order through this use of play and satire.

The third and final chapter will focus on the Guerrilla Girls’ performance of gender. In this chapter, I will be focusing on the Guerrilla Girls’ gender performance through the wearing of masks, fashion, and use of pink decorative script. In the Guerrilla Girls’ activist work, they take the signifiers of gender conventions and subvert them through extremes and transgressive public strategies as they are critiquing the gender constructs propagated by society. These actions not only become activist moments in publically displaying these norms to manipulate conventional concepts of gender, but also established norms surrounding museums spaces. In this chapter, I will also be discussing “gender performativity.” In 1988, Judith Butler defined “gender performativity” as a condition for the reproduction of gender norms, whether intentionally or unconsciously. These actions are sustained and embodied over a lifetime, which give individuals a convoluted and complicated understanding of their gender and sexuality. According to Richard Schechner, “each individual from an early age learns to perform gender-specific vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks, and erotic behavior as well as how to select, modify and use scenes, body shapes and adornments, clothing, and all other gender markings of a given society.” Gender performativity is not something applied or something to be involved in, but rather a means of understanding particular embodied events and actualities in and of a specifically material world. Butler coined these ideas within the first three years of the Guerrilla Girls’ activist work, and thus this term is valuable in discussing the 1980s activism, performance, and feminism.

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All of these above concepts: public and cultural performance, play, and the performance of gender, promote the Guerrilla Girls as activists fighting for the rights of disenfranchised groups through their public and private activist actions.
CHAPTER 1: PUBLIC AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

In 1985, the Guerrilla Girls began their activist work by covering areas of New York City with their insurgent public posters. As they postered the streets of SoHo, the East Village, and the Tribeca neighborhoods in Manhattan, they were engaging with the burgeoning activist, performance, and feminist scene of the 1980s. To contextualize the Guerrilla Girls in this history, I will begin this chapter with an overall analysis of the Guerrilla’s position within these 1980s movements. This will not only set up my discussion of the performance of the Guerrilla Girls on the streets and within museums, but give an overall context of the Guerrilla Girls’ work for later discussions on play and the performance of gender. After this historical analysis, I will then be able to articulate the Guerrilla Girls’ public and cultural performances on the streets and within museums spaces. While the Guerrilla Girls have called their work “public service messages” while others have called them “interventions” as they are site-specific and instant-specific, I will be articulating the Guerrilla Girls’ performances on the streets and within museum spaces through the dialogue of public and cultural performance. I will be employing the definition of public performance as defined by Bradford D. Martin in 2004 as the performance of spectacles in spaces open to the general public that avoid conventional cultural spaces such as museums and theatres. In doing this, the public performance reaches out to the masses, and forces the viewers to perform with these street posters and their requests. In some of their original posters, such as What Do These

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Artists Have in Common? (1985), (Figure 4) the spectator is forced in public spaces to perform and react to a list of prominent artists who were exhibited at this time in galleries that showed 10% (or less) female artists.

After looking at the public performances of the Guerrilla Girls in their initial posterling, I will also consider the cultural performance of their works in museum spaces in specific exhibitions such as “The Night the Palladium Apologized” (1985) and “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney” (1987). In this section, I will be defining cultural performance as performances in which social norms are considered and questioned, and often challenged and rethought to enact changes in social and societal constructs. As they perform in public spaces to reach out to the masses, they also perform culturally to change not only how the general public feels about art institutions, but also how museum attendees and institutions view themselves. I will argue that these exhibitions, similarly to the street posters, performed within institutional spaces so that they functioned less as “exhibitions” and more as performed actions and moments for the spectator to engage with the critiques of these spaces on the museum walls. Through these moments in the streets and within museums, the Guerrilla Girls’ performances as activists strived to alter the perceptions of institutionalized spaces through their exhibition and poster actions.

FEMINISM, PERFORMANCE, AND ACTIVISM OF THE 1980s

Even before the Guerrilla Girls was founded in 1985, agit-prop feminist art collectives of the 1970s had attempted to secure a place for the disenfranchised in museums through public performances and protests within the museums. Art Workers Coalition and the Guerrilla Art Action Group were two artist collectives that were the precursors to the Guerrilla Girls. In 1969, AWC drafted a list of demands for MOMA,
which requested greater representation of African American and Latino artists in their exhibitions, more artistic freedom, and to make museums more available to the general working class. ¹¹ AWC, along with Art Strike and others formed the Ad Hoc Women Artists Committee, who, in 1970, criticized the Whitney Museum’s Annual Exhibition for showing too few female artists and requested with pamphlets, posters, and even placing raw eggs and tampons in the exhibition spaces, for the exhibition to have 50% female participation. ¹² GAAG, as an extension of AWC, performed actions that were much more provocative and controversial. In 1969, two men and two women wrestled in the lobby of MOMA, but quickly left behind a pool of animal blood and a list of demands, including a request that the Rockefeller family resign from the museum’s board. Although museums changed some of their ways by adding more female artists to their exhibitions, these groups both disbanded in the early 1970s without much change.

While activist groups such as AWC and GAAG were the forerunners to groups like the Guerrilla Girls, the Guerrilla Girls were formed in a disparate cultural milieu. By the late 1970s, second wave feminism was being replaced by third wave feminism,¹³ while the feminist sex wars were being fought over female sexuality and pornography. In 1970s, second wave feminists fought under the slogan “the personal is the political.” As some women were involved in groups and protests in the 1960s to 1970s such as GAAG and AWC, second wave feminists were turning inwards to redefine how they viewed

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¹² Ibid., 156.

¹³ The term “third wave feminism” would be coined in 1992 by Rebecca Walker.
themselves, the everyday, the domestic, and the specifically embodied. In focusing internally and on their own individual experience, they could then begin to contemplate their individualized lives in relation to a larger systematic network of oppression. This time period included performance artists like Carolee Schneemann, with her performance *Interior Scroll* (1975), which critiqued the “sexist creeds” of the art world. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, third wave feminism sought to destabilize outdated constructs of sexuality, gender, the body, and heternormativity, among other discussions. While Carolee Schneemann and Karen Finley had gained prominence by the 1970s, 1980s performance was turning towards theaters, costumes, and sets. Even though performance artists like John Kelly, Anne Magnusson, The Alien Comic, and Ethyl Eichelberger were still thriving, performance artists like James Neu, Spalding Grey, and Richard Foreman, were turning farther away from conceptual performance and anti-establishing idealism of their forefathers and towards the commercial business of art making and experimenting with conventional concepts of the theatre.

In the spring of 1985 within these changes in feminism and performance, the Guerrilla Girls would begin their activist work with protests and postering against MOMA’s exhibition “An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture,” where less than 10 percent of the artists were women, and 100 percent of them were white.”

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15 Ibid., 14.

16 While terms like second and third wave feminism are much more highly contested then I am able to discuss here, I am utilizing them to place the Guerrilla Girls in the larger context of 1970s and 1980s feminism.


18 Ibid., 190.

original 1985 posters included What Do These Artists Have In Common? (Figure 4), How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year? (Figure 5), These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None at All (Figure 2), and These Critics Don’t Write Enough about Women Artists (Figure 6). These posters were put up overnight in SoHo, the East Village, and the Tribeca neighborhoods in Manhattan. In a very short amount of time, the Guerrilla Girls were being talked and written about by numerous journalists and critics, including several critics that had been critiqued in the poster These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None at All (Figure 2), such as Mary Boone, Holland Cotter, and Hilton Cramer. Cramer would even name them “quota queens,” which is a nickname that has stayed with them since their inception. In 1985, the Guerrilla Girls would be asked to curate an all female show “The Night the Palladium Apologized” at The Palladium, which was a well-known club in New York known for showcasing only male artists.

In 1986 to 1987, the Guerrilla Girls continued to poster on the streets of New York, including Guerrilla Girls’ 1986 Report Card (Figure 7), which graded galleries and curators, such as Blum Helman, Diane Brown, and Allan Frumkin, on their lack of women artists in their exhibitions. At this time, the Guerrilla Girls were also doing more singular, private protests against curators and critics. They gave out satirical awards, such as “The Most Patronizing Art Review of 1986” to John Russell and the “Norman Mailer Award” for sensitivity to issues in gender equality to Frank Stella for saying he liked the “muscular” work of “girl” artists like Helen Frankenthaler. In 1987, they were featured

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at the Whitney Biennial in The Clocktower in NYC in the exhibition “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney” (Figure 1). On the walls of this gallery, the Guerilla Girls would critique the Whitney Biennial, which was curated by Richard Armstrong, John G. Hanhardt, Richard Marshall, and Lisa Phillips and included artists like Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, and Sol LeWitt.  

Works such as Well Hung at the Whitney: Biennial Gender Census 1973-1987 (Figure 8) and the interactive game Can You Score Better than the Whitney Curators? (Figure 9) graced the walls of The Clocktower. By 1988 (until today), the Guerrilla Girls were being featured in numerous exhibitions such as “Unity: A Collaborative Process” in Goddard, Riverside NYC and “The Print Club” in Philadelphia. They were also continuing to poster all over NYC with The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist (1988/1989) (Figure 3) and At Last! Museums Will No Longer Discriminate Against Women and Minority Artists (Figure 10). In 1989 and 1990, they created some of their works Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? (Figure 11) and Guerrilla Girls’ Pop Quiz (Figure 12).

In the 1980s, while more prominent aged artists such as Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra were being highly praised by the art community, street artists were also being commercially placed in institutions and museums. While street poster artists like Jenny Holzer and her Truisms (1977-9) had gained prominence in museums, other street artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiet had become institutionalized by 1985. These two men had gained popularity in the 1970s and were

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thrive in the mid-1980s. Their work similarly focused on social injustices, sexuality, AIDS culture, as well as racism, colonialism, and class struggle. Other street artists, like Richard Hambleton, Futura 2000, and Kenny Scharf (who was also in the Whitney Biennial in 1987) had also been featured in museums.

By 1991, the Guerrilla Girls were participating in an even larger activist scene and were creating posters that branched outside the art scene to politics such as George Bush: “The Education President” (Figure 13). In the 1980s and early 1990s, numerous art collectives and activist groups formed to protest injustices surrounding the Vietnam War, civil rights, military interventions in Central America, AIDS activism, and NEA controversies like ACT-UP (1987), Gran Fury (1988), DIVA TV (1989), and Fierce Pussy (1991). Fierce Pussy, for example, created the street posters Are you a boy or girl?” and Find the dyke in this picture. Not unlike the Guerrilla Girls, these groups would draw on graphics of pop art and performance art, institutional critique, and appropriation art. Moreover, in 1991 when the Guerrilla Girls put up their billboard First they want to take away a woman’s right to choose, Now They’re Censoring Art (Figure 14), in 1992, ACT-UP and Felix Gonzalez-Torres were creating billboards like Billboard of Bed, which protested issues surrounding the AIDS epidemic.

By 1990-1995, the Guerrilla Girls were still being presented in exhibitions, including “The Guerilla Girls Talk Back: A Retrospective” (1991), which toured for five years. They also continued to poster the streets, which included The Guerrilla Girls Proclaim Internet Too Male, Too Pale! (Figure 15). However, by this time, they began to

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23 Both Haring and Basquiet were featured on the Guerrilla Girl Poster What Do These Artists Have In Common? (Figure 4).
focus more on community outreach and public speeches/performances rather than street postering. Starting in 1995, they started writing books, which now include a total of four: *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls* (1995), *The Guerrilla Girls’ Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (1998), *Bitches, Bimbos, and Ballbreakers* (2003), and *The Guerrilla Girls’ Art Museum Activity Book* (2012). It is important to foreground this historical context of the 1980s as the foundation for understanding the Guerrilla Girls as performance artists. These posters, however, from 1985-1995 really set the groundwork for understanding the Guerrilla Girls as public and cultural performers of the 1980s.

PUBLIC AND CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

Although the terms public and cultural performance are complicated to define, scholars like John McKenzie (2001) and Bradford D. Martin (2004) would define these terms in their work after the 1970s and 80s. Public performance, as defined by Bradford D. Martin in 2004, is “a self-conscious, stylized tactic of staging songs, plays, parades, protests, and other spectacles in the public places where no admission is charged and spectators are often invited to participate, and it conveys symbolic messages about social and political issues to audiences who might not have encountered them in more traditional venues.” These groups often moved to the streets to leave behind “bourgeois cultural venues such as theaters, concert halls, and museums and to democratize culture by trying to communicate with broader audiences where the performer-activists encountered them, most often, in the streets.”

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25 Public performance can also be called other terms, such as “street performance” or “postmodern street performance.”
26 Martin, *The Theater is in the Street*, 3.
27 Ibid., 10.
In 1985, the Guerrilla Girls original public street posters, such as *What Do These Artists Have In Common?* (Figure 4), *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?* (Figure 5), *These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None at All* (Figure 2), and *These Critics Don’t Write Enough about Women Artists* (Figure 6), were glued up around the neighborhoods of SoHo, the East Village, and the Tribeca neighborhoods in Manhattan. These locations were markedly important for the art world, as they were the center for performance art in the 1970s and early 1980s. SoHo in the 1970s had been a location for artist-occupied lofts in downtown Manhattan where new performances and artistic experiences were being performed.\(^{28}\)

Working in lofts, storefronts, and alternative spaces, performance and dance artists like Jack Smith, Michael Smith, Vito Acconci, and Laurie Anderson were creating performances that are today categorized as object theater, loft performance, and new psychodrama.\(^{29}\) J. Hoberman (2013) described this as a time when “theatrical and living and gallery spaces merged,”\(^{30}\) as these performance artists created some of the foundational works of performance theory.

While many of these artists and performances had been shown in exhibitions by the 1980s, SoHo and Manhattan were still important to the performance and arts community of the 80s. SoHo was still a location for lofts of artists and activists, like “Frida Kahlo” a member of the Guerrilla Girls, whose loft was the original location for their first meeting. It is likely then, to some extent, that the Guerrilla Girls were postering

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\(^{29}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.
in SoHo and Lower Manhattan because these were the places they lived and created their own art. However, according to Elizabeth Hess (1995), during this time Wall Street executives and lawyers had also begun to move into SoHo, “transforming funky loft spaces into expensive condos and co-ops.”  

So as the Guerrilla Girls postered areas of NYC with their original activist objects like *Want to Earn Big Money in the Art World?* (Figure 16), they were not only for the art community to see, but also confronted high paying bourgeois males, like those appropriating these spaces in SoHo.

Additionally, the Guerrilla Girls publically performed in these locations in 1985 because these were not only the centers of artistic communities (SoHo), but these areas were not the popularized and tourist locations of Upper Manhattan museums, like MOMA and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. With the exception of the Edward Thorp Gallery and The Palladium, the Guerrilla Girls were reviewing galleries in their poster *These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None at All* (Figure 2) that were above 14th street, such as the Allan Frumkin Gallery, Pat Hearn Gallery, and Leo Castelli Gallery. Moreover, the Guerrilla Girls were not directly critiquing the galleries on the walls of their buildings, but instead displaying these posters for artistic communities of SoHo and non-artist groups of these areas to see and interpret. As Martin described in his definition, these public performers, like the Guerrilla Girls, were moving beyond these bourgeois cultural venues to interact with larger audiences on the everyday streets of New York.  

These spectacles were made by the Guerrilla Girls as a way to critique the museums outside of these supposedly conventional spaces of museum mile and Manhattan that were operated by the commercial art industry. While galleries and

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32 Martin, *The Theater is in the Street*, 10.
critics of Upper Manhattan were discussing the implications of these pithy posters very shortly after they were displayed in public spaces, the original audience were the individuals and inhabitants of trendy SoHo and Lower Manhattan. 33

While the Guerrilla Girls were also engaged with these public performances and spectacles to change perceptions of the heteronormative art world, they were also involved in what was later coined “cultural performance.” As defined in John McKenzie’s book _Perform or Else_ (2001), cultural performances are “‘occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.’” 34 In cultural performance, social norms are challenged and rethought, and usually become catalysts for personal and social change. The three parts of cultural performance are (1) social and personal “reflection through the dramatization or embodiment of symbolic forms” (2) “the presentation of alternative arrangements,” and (3) “the possibility of conservation and/or transformation.” 35 He goes on to state that “cultural performance scholars have also theorized our own activities in terms of liminality, arguing that we operate in the interstices of academia as well as the margins of social structures and seek to reflect upon and transform both the academy and society at large.” 36

As stated above, the Guerrilla Girls came at a crucial time for activism, performance, and feminism. These cultural performances by these groups in the mid-

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33 In Jan Cohen-Cruz’s book _Radical Street Performance_ (1998), she expands extensively and critically on topics of radical street performance and the occupation of the streets for commercial, bourgeois purposes.


35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 36.
1980s, like ACT-UP and the Guerrilla Girls, were not only gaining the attention of the masses in the streets, but also critiqued the norms of society that were often ignored. In posters like *Only 4 Commercial Galleries in N.Y. Show Black Women* (1986) (Figure 17), the Guerrilla Girls questioned the lack of not only women, but black women in galleries like Calvin-Morris and Condeso/Lawler. While this poster points to the exhibiting of only four black artists in all galleries in NYC, the poster continues with the even more harsh statement “Only 1 shows more than 1” (The Calvin-Morris Gallery).

In other posters such as *Want to Earn Big Money in the Art World?* (Figure 16), the image featured a dollar bill with a dashed line drawn over the right side. The caption stated: “Women in American earn only 2/3 of what men do. Women artists earn only 1/3 of what men do.” These statistics and short phrases of both posters asked the viewers to perform with these posters by contemplating these inequalities and to ask questions such as: Why and how does this discrimination continue to occur? Why are museums not held accountable for their lack of female representation? The viewer was able to engage with this cultural performance to ask why women, including ones of color, were left out of galleries and paid substantially less than male artists for their work, and why these issues and statistics were ignored by the arts community. These public and cultural performances enacted by the interaction of the viewer with the poster are at the core of the Guerrilla Girl work as they subvert the norms of museum culture and challenge the norms of contested street and public arenas outside of traditional museum spaces. By 1987, the Guerrilla Girls work became not only about these street public performances, but also about critiquing museum structures through cultural performance and institutional critique.
PERFORMING WITHIN MUSEUMS

As mentioned above, in the same year that the Guerrilla Girls began their street art, they were asked by The Palladium, a club in New York known for showcasing only male artists, to curate an exhibition of 100 female artists. During this exhibition, “The Night the Palladium Apologized,” the Guerrilla Girls selected 100 artists to be in their show. However, instead of orchestrating an open call, the artists were personally hand selected by the Guerrilla Girls. Unfortunately, key members quit the group in protest of this exhibition, stating “‘We couldn’t beat the system and join it at the same time…The group was moving in the wrong direction.’” After this disagreement, the Guerrilla Girls vowed to never create an exhibition again where they had to pick the artists out personally.

In 1987, they curated the “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney” at The Clocktower as a counterpoint to the Whitney Biennial (Figure 1), which received more press attention than any other action to date. For this exhibition, the Guerrilla Girls critiqued the museum from within, documenting the horrific statistics of this museum’s record on artists of color and women. The exhibited works included “Well Hung at the Whitney: Biennial Gender Census 1973 – 1987,” which featured downward hanging (and satirically phallocentric) columns showing how few female artists in comparison to male artists had been exhibited (Figure 8). An interactive game invited its viewers to “fire darts at a huge mammary gland representing the gender and racial breakdown of past

Biennials” 39 (Figure 9). While one Whitney curator complained that the exhibition was “...statically inaccurate, conceptually trite and physically unappealing...They should go back to their sensational posters,” 40 this exhibition is considered one of their most successful actions.

Initially, according to the Guerrilla Girls, the Whitney curators expected them to create a show that they would “want” in the Biennial. 41 Instead, the Guerrilla Girls exposed the museum’s record on exhibiting women and artists of color. The Guerrilla Girls relayed numerous statistics in their exhibition such as: the Whitney’s acquisition of art by women had never exceeded 14% in any year, male artists in the Biennial had their work purchased by the museum twice as much as female artists, and between 1982-1987, there had been only one solo female show at The Whitney. 42 Along with works like those in (Figure 8 and 9), a wall of objects aptly named *Major Contributions to the Whitney Museum and the Products Their Companies Make* (Figure 18) visualized the products made by the corporate sponsors of the Whitney. The Guerrilla Girls stated “We found it infuriating that the profits from products marketed to women and people of color – like cosmetics and cigarettes – end up funding shows that discriminate against them.” 43

Another item in the exhibit was a letter (Figure 19) written to a Whitney trustee, Alfred Taubman. In this letter, the Guerrilla Girls address the fact that Taubman was not only a trustee at the museum, but also Sotheby’s chief stockholder. The Guerrilla Girls asked in this letter “We understand that Philip Morris, Mobil Oil, and Equitable get involved in

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
the wonderful world of art because it’s good for their public image. But what does your company have to gain?”

This above exhibition of visual objects, charts, and statistics is in itself a performance. This group of objects was collected and organized to subvert countless Whitney exhibitions that had infuriated the Guerrilla Girls over the course of 14 years (1973-1987). These objects were not commodifiable “art objects” but instead objects that performed particular tasks to make very poignant statistical points. *Major Contributions to the Whitney Museum and the Products Their Companies Make* (Figure 18) was a wall of products featuring paper plates, female underwear, and magazines that were often marketed to female customers and, the Guerilla Girls explained, manufactured by the corporate sponsors of the Whitney. So, while these objects were tailored to female customers, they financially promoted a museum that was not supporting female artists.

Although these objects’ location in the museum gave them an identity rooted in institutional critique, the viewer could interact and perform with the posters and objects in this exhibition to question the lack of female artist in museums on the institution’s walls.

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44 1980s performance artists, such as John Cage and Vito Acconci, along with later artists such as Laure Provoust and Tino Sehgal, often call exhibitions of this type “constructed situations.” Exhibitions such as “Instant House” (1980) by Acconci are not just displaying art objects, but instead are created to perform a particular way with the spectator.

45 Although I will not expand on institutional critique in this thesis, it is an important concept to understanding the Guerrilla Girls’ work and performance with the changing ideas at this time about institutional critique and what could be considered radical performance outside of institutional critique. Scholars such as Hans Haacke, Andrea Fraser (2006), and Claire Bishop (2012) contribute extensively to these arguments.
While posters from this exhibition, and many others, have become cultural icons and are collected by museums and institutions,\(^{46}\) it does not eliminate the performance of these objects. The Guerrilla Girls do not sell their works in galleries and museums, all editions of the posters are unlimited, and they have never been represented by an art dealer. The museum can own a poster, but no poster is better than any other, as they are never out of print. The cultural and public performance of these art objects is a great part of their artistic oeuvre, not the physical copies of the work themselves. These posters are often ephemeral, and become stripped away with the city as it deteriorates.\(^{47}\) However, even as these objects are covered and ripped, the spectators continue to their own thoughts in the posters’ margins (Figure 20).

CONCLUSION

Although the Guerrilla Girls have dealt with innumerable questions such as “What do you do when the art institutions you’ve spent your entire life attacking suddenly embrace you?”\(^{48}\) and “Have America’s feminist artists sold out?,”\(^{49}\) Frida Kahlo and Kathe Kollwitz have stated that despite the fact that the Guerrilla Girls were initially opposed to being featured in museums, they could not pass up the invitation to reach a larger audience\(^{50}\) and to critique the museums right on their walls.\(^{51}\) I will not be discussing the concept of “selling out,” in terms of authenticity, commodity, or otherwise

\(^{46}\) Hoban, “ART; Masks Still in Place, but Firmly in the Mainstream,” 2004.
\(^{47}\) This is not the case today, however, as most posters will disappear within 48 hours of them being put up in public.
\(^{49}\) Guy Adams, “Guerrilla Girl Power: Have America’s feminist artists sold out?” The Independent, April 9, 2009.
in this thesis, as the performance of these objects, actions, and posters is more valuable to the discussion of their oeuvre. These cultural and public performances of street art and exhibitions, although dissimilar in the way that the spectator and institutions engage with them, speak to the Guerrilla Girls as performance artists in their own right in the 1980s. These actions, while they were cultural and public performances, were also activist moments that critiqued the lack of women artists in prominent museums like the Whitney and called attention to the inequalities in museum culture in the 1980s. The forthcoming posters of the late 1980s would take up these performances through the terminology of play and satire.
CHAPTER 2: PLAY AND SATIRE

While the early posters and actions of the Guerrilla Girls were focused specifically on museum facts and statistics, posters beginning in 1987 became much more humorous and satirical. In posters such as *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* (1989) (Figure 3), the Guerilla Girls mocked patriarchal museum systems through paradoxical language, which included ironic statements such as: “working without the pressure of success.” These posters, performances, and books, revolve around the psychological and performance term “play.” Although play is a tricky concept to define, early 1970s scholarship on “play” came out of the psychologist’s need to understand how play is “superfluous” to biology, centered in animal behavior, differs in children and adults, and contextualized in ritual activity and competitions/games. In the 1970s, psychologists took up the concept of play, as their works formed the groundwork for understanding play during this time. During and after the 1970s, performance critics and scholars, like Gregory Bateson and Richard Schechner, took up this concept to interpret performance, theater, and masquerade.

In this chapter, I will discuss play as the utilization of parody, meta-communication, and irony to subvert normative power structures. Meta-communication is defined as the secondary communication of a spoken or written work. Moreover, the message that is directly stated usually has an alternative, secondary meaning which implies an intrinsic, dissident message. Meta-communication “of play [also] doubt[s] the

validity of the social order,” specifically through this use of societal satire. Therefore, when the Guerrilla Girls state in The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist (Figure 3) that “not having to be in shows with men,” this phrase operates as an ironic statement regarding the way women are not shown enough in galleries. While using the terms play and meta-communication, I will also be contemplating concepts such as satire, which is defined as the use of humor, exaggeration, and ridicule to expose vices and social order. Satire compliments the concept of play, as satire is often used to critique society in contemporary moments, bringing specific political issues to the forefront of a discussion.

I will be analyzing five posters and the concept of masking to explore the way in which the Guerrilla Girls have employed play and satire to subvert the patriarchal order of museums in the 1980s. The mastery of these ironic, satirical, and playful posters are at the center of the Guerrilla Girls’ powerful oeuvre. While groups such as AWC and GAAG made demands of museums, the Guerrilla Girls employed what Anne Teresa Demo calls “comic politics of subversion.” By engaging with this satirical language and post-pop art design, they have taken back images of the “nude” and female muse in art historical dialogue, such as the Grand Odalisque by Ingres in the poster Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum? (Figure 11), to repossess the female body

54 Several scholars, including Lucy Fischer (1991), Mary Doane (1999), and Jo Anna Isaak (2002), theorize that feminist movements of the 1970s were often considered lacking humour, and that feminists are often considered the butt of the joke. Isaak (2002) presented the exhibition “Revolutionary Power of Women’s Laugher” in 1983 to counteract some of these points made in the 1970s and earlier, which Isaak sees as pejorative.
as a place for feminist activism and protest. Through all of these elements, the Guerrilla Girls subvert and protest the established male institutional discourse through play and satire in the public performance of posters.

SARDONICALLY PLAYFUL POSTERS

*The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*

While many of their original posters in 1985 to 1986 were more focused on public and cultural performance, as discussed in the first chapter, their posters from 1987 on became much more satirical. The 1989 poster *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* (Figure 3) features a list of thirteen reasons why women artists are gaining an apparent advantage in the art market, which Gertrude Stein states is the perfect “balance between humor and hopelessness.” This list includes “not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits” and “seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.” This poster comes as the epitome of this playful, meta-communication language and what Demo calls strategic juxtaposition. As this poster states “working without the pressure of success,” the Guerrilla Girls are critiquing the artistic community for their ability to support feminine works in their institutions. One of the advantages listed is “getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla mask.” This advantage was mirrored at a later Guerrilla Girl performance, where a Guerrilla Girl exclaimed that she had “to wear a hot, heavy gorilla mask” on stage and in public to get attention and respect. They even go as far as to say that “We discovered that the art world takes feminists more seriously when we use humor and wear a gorilla disguise. Pathetic!”

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This 1970s psychological scholarship laid the foundation for understanding how play is exploited by the Guerrilla Girls in this poster. Activists and artists, such as the Guerrilla Girls, expose public anomie and personal alienation through the use of meta-communication and the inversion of “these play forms to express their own hidden rhetorics of resistance or subversion.” In this poster, the simple title *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* propositions the viewer to expect a list of actual “advantages.” While this poster does set up the list as “positive” factors of being a female artist, the meta-communicative list of satirical statements such as “knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty” and “being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine,” confronts the viewers with the truths about female artists in the 1980s. Moreover, the viewer immediately becomes aware that this list does not in actuality indicate the advantages of being a female artist, but the disadvantages of being a woman artist attempting to gain fuller participation in museums. This list is not only satirical, but also rooted in feminine stereotypes. For example, “having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs” and “being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine.” These are very dark statements about the plight of female artists and their inability to gain access within art institutions without being labeled as “feminist.”

Other artists of the 1970s participated in similar meta-communicative statements. Jenny Holzer’s *Truisms* (1977-9) were public posters that featured darkly satirical statements such as “you get the face you deserve” and “self-awareness can be crippling.” Other posters of the later 1990s deployed playful political satire in their posters such as

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59 Handelman, “Playing and Ritual,” 191.
Fierce Pussy’s *Dyke* poster, which displayed the word “Dyke” written below the image of a smiling baby girl wearing a frilly apron. These two posters, along with the Guerrilla Girl’s *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, were engaging with similar visuals. Each poster had a white background with lists written in simple black typeface. While posters later in their career (like the below *Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum?*) were anchored in pop art and post-pop art aesthetics, these very uncomplicated type-face designs emphasized the satirical language and specific point being made these activist groups. Later groups, such as DAM! (formed in 1990/1) and Toxic Titties (formed in 2002), pride themselves in their “strong visual language, subversive wit” in the performance of their activism. 61 This type-face aesthetic and rebellious language would be utilized by the Guerrilla Girls in other posters of the late 1980s. 62

*Guerrilla Girls’ 1986 Report Card, Pop Quiz, and We Sell White Bread*

The *Guerrilla Girls 1986 Report Card* (Figure 7) is one of their early posters, which visualizes the lack of women in numerous gallery shows with a pithy elementary grading system. The Mary Boone gallery, with zero shows in 1985-1987, has received a “boy crazy,” while Pace, with two shows each year received a “working below capacity.” In many ways, this poster plays with the idea of meta-communication as defined within the field of psychology. In Gregory Bateson’s article “A Theory of Play and Fantasy” from 1976, he discusses how play is usually done in lieu of competitive, rule based

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62 This artistic style would continue to be popular today and has be seen in activist posters by Sophia Wallace such as “Cliteracy” (2012).
games. Here the Guerrilla Girls act within this concept, as they base this poster on rules that should be followed in a school or educational system. Although this poster itself is obviously carrying “some degree of meta-communication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message ‘this is play,’” these museums fail to follow “guidelines” in that they do not offer equal opportunity to all artists. This use of satire is complex, as it utilizes a non-rule based theory of play to create a poster that utilizes an institutional system of rules, such as a school report card. A school report card relies upon the rules of an established system of grades, which rates the students on their work and ability to complete assignments over time. In this poster, this report card, instead of judging the quality of work done by students, mocks the museum system who claims to allow all races and sexes equal access, while instead obeys the rules developed by rich, white, male patriarchs that have been in place for centuries.

Guerrilla Girls’ Pop Quiz and We Sell White Bread feature the most direct uses of satire and play by the Guerrilla Girls. In the simple, black and white Pop Quiz poster (Figure 12), the Guerrilla Girls asks “Q: If February is Black History Month and March is Women’s History Month, what happens the rest of the year?” The answer being “A: discrimination.” Where Mira Schor (1997) sees a mixture of condescension, sarcasm, cloying sweetness, and triumph in this answer, it is more explicitly, an overt expression of pain and continued sexism and racism through satire. The Guerrilla Girls saw an increase in tokenism as shows by African Americans and women for the months of February and March, while the rest of the year their work was avoided. In other black and

64 Ibid., 41.
65 Schor, Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture, 96.
white posters, such as *We Sell White Bread* (Figure 22), the text reads “Ingredients: White Men, Artificial Flavorings, Preservatives” with a “*Contains Less Than The Minimum Daily Requirement of White Women and Non-Whites.*” While both of these posters reflect the post-pop art design and typeface style of Kruger and Holzer as discussed above, they also participate in a comparable meta-communicative play messages. In the Guerrilla Girls’ *Pop Quiz*, the viewer is asked to perform with the poster as they are tested on their knowledge of discrimination. There is a hint of play in this poster, as it appears to be silly trivia game, but the viewer is subsequently confronted with society’s attempt to somehow alleviate inequality through events like Black History Month and Women’s History Month. In *We Sell White Bread*, this pop art image of bread really does not protest any specific moment, stereotype, or discrimination, but instead its meta-communicative message speaks generally to the “lack” of female and non-whites represented in museums and institutionalized spaces. These clear elements of play are at the forefront of Guerrilla Girl actions, as they use these powerfully simple statements to profess resilient statements to the public about the lack of equality.

*Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum?*

In 1989, the Guerrilla Girls designed the brightly colored poster *Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum?* (Figure 11). This poster features the borrowed image by Ingres, *The Grand Odalisque*. This well known Romantic/Realist image was appropriated by the Guerrilla Girls into a typical “quota queen” statement that “less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.” This poster has been recreated several times now, including in 2005 and 2012, reiterating new, failed statistics where the 5% drops down to 3% and 4%. The Guerrilla
Girls “Frida Kahlo” and “Kathe Kollwitz” have even responded to this humorously: “We went back to the Met in 2004 to do a recount. We were sure things had gotten better, especially after years of Guerrilla Girls’ complaining. Here’s what we found: Fewer women artists but more naked males. Is that progress?” 66 The poster has also been reused in 2014 to instead ask *Do Women Have to be Naked to get into Music Videos? while 99% of guys are dressed!* This image has a collage quality, as the nude classical body of the *Grand Odalisque* has been replaced by a naked contemporary female body from Robin Thicke’s controversial song “Blurred Lines” (Figure 23).

An analysis of this poster is rooted in in Linda Nochlin’s article “Why have there been no great women artists?” published originally in 1971, where she addresses the misconceptions surrounding this question and the idea of the male genius. Nochlin states that although women and art historians have tried to answer the age-old question “Why have there been no great women artists?” with answers such as quality and women’s work differing in “greatness” from male artwork, they should be questioning what is wrong with questions such as this. 67 Nochlin states that this question is “simply in the top tenth of an iceberg of misinterpretation and misconception; beneath lies a vast dark bulk of shaky *idees recues* about the nature of art and its situational concomitants, about the nature of human abilities in general and of human excellence in particular.” 68 Part of this multifaceted argument is that historically, the arts are “stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging to all those, women amongst them, who did not have the good fortune to be

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born white, preferable middle class, and above all, male.” The Guerrilla Girls work and especially the posters Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum? and The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist question some of the moments Nochlin describes in her 1971 article. This employment of the Grand Odalisque image comes from the appropriation of a popular female nude featured in the Louvre by a prominent male artist. This use of popular female images is not unusual for the Guerrilla Girls who also allocated images of the Mona Lisa in their work (Figure 14) along with Meret Oppenheim’s fur tea cup in a 1997 protest against MOMA’s curator Margit Rowell for the lack of women artists in the show “Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life” (Figure 21). In appropriating such images, the Guerrilla Girls are a part of a tradition from the 1970s and 1980s. In Nicolas Bourriaud’s book Postproduction (2002), Bourriaud coined the term postproduction art, which refers to

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69 Nochlin, “Why have there been no great women artists?,” 150.
70 Ironically, Kathe Kollwitz, who had a popular father who encouraged her work and is mentioned in Nochlin’s argument here, is also one of the pseudonyms of one of the founding members of the Guerrilla Girls.
71 Nochlin, “Why have there been no great women artists?,” 176.
artworks made of preexisting works. The artist takes what has already been produced culturally and artistically and reconfigures those images to express a new contemporary point or idea. 72 The progenitor of this style is Marcel Duchamp, who was later followed by artists like Andy Warhol. In the 1980s when the Guerrilla Girls were producing their activist posters, artists such as Louis Lawler, Vikki Alexander, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Philip Taaffe, and Mike Bidlo were engaging in postproduction or appropriation art. This appropriation art was suited to break down the myths of the “master” works or “master artist” to demystify ideological concepts of the artist and to break down some of the sociological issues with their work. In this poster, the Guerrilla Girls are thwarting the myth of the individual male genius like Ingres and Da Vinci, as masterpieces are made by these classical Old Masters, 73 which is often rooted in historically determined concepts of aesthetics. 74 This appropriation of classical imagery for subversion is extremely popular in street, public, and graffiti art today and is used by artists such as Shepard Fairey, Nick Walker, and Ron English.

In this poster, the Guerrilla Girls are taking advantage of the historical significance of this painting. According to Anne Teresa Demo “historically, the image of Ingres’ odalisque, like its twentieth-century twin, created controversy…the completion of the painting in 1814, he was highly criticized for creating a painting deemed ‘primitive,’” as she waited, submissive and indifferent. 75 Demo seems particularly invested in the

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argument that “Ingres’s odalisque is a classical symbol of patriarchal art; by defacing it, the Guerrilla Girls use the odalisque to critique the very institutions that canonize such images” 76 while also reclaiming a position as artists and creators in their own right, 77 versus just considered “muses” or “objects.” 78 However, Demo’s argument does not address another reading of the image, which is that this exotic odalisque is a somewhat confrontational female, as she takes on the male viewer with indifference and the power of seduction. This odalisque bears similar qualities of Manet’s Olympia, which infuriated French Academy in 1863-5, as Olympia, a typical name for a prostitute in France in the 1860s, mocked the male viewer and displayed her own personal power over those who would purchase her and abuse her for their own pleasure. Therefore, in this poster, the Guerrilla Girls are using particularly controversial and weighty images that are not simply “muses” and objects of desire, but women who attempt to embrace their own position and society and gain power through the means they were allowed.

The text and color placement of this poster are also intricate to this argument. This poster begins with the rhetorical yet darkly comical question Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum? where the answer appears simply and unfortunately to be “yes.” These statistics employ information that is valuable but cannot be disagreed with or criticized. According to Joel Schechter’s book Satiric Impersonations: From Arisophanes to the Guerrilla Girls (1994), he compares the Guerrilla Girls to the satirical writer Jonathan Swift, who also fought societal follies through mockery and play.

77 This is also discussed in Geraldine Harris’ book Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity (1999), as women are often the objects of gaze, as well as the objects of jokes (49).
Schechter states in his book that “Swift and the Guerrilla Girls use such impersonal language against its speakers by quoting it or refracting it in a new context. They are not personally responsible for what ensues.” They are just relaying the facts, and are not responsible for how viewers react to them.

In this poster, the Guerrilla Girls are using playful colors and images reminiscent of pop art and post-pop art design anchored in artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein, that engage the viewers similarly in public advertising, which include not only their posters, but also their books and website design. While Lichtenstein was highly exhibited in the 1980s, artists like Holzer, Kruger, and Fierce Pussy were very part of this post-pop art aesthetic. While Kruger was appropriating black and white images with bold, red captions, the Guerrilla Girls’ poster Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum? was printed in bright yellow and pink with bold dark words, some highlighted in pink. The colors of the odalisque have also been dulled to fit with the aesthetics of the poster. The graphicness of this poster would make it stand out in the urban landscape, while also hinting at these historic pictorial styles and appropriation.

PLAYING DRESS UP

While poster design is the ultimate way that play becomes a centralized part of the Guerrilla Girls’ oeuvre, it is worth briefly mentioning that the wearing of masks, masquerading, and dress up is an important aspect of play. Although this concept will be discussed further in the next section on the performance of gender, play also focuses on the use of “masking” whether discussing it realistically or metaphorically. While the

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concept of masquerade was utilized in the 1980s by artists like Cindy Sherman and groups like WITCH, the Guerrilla Girls really epitomized this concept in their performed anonymity and the wearing of masks. While these masks are “comic theatricality” and rather humorous in the way that each mask differs slightly and reveals a little more about each character, they are also utilized in a very calculated way. Huizinga has described this aspect in detail, stating that “the disguised or masked individual ‘plays’ another part, another being.” Handelman (1977) takes this analysis further by describing masking in ritual. Those who perform in the ritual are players who become anonymous and are stripped of their previous selves. “Their social selves become superfluous; and they are free to see one another as concrete idiosyncratic human beings.” In doing this, the players are permitted to mask their individuality, which includes the playing of symbolic types and loss of self, which can enable “mass participation without collective responsibility.” Huizinga and Handelman both see play as the ability for a person/group to masquerade and perform as someone else completely. The Guerrilla Girls are doing this directly in the art community through their use of the gorilla mask and anonymity. Although the masks themselves are humorous and jovial, in the way that groups of people can play dress up with them, they also represent a symbol of the fight against the authority of the museum culture. The Guerrilla Girls’ anonymity also performs to question inequalities, as they take up the names of female artists who have been myopically left out of art historical dialogues and that have not been collected

82 Schechter, Satiric Impersonations, 26.
84 Handelman, “Playing and Ritual,” 187.
85 Ibid., 186.
enough by major museums. While this is an abridged interpretation of play and masking, it is important to mention before discussing masking in the context of gendered performance.

CONCLUSION

As the Guerrilla Girls engage with the psychologically defined term play, their subversive posters continue to involve the viewer in a public and cultural performance. These posters, such as *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* and *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get Into the Met Museum?*, go beyond being simple satire, but are laden with meta-communication that forces the viewer to move beyond merely looking and forces them to question and reinterpret how they see institutions, stereotypes, and art history. These performances and play allow the Guerrilla Girls to continue to use facts and statistics that cannot be denied by the institutions, with satirical language that urges the viewer to contemplate their own perceptions of institutionalized art. For the Guerrilla Girls, play is at the core of their feminist activist work and these posters and the wearing of masks epitomize how they are viewed and understood in today’s artistic community, and how they continue to impact feminist practice.
CHAPTER 3: PERFORMANCE OF GENDER

While the Guerrilla Girls see themselves more as “visual artists and culture jammers”\(^86\) than performance artists, their letters, posters, language, fashion, and gorilla masks have flirted with the performance of gender to express femininity, power, and sexuality while subverting heterosexual and masculine norms. These actions included the Guerrilla Girls wearing fishnets, skirts and high heels during many of their public actions and speeches, while they also used pink, “decorative script, deferential language, and even a dainty…flower”\(^87\) in their letter writing (Figure 24). In the Guerrilla Girls’ performance of gender through these actions, they subvert cultural concepts of femininity and sexuality that are historically similar to performance artists of the 1970s, such as Carolee Schneemann and Adrian Piper.

In this chapter, I will also be working with the definitions of gender performativity as defined by Judith Butler in her 1988 article “Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory” and her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. “Performativity,” as defined by J.L. Austin in his 1955 lecture to Harvard University, is the act in which saying something is in fact the action of doing something. For example, in a marriage ceremony, both the bride and the groom state “I do” as their final words of the ritual. In this action, they are not only stating the fact that they are going to commit themselves to one another, but also they are performing the action of the marriage contract itself. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker in their introduction to *Performativity and

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Performance (1995), the marriage ceremony is a kind of fourth wall or proscenium in which the attendants of the wedding become the witnesses to this spectacle.  

In 1988, Butler expanded this idea into the realm of gender. Beyond biological physiology, the body is a historical situation as it reproduces and embodies repeatedly gendered modes that enforce heterosexual based norms. These repeated actions over time are done collectively within society, “hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality over again.”

Richard Schechner states that some of these actions include “vocal inflections, facial displays, gestures, walks, and erotic behavior as well as how to select, modify, and use scents, body shapes, and adornments, clothing, and all other gender markings of a given society.” It is not the actors’ choice to reproduce these actions, but instead is thrust into these already existing directives because of exterior societal and political interests. These cultural significations of the sexed body are so codetermined by these repeated actions that it is no longer possible to even make the distinctions between the terms gender and sex.

During the 1980s when Butler was defining gender performativity and in 1985 when the Guerrilla Girls arrived on the performance scene, performance art, according to RoseLee Goldberg, was invested in moving back into the proscenium spaces and

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90 Ibid., 526.
91 Schechner, Performance Studies, 130.
93 Ibid., 524.
engaging with costumes, scripts, and lighting. While Karen Finley and Carolee Schneemann had become popular by the 1980s, other artists and groups such as Eric Bogosian and James Neu were turning back to the theater and scripted works. They moved beyond the anti-institutional idealism of the 1960s and early 1970s, and towards the theatrical spectacle. For example, the performances *The Birth of the Poet* in 1985 by Richard Foreman, which has been called a “Dada” performance, was written by Kathy Acker, with music by Peter Gordon and sets by David Salle. At the New Wave Festival, the actors dressed in numerous costumes such as bell-bottom trousers with long hair and head-bands and sang about sex and art with the cynicism of the eighties consumer in Acker’s obscene prose. This work, which Goldberg calls brilliant, changed aesthetics every five minutes and “was a direct response to the enthusiasm of the eighties for collaboration, indeed for vehicles in which very popular, high-profile artists on the strength of their collaboration could create an exciting event.” This move back to the theater, costume, and script along with the defining of gender performativity are a very much a part of the Guerrilla Girls’ oeuvre in the use of language, fashion, gorilla masks, and their performance of gender.

GUERRILLA GIRL LANGUAGE AND PENMANSHIP

In the Guerrilla Girls’ public performances, they often express themselves through scripted and animalistic language. The Guerrilla Girls are often cited saying phrases such as “…we constantly agree to disagree. Sometimes there’s foot stomping and

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95 Ibid., 200.
96 Ibid.
gnashing of teeth, but somehow things get done. It’s all kind of hormonal.” 97 With their anonymity and subversive language, they also even go so far as to make outlandish controversial statements such as: “We’d love to be inclusive, but it’s not easy to find men willing to work without getting paid or getting credit for it.” 98 Often other scholars and journalists, like Hess, mimic this language, discussing gorilla activity such as calling the Guerrilla Girls “queens of the jungle.” 99 She has even said “when the Girls leave town, the women left behind have been empowered to speak and there is no one to blame except a bunch of monkeys from New York.” 100

All of these statements and language are a part not only of play as described in the previous chapter, but also their gendered performance. The Guerrilla Girls are using a script of feminist, yet primal language in the way that they discuss the actions of “gnashing their teeth,” “stomping around” and returning back to the jungle (Figure 25). In Peggy Phelan’s discussion of performance and writing about performance acts in her book Mourning Sex (1997), this use of language reiterated over and over again is what she calls “performative writing.” 101 In using performative writing to speak about the performance just seen by a critic of scholar, it avoids the impossible task of trying describe the performance, but instead to “enact the affective force of the performance event again.” 102 The Guerrilla Girls continue to do this in their own work as the repeat over and over similar statements, phrases and language. While they often use the catch

98 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
phrase “‘too male, too pale, too stale and too Yale’” to describe museums and institutions like MOMA and the Guggenheim, they have also titled posters this phrase, such as (Figure 15) which features a description of the internet as “84.5% male and 82.3% white. Until now.”

This performance of gender also occurs with the Guerrilla Girls’ name, as they reclaim the word “girl.” While guerrilla comes from the idea of guerilla warfare, the term girl is gendered. As stated by “Frida Kahlo, “calling a grown woman a girl can imply she’s not complete, mature, or grown up. But we decided to reclaim the word ‘girl,’ so it couldn’t be used against us. Gay activists did the same thing with the epithet ‘queer.’” According to Schechnter (1994), while as girls they are “demur” and modest, as “guerrillas” they forget about modesty and act like primes in public. They become a “cross between a guerrilla soldier, a guerilla theater actor, and a gorilla.” This subversive language is part of the larger discourse of feminism. Geraldine Harris states that feminist performance artists of the 1960s had a fascination with linguistics. While she does not describe any specific groups or performances, she states that second wave feminists, amongst other radical feminist groups, engaged in linguistics and coined terms such as “wimmin” and “herstory” in the 1960s.

This Guerrilla Girl dialogue and script continues into use of stationary and letters sent to critics, curators, museums, and magazines that feature the use of pink, “decorative

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103 Chadwick, “Women Who Run with the Brushes & Glue,” 15.
104 Ibid., 14.
script, deferential language, and even a dainty…flower” ¹⁰⁷ (Figure 23). To engage with such overtly feminine and “lady-like” script is part of this performance and illusion that they are building around themselves. Many of these images also feature a Guerrilla Girls’ hand in the process of writing the letter. The viewer can see that the Guerrilla Girl is wearing a glove of a gorilla hand, which features delicately painted pink nails on such a heavy wrinkled hand. There is a peek of skin of a woman’s arm, showcasing a possible tattoo of the Guerrilla Girl wearing the glove. This image represents the combination of femininity and toughness that the Guerrilla Girls pride themselves on while sporting the performance elements of the 1980s of costume and script. These fundamental components are also specifically gendered, focusing around the “masculine” features of a gorilla hand with the dainty pained fingernails on the hand of a female activist. This glove is only a small part of the costume worn by the Guerrilla Girls.

GUERRILLA GIRL FASHION

In the 1980s, the Guerrilla Girls received recognition not only for their posters and subversive actions, but also for their attire. While they obviously donned their gorilla masks to hide their identities (which will be discussed in the next section), they also wore overtly feminine garments (Figure 26 and 27). According to Anna Chave in “The Guerrilla Girls Reckoning” (2011), these women were “vamping with feminine stereotypes” as they “sported fishnet stockings and high heels with their masks – exemplify[ing] time tested, if controversial strategies of those in the 1970s feminist ambit, such as Hanna Wilke or (a more inconstant feminist) Bourgeous.” ¹⁰⁸ Hess (1995) has stated that the Guerrilla Girls aesthetic was modeled after Madonna, whose

bisexuality was subversive in the 1980s, “as she explored her sexual fantasies before a mainstream audience,” through songs “Like a Virgin” and “Material Girl.” Madonna in the 1980s was fighting the conventions of femininity and creating controversy with her female voice while at the same time wearing heels, lace, and crucifixes. Madonna’s style and performance can be compared with the Guerrilla Girls and their use of fishnets and girlish handwriting as a way to subvert norms of femininity and what is “sexy.”

This performance of costuming and creation of a character is a descendant of this 1970s performance history and the propensity for the Guerrilla Girls to not only rebel against norms in museums, but also normative gender roles. These performances of gender are entrenched in the history of performance artists like Karen Finley, Carolee Schneemann, Adrian Piper, and Cindy Sherman. In Jeanie Forte’s “Women’s Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism” (1988), she describes these performances by Karen Finely, which often involved Finley pouring honey or rubbing chocolate over her naked body, as shocking to the 1970s and 1980s jaded New York art scene. “The violence and/or ‘disgust’ factor in these works fuels the exploration of aesthetics as an ideological trap, one which subjugates women in particular but which also dictates the numbed and plastic tastes of dominant culture.” Moreover, these over sexualized performances were able to subvert some of the normal conversations about what was sexy or attractive.

In the 1970s, Adrian Piper was also engaging with the performance of gender through her street performance series Catalysis. This included performances in which

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111 Ibid.
Piper doused herself with mixtures of vinegar, eggs, milk, and cod liver oil and wore these clothes on public transit for over a week (*Catalysis I*), walked around the streets of New York wearing a sign that said “Wet Paint” (*Catalysis III*), and stuffing large towels into her mouth on the public transit (*Catalysis IV*). In performances such as these, Piper questioned the construction of identity and gender and accentuated the fact that bodies have always produced cultural inscriptions, as relayed in the concept of gender performativity. These activist performances challenged audiences in the streets to question what constitutes dress, sanity, and public versus private.  

Like performance artists Carolee Schneemann and Adrian Piper, the Guerrilla Girls staged their own performance of gender with their gorilla masking and fashion on the streets, during public speeches, and within museums. Gender is always being performed in some way, and the Guerilla Girls are manipulating these performances to gain attention, execute their own actions, and to subvert the norms of gendered clothing and sexuality. While this is a small part of their performance work as a whole, it contributes to their continued resistance against the idea of what is “normal,” whether it be in the historic exhibition of artists or the display of gender. The performance of gender would continue with photographers like Cindy Sherman in the late 1970s and 80s and Renee Cox and Nikki S. Lee to contemporary performance artists such as Ann Liv Young.

**DONNING A GORILLA MASK**

The Guerrilla Girls perform gender and costuming even more through the wearing of gorilla masks, which disguise their faces, and even their gender. As a way to protect

their anonymity, the Guerrilla Girls are only ever seen in public wearing their gorilla masks, which are both frightening and comical. These masks, which were chosen by the original members after a misspelling of “guerilla” as “gorilla,” come in all sorts of shapes, sizes, and expressions (Figure 28). These masks aid in the rewriting of history through anonymity. History is never the story of what happened but the controlled timeline of who had the most ownership and power. According to Schechner, “all historical narratives are haunted by what/who is erased, threatened by what/who demands representation…The struggle to write history, to represent events, is an ongoing performative process.” 113 The Guerrilla Girls have engaged with this dialogue in taking up the names of dead female artists often ignored from art historical study, like Frida Kahlo and Gertrude Stein. By embracing these pseudonyms, they highlight the difference “between enforced and chosen anonymity” as women artists have remained unwillingly anonymous for centuries. 114 In embracing the feminist names and sexuality, they are reinforcing their importance as contributors to the art world by giving these artists the recognition they deserve. They have also engaged in this discourse through the writing of satirical books like The Guerrilla Girls’ Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art (1998).

The gendered performance of these masks also lies in the viewers’ association of the animalistic gorilla with innately masculine qualities. While the Guerrilla Girls wear sexed clothing, their masks hide their gendered selves, and foregrounds instead a much more masculine image. These grunting, open-mouthed masks are much more aggressive

113 Schechner, Performance Studies, 133.
and angry than they are “feminine.” They are not sexy or aesthetically beautiful, but instead somewhat threatening and comedic. Again, they reassert that only powerful and masculine identities are featured, respected, and given any recognition in the art community. Thus, the Guerilla Girls are toying with the complexities of gender assigned roles by not only having extremely sexualized and feminine clothing, but also by wearing very masculine masks.

While the gorilla mask has become a distinct attribute of the Guerrilla Girls, they have come under a lot of fire for their racist connotations and forced anonymity. In 1995, Hess described the controversy in using such a racially charged symbol. She states that while the mask in the 1980s was “an ironic declaration of war, a pun that linked these feminist guerrillas to their subversive activities,” in the 1990s, the image of the animal head and female body “began to read like a Darwinian joke about the nature of progress.”  

An African American Guerrilla Girl said in an interview that the “gorilla masks began to take on unintended racial assumptions: ‘The mask becomes a physical and psychological burden at times, limiting our functions…When I put on the mask, I look the way some people see me every day, unconsciously.’” This African American Guerrilla Girl saw these racial ideas about the gorilla mask coinciding with past assertions made about African Americans having skull features more reminiscent of gorillas and apes. Western science and society had used these assumptions to place African Americans in a lower societal status and to enslave them. The mask “had become a projection of racist fantasies and a perpetuation of the sexual allure of the veiled

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116 Ibid., 327.
woman.”  

Hess believed that the Guerrilla Girls were trying to make “learning about racism and sexism a pleasing, seductive spectacle” however, the mask took away from these ideas as it became something simply for people to exploit and mock.

While I agree with Hess that the Guerrilla Girl gorilla mask comes with negative racial connotations, the masks are not only necessary to the Guerrilla Girl aesthetic, they are loved and adored by fans. Many spectators find the masks to be comical, and much a part of the Guerrilla Girl performance and theater as a part of carnivalesque and fantasy. These masks, once again, are part of the costuming and character that the Guerrilla Girls are creating. The mask is just another part of their theatricality, which includes this above performance of language and fashion.

As I also stated in the previous chapter on play, the wearing of masks allows the Guerrilla Girls to act within this performance of jungle language and costuming while also being anonymous, not unlike art collectives such as The Residents. These masks are not just props or costuming, but are a factor in play and the performance of gender. As Huzinga (1970) states in his book, “the terrors of childhood, open-hearted gaiety, mystic fantasy and sacred awe are all inextricably entangled in the strange business of masks and disguises.” The performance of gender and display allows the individual to become another person and to enact the gender or action that is important to their cause. In the wearing of these masks, the Guerrilla Girls are able to not only be playful and masquerade as anonymous guerrilla activists and possibly protect their own careers as artists outside of the collective, but they are also able to then engage with the pseudonyms of dead female artists who have not gained the recognition that they deserve,

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117 Ibid.
such as Alma Thomas and Rosalba Carriera. Moreover, the Guerrilla Girls can then not only hide their identities through anonymity, but also subvert the sexist notion of what women (and feminists) should and should not look like by wearing overtly feminine fashion such as fishnets and high heels. This performance of gender, along with play and cultural and public performance, make up the Guerrilla Girls vast performance oeuvre.
CONCLUSION

Today, after 30 years of activism (Figure 29), the Guerrilla Girls continue to perform publically and culturally within museums and on the streets of New York City. However, these performances have moved beyond racism, sexism and politics into the realms of film and pop culture and their posters and speeches have been displayed and reenacted all over the world. While in this thesis I have focused on the Guerrilla Girl work from their inception until the mid-1990s, the historical context and performance of their work beyond this decade merits its own analysis. Although they continue to embrace the pop art aesthetic, billboards such as *Even the U.S. Senate is more progressive than Hollywood* (2003) (Figure 30), with the statistics of 14% female senators versus 4% female film directors, ask new questions about other artistic institutions. Other posters continue to perform with the spectators, such as *These Galleries Show No More than 10% Women Artists or None at All* (Figure 31) and *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions At NYC Museums Last Year* (Figure 32) side by side with statics from 1985, 2014, and 2015. Unfortunately, as the Guerrilla Girls continue to say and this poster reiterates, not much has changed in 30 years. While some questions are left unanswered, and more elements of performance are revealed about their 30 years of history, the Guerrilla Girls continue to be an important part of feminist activist history, as their value cannot be ignored by those in the institutionalized art community and art history.

Beyond this thesis and these concepts of cultural and public performance, play, and the performance of gender, what does categorizing the Guerrilla Girls as activists and performance artists say about this interaction between performance and activism? How
are activist actions innately a type of performance? How are performed actions political and often considered activism? Through the interrogation of the Guerrilla Girls as both performance artists and activists, I would like to further my research in the future to a larger discussions of how activism and politics are a form of stage-craft, where activists engage politically through performance as a form of practice. Through these performances, activists strive to change the environment around them, critiquing these moments through very particular performed actions. In furthering my discussion on the Guerrilla Girls and their performance as activists, I hope to understand their objects, materiality, posters, tactics and strategies, and outcomes in the larger context of performance and activist history to understand not only how their actions can be activism and performance, but also how activism is inherently performance.
FIGURES


(Figure 1) Guerrilla Girls, Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney., 1987.
(Figure 2) Guerrilla Girls, *These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None At All*, 1985.
THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success
Not having to be in shows with men
Having an escape from the art world in your free-lance jobs
Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty
Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine
Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position
Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others
Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood
Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits
Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger
Being included in revised versions of art history
Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius
Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS, CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

(Figure 3) Guerrilla Girls, The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist, 1989.
### WHAT DO THESE ARTISTS HAVE IN COMMON?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arman</th>
<th>Keith Haring</th>
<th>Claes Oldenburg</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean-Michel Basquiat</td>
<td>Bryan Hunt</td>
<td>Philip Pearlstein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Casebere</td>
<td>Patrick Ireland</td>
<td>Robert Ryman</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Chamberlain</td>
<td>Neil Jenney</td>
<td>David Salle</td>
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<td>Sandro Chia</td>
<td>Bill Jensen</td>
<td>Lucas Samaras</td>
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<td>Francesco Clemente</td>
<td>Donald Judd</td>
<td>Peter Saul</td>
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<td>Chuck Close</td>
<td>Alex Katz</td>
<td>Kenny Scharf</td>
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<td>Tony Cragg</td>
<td>Anselm Kiefer</td>
<td>Julian Schnabel</td>
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<td>Enzo Cucchi</td>
<td>Joseph Kosuth</td>
<td>Richard Serra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eric Fischl</td>
<td>Roy Lichtenstein</td>
<td>Mark di Suvero</td>
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<td>Joel Fisher</td>
<td>Walter De Maria</td>
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<td>Dan Falvin</td>
<td>Robert Morris</td>
<td>George Tooker</td>
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<td>Futura 2000</td>
<td>Bruce Nauman</td>
<td>David True</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ron Gorchov</td>
<td>Richard Nonas</td>
<td>Peter Voulkos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They allow their work to be shown in galleries that show no more than 10% women or none at all.

Source: Art in America Annual 1984-5

A public service message from Guerrilla Girls

Conscience of the Art World

(Figure 4) Guerrilla Girls, *What Do These Artists Have in Common?*, 1985.
(Figure 5) Guerrilla Girls, *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?*, 1985.
(Figure 6) Guerrilla Girls, *These Critics Don’t Write Enough About Women Artists*, 1985.
(Figure 8) Guerrilla Girls, *Well hung at the Whitney: Biennial Gender Census 1973-1987*, featured in the 1987 exhibition “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney.”
(Figure 9) Guerrilla Girls, Can You Score Better than the Whitney Curators?, featured in the 1987 exhibition “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney.”
AT LAST!
MUSEUMS WILL NO LONGER DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN AND MINORITY ARTISTS.*

*Under the Civil rights Restoration Act of 1988, an institution that discriminates in any of its operations will be denied federal funds. We encourage women and artists of color to contact their favorite museum. THEY NEED YOU NOW!

Please send $ and comments to:
Box 1056 Cooper Sta. NY, NY 10276 GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

(Figure 10) Guerrilla Girls, At Last! Museums Will No Longer Discriminate Against Women and Minority Artists, 1988.
(Figure 11) Guerrilla Girls, *Do women have to get naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, 1989, 1995.
GUERRILLA GIRLS’ POP QUIZ

Q. If February is Black History Month and March is Women’s History Month, what happens the rest of the year?

A. Discrimination

A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS, CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

(Figure 12) Guerrilla Girls, Guerrilla Girls’ Pop Quiz, 1990.
(Figure 13) Guerrilla Girls, George Bush, “The Education President,” 1991.
(Figure 14) Guerrilla Girls, *First They Want to Take Away a Woman's Right to Choose. Now They're Censoring Art*, 1991.
(Figure 15) Guerrilla Girls, *The Guerrilla Girls Proclaim Internet Too Male, Too Pale!*, 1995.
(Figure 16) Guerrilla Girls, *Want to Earn Big Money in the Art World?*, 1985, 1995.
ONLY 4 COMMERCIAL GALLERIES IN N.Y. SHOW BLACK WOMEN.*

ONLY 1 SHOWS MORE THAN 1.**

* Cavin-Morris, Condeso/Lawler, Bernice Steinbaum, Shreiber/Cutler
* Cavin-Morris

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1986-7

Box 1056 Cooper Sta. NY, NY 10276 GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

(Figure 17) Guerrilla Girls, Only 4 Commercial Galleries in N.Y. Show Black Women, 1986.
(Figure 18) Guerrilla Girls, *Major Contributors to the Whitney Museum and the Products Their Companies Make*, featured in the 1987 exhibition “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney.”
Dearest Alfred,

It has come to our attention that in addition to being a trustee of the Whitney and serving on the Painting and Sculpture Committee that you are also the chief stockholder of Sotheby’s, and have, privately given more than $300,000 to the Museum over the last seven years.

We understand that Phillips, Mobil Oil, and Equitable get involved in the wonderful world of art because it’s good for their public image.

But what does your company have to gain? We would love to hear from you.

XXX

Guerrilla Girls

(Figure 19) Guerrilla Girls, Dearest Alfred, featured in the 1987 exhibition “Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney.”
(Figure 20) Guerrilla Girls, Guerrilla Girls posters on streets of New York City, including *What Do These Artists Have in Common?*, *How Many Women One-Person Exhibitions at NYC Museums Last Year?*, and *These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None At All*, 1985.
Dear Margit,

We’re thrilled that you have managed to redefine the still life to exclude women and artists of color from the practice.

Guerrilla Girls think you should change the show’s title from “Objects of Desire: the Modern Still Life” to “The Objects of MOMA’s Desire are Still White Males.”

Lotsa luck,

Guerrilla Girls

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Margit Rowell
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street
New York, NY 10019

(Figure 21) Guerrilla Girls, Does MOMA Really Know Best?, 1997. Top: Front, Bottom: Back.
(Figure 22) Guerrilla Girls, *We Sell White Bread*, 1987.
(Figure 23) Guerrilla Girls, *Do women have to be naked to get into music videos?*, 2014.
Dearest Art Collector,

It has come to our attention that your collection, like most, does not contain enough art by women.

We know that you feel terrible about this and will rectify the situation immediately.

All our love,
Guerrilla Girls

(Figure 24) Guerrilla Girls, *Dear Collector... We Know You Feel Terrible*, 2007.
(Figure 25) Guerrilla Girls, *Guerrilla Girls Go Back to the Jungle.*, 1990.
(Figure 27) Guerrilla Girls in Esquire Magazine, 1989.
(Figure 28) Guerrilla Girls in the New York Times, 1990.
(Figure 29) Guerrilla Girls, *Not Ready to Make Nice: Guerrilla Girls Birthday Party, 30 Years and Still Counting!*, 2015.
(Figure 30) Guerrilla Girls, *Even the U.S. Senate is more progressive than Hollywood*, 2003.
Figure 31) Guerrilla Girls, *These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None At All*, 1985 versus 2014, 2014.
(Figure 32) Guerrilla Girls, *How Many Women Had One-Person Exhibitions At NYC Museums Last Year*, 1985 versus 2015, 2015.
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