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Out of place: the exhibition shining a light on under-seen female artists

Rarely and sometimes never seen artwork from women who have been viewed as ‘out of place’ by other institutions are being put on show in Brooklyn

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Joan Snyder – Buried Images, 1978. Photograph: Brooklyn Museum

Like most museums, the Brooklyn Museum keeps much of its art collection in storage. For this particular institution, this includes a large amount of work from women which has been collecting dust, until now.

A new exhibition featuring some of this rarely seen, sometimes never seen, work from women will be on view from 24 January, called [Out of Place: A Feminist Look at the Collection](#).

More than 60 artworks from 44 artists will be on display, featuring work that has traditionally been viewed as “out of place” in major museums. The works start from the 1930s and go through

to the early 2000s with a special highlight on craft materials, which women have largely brought into the mainstream art world.

The exhibition includes works by Louise Bourgeois, Helen Frankenthaler, Betye Saar and Carolee Schneemann, among others – including some anonymous artists. Hot off the heels of this weekend’s Women’s March, it’s certainly timely.

“We live in a historic moment where there is questioning and critique of institutions and where they originated, their founding principles and civic history,” said Catherine Morris, who co-curated the exhibition with Carmen Hermo in the museum’s Elizabeth A Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

“What does it mean to look at the world through a feminist lens?” asks Morris. “How has this political movement impacted the world and how we understand what we look at?”

The idea for this exhibition started last year, after the success of their other feminist-centered exhibition Half the Picture: A Feminist Look at the Collection. Last fall, the Brooklyn Museum received a gift from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, an Atlanta-based collection boasting more than 1,000 works of African American art from the south. Among the works in the donation is an anonymous cotton and wool quilt from 1890, in patterned abstract stripes of blue, red, black and white.



Unidentified artist (American) – Bars Quilt, circa 1890. Photograph: Gavin Ashworth

“Questioning who is part of an institutional history, and who is deciding on what’s having an impact on cultural institutions, which have been out of place, is something,” said Morris. “So, there’s lots of things that that can mean, and how it can impact culture.”

The exhibition is divided into three sections: the role of museums and galleries, artwork made outside of the mainstream and the domestic world’s connection to feminism.

There’s a painting by the Colombian artist Gala Porras-Kim featuring 13 different dog breeds, as well as paintings by the New York artist Polly Apfelbaum, which imagines Snow White’s seven dwarves without her.

There is also a piece by Saar, *Liberation of Aunt Jemima: Cocktail*, from 1973, and an untitled portrait by May Wilson, an albumen silver print photo covered in glitter and paint. The exhibit also features a 1978 painting by Joan Snyder, whose neo-expressionist artworks were largely overlooked in a time when male painters were celebrated. The same can be said of Frankenthaler, who is also featured in this exhibition.

What is coincidental, is that a feminist artwork is the destination piece for the museum. The main artwork crowning the fourth floor is Judy Chicago’s 1979 sculpture, *The Dinner Party*, which has been seen by more than 1.5 million people, and is often referred to as the most famous feminist artwork of all time. It’s also symbolic of this exhibition, being “out of place”.

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Dindga McCannon – Revolutionary Sister, 1971. Photograph: Brooklyn Museum

“When Judy made it, it was not accepted by the mainstream art world. When it came out, it was vehemently rejected,” said Morris. “It lifts craft-based materials to the same important level as oil painting, that’s part of the dialogue that feminism brought very early to the conversation of what is valuable, and what is art.”

A large percentage of the works on view have never been shown before or are new to the collection. “We are ‘shopping our own closet’, so to speak,” said Morris. “As a curator, that’s what you’re always looking for, you’re energized by contemporary concern.”

One of the rarest works on view is a sculpture by Mary Frank, which has been hiding in the collection for decades. “It’s on view now for the first time in literally decades,” said Morris.

A carving by [Tonnie Jones](#) is going on view for the first time, a photo series of Schneemann alongside her cats, and works by Stella Waitzkin, who was a longtime resident of the Chelsea hotel in New York City. “She devoted herself to this idiosyncratic project of making sculptural objects out of books,” said Morris. “Suddenly, to me, certain objects look really pertinent to this moment, like these artworks.”

With the [onslaught of political art](#) expected to hit museums and galleries ahead of the presidential election in November, and the [Feminist Art Coalition’s](#) countrywide takeover of [art exhibitions in museums and institutions in 2020](#), this is just a sign of what’s to come this year.

This exhibition also falls ahead of [the centennial of the 19th amendment](#), women’s constitutional right to vote. Institutional critique is a large part of the show.

“How an artwork gets incorporated into the larger art world dialogue, and what happens when it does, or doesn’t, is part of this,” said Morris.

“Were the artists part of the original vision of what would be collected, and how has that changed?” she asks. “When someone is told they’re ‘out of place’, it’s a way for them to be put in their place. That’s what brought us to this project.”

- [Out of Place: A Feminist Look at the Collection](#) will be showing at Brooklyn Museum from 24 January to 13 September