

GUERRILLA GIRLS MANIFESTA

For Art Museums Everywhere

BANISH board members who make the world a worse place. Out with money launderers, arms dealers, climate change deniers, polluters, antiquities traffickers, addictive drug manufacturers, student loan sharks & cronies of Jeffrey Epstein.

WRITE wall labels that tell the whole history of art, including, but not limited to, slavery & the genocide of indigenous peoples.

REPATRIATE pillaged, smuggled & looted artifacts in your collection; apologize publicly & cough up a lot of dough.

CAST OUT institutional racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia & colonialism too.

HONOR your employees, never undermine their efforts to unionize, & pay them a living wage plus benefits.

TELL US the percentage of white male artists in your collection.

CONFESS that for centuries women have been depicted in art as luscious objects of male desire & victims of male aggression.

GET REAL: If a museum shows only **SUPER EXPENSIVE** art bought at **SUPER EXPENSIVE** galleries & donated by **SUPER RICH** collectors, it should rename itself the Museum of **SUPER RICH PEOPLE'S ART**.

REFUSE to be part of schemes that allow billionaire art collectors to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

RX: Tell your favorite museum to show art that looks like the cultures it claims to represent. The history of art is more than the history of wealth and power!

Guerrilla Girls ManifestA: For Art Museums Everywhere, 2024; Digital print on paper, 18 x 24 in.; NMWA, Museum purchase: Members' Acquisition Fund

Guerrilla Girls

Making Trouble

April 12, 2025–September 28, 2025

Hannah Shambroom

On a spring night in 1985, a group of feminist activist-artists snuck through the streets of lower Manhattan, home to many of the city's most prestigious galleries and museums, and pasted posters denouncing gender discrimination onto walls, streetlamps, and phone booths. The unconventional act sent shock waves through New York City's art scene and was the first of many that the group—aptly calling themselves the Guerrilla Girls—would stage in protest of inequality. This year marks the Guerrilla Girls' fortieth anniversary, and NMWA celebrates this milestone by exhibiting a selection of the group's earliest posters from the 1980s and '90s alongside more recent prints, demonstrating their persistence and impact over decades.

These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None at All, from the series “Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: The First Five Years, 1985–1990,” 1985; Photolithograph on paper, 17 x 22 in.; NMWA, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay

THESE GALLERIES SHOW NO MORE THAN 10% WOMEN ARTISTS OR NONE AT ALL.

Blum Helman
Mary Boone
Grace Borgenicht
Diane Brown
Leo Castelli
Charles Cowles
Marisa Del Re
Dia Art Foundation
Executive
Allan Frumkin

Fun
Marian Goodman
Pat Hearn
Marlborough
Oil & Steel
Pace
Tony Shafrazi
Sperone Westwater
Edward Thorp
Washburn

SOURCE: ART IN AMERICA ANNUAL 1984-5

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

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Simple Facts, Obvious Conclusions

The Guerrilla Girls burst into the art world with their bold text- and graphics- based prints. The collective formed in the wake of the Museum of Modern Art’s 1984 exhibition *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*. Although the exhibition claimed to represent the best artists of the time, fewer than 10 percent were women and none were artists of color. Protests outside the museum failed to garner attention, so members of the group set out to prove exactly how bad the art world was for women and non-white artists. “It was worse than we thought,” says a Guerrilla Girl who goes by the name Frida Kahlo. “The most influential galleries and museums exhibited almost no women artists. . . . Everyone in positions of power—curators, critics, collectors, the artists themselves—passed the buck. . . . We decided to embarrass each group by showing their records in public.”¹

The Guerrilla Girls’ earliest works eschew imagery in favor of bold, black-and-white text with direct messages. *These Galleries Show No More Than 10% Women Artists or None at All* (1985) brazenly names twenty preeminent New York City galleries that disproportionately represented men. Institutions were not the group’s only targets. *What Do These Artists Have in Common?* (1985) lists forty-two prominent artists—mostly white men—who allowed their art to be shown in spaces that exhibited work by very few, if any, women artists. A statement accompanying the posters warned of more to come, promising, “Simple facts will be spelled out; obvious conclusions can be drawn.”²

Although their first focus was gender disparity in the visual arts, in later works the Guerrilla Girls cast a critical eye on other fields, including film, theater, politics, and pop culture. The group adapted their material, techniques, and style to suit their subject matter, often incorporating color, graphics, and humor. *10 Trashy Ideas About the Environment* (1994) contains sardonic notes on the environment, ironically printed on a plastic bag. As Guerrilla Girl Eva Hesse said, “We found out quickly that humor gets people involved.”³

Do You Know the Guerrilla Girls?

Members of the Guerrilla Girls wear gorilla masks in public and adopt the names of deceased women artists and writers as pseudonyms. Both strategies arose from the need to remain anonymous, but have since become hallmarks of the group. “We wanted the focus to be on the issues, not our personalities or our own work,” one member explained.⁴

The idea to don simian disguises emerged from a humorous mistake. At an early meeting, one spelling-challenged member wrote “Gorilla” instead of “Guerrilla” in her notes. In addition to anonymity, the masks embolden them to be more outspoken. “You’d be surprised at what comes out of your mouth when you wear a gorilla mask,” they’ve said.

Their aliases also buffer the Guerrilla Girls from retribution in the art world, which they both participate in and criticize. *Guerrilla Girls’ Identities Exposed!* (1990) purportedly lists individual members, with a touch of their signature cheekiness. “Is this or isn’t this a real list of Guerrilla Girls?” a statement released with the print asks. “Only the people on it know for

sure.” With more than five hundred women named, there is strength and protection in numbers.

The Guerrilla Girls and NMWA

Many of the prints in the exhibition, including the Guerrilla Girls’ first two portfolios of posters from 1985 to 2005 (“Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: The First Five Years” and “Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: Portfolio 2”) were donated to the museum by longtime NMWA supporter and Advisory Board member Steven Scott. Scott first encountered the Guerrilla Girls while gallery-hopping in SoHo in the mid-1980s. “The posters were ubiquitous,” he says. “I was highly enamored by the uproarious sense of humor conveyed by the works’ provocative subject matter, which sparked inappropriate laughter in all passersby.” Inspired by the Guerrilla Girls’ direct missives, Scott has been committed to equitable representation of men and women at his own gallery in Baltimore since it opened in 1988. “This was a conscious decision,” he explains. “I had read all the Guerrilla Girls’ statistics and was shocked at how few major New York contemporary art galleries showed more than 10 percent women. Like NMWA, I wanted my gallery to be a catalyst for change.”

The exhibition also debuts four recent acquisitions, including one of the collective’s newest works, *Guerrilla Girls ManifestA: For Art Museums Everywhere* (2024). Featuring directives for arts institutions to adhere to equitable and principled practices, the print is both a call-out and call to action, installed at NMWA across a prominent gallery wall as a large-scale vinyl print.



PHOTO BY LORE GRANKER FOR CONTACT PRESS. © GUERRILLA GIRLS; COURTESY OF WWW.GUERRILLAGIRLS.COM

Left: Guerrilla Girls in action, ca. 1985

Top right: *10 Trashy Ideas About the Environment*, from the series “Guerrilla Girls Talk Back: Portfolio 2,” 1994; Digital print on plastic bag, 12 x 9 in.; NMWA, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of Wilhelmina Cole Holladay



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Still Making Trouble

The Guerrilla Girls’ passion for advancing inclusivity in the arts fuels NMWA’s work, too. Today, museums, galleries, collectors, and patrons are more aware of gender and racial inequality than they were in previous decades. Yet new generations continue to face hurdles surrounding representation, access to resources, pay disparities, and more. Through the years, the Guerrilla Girls have continued to make waves. *Guerrilla Girls: Making Trouble* highlights the collective’s intrepid work and encourages museum visitors to speak up in their own activism. For forty years, the Guerrilla Girls have disrupted the status quo in the arts and beyond, and they are not slowing down.

// Hannah Shambroom is assistant curator at the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Guerrilla Girls: Making Trouble is organized by the National Museum of Women in the Arts and generously supported by the members of NMWA.

Notes:

1. “Interview from *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls*,” Guerrilla Girls, accessed April 10, 2025, https://www.guerrillagirls.com/confessions_interview.
2. “Guerrilla Girls’ First Press Release, May 6, 1985,” Guerrilla Girls, accessed April 10, 2025, <https://www.guerrillagirls.com/1985-projects/1985guerrillagirls-pressrelease>.
3. “Interview from *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls*.”
4. “Interview from *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls*.”