

ON THE BASIS OF ART: 150 YEARS OF WOMEN AT YALE

Yale University Art Gallery celebrates the work of Yale-educated women artists in a new exhibition from September 2021 through January 2022

April 29, 2021, New Haven, Conn.—*On the Basis of Art: 150 Years of Women at Yale* celebrates the vital contributions of generations of Yale-trained women artists to the national and international art scene. Through an exploration of their work, the exhibition charts the history of women at the Yale School of Art (formerly Yale School of the Fine Arts) and traces the ways in which they challenged boundaries of time and circumstance and forged avenues of opportunity—attaining gallery and museum representation, developing relationships with dedicated collectors, and securing professorships and teaching posts in a male-dominated art world. On view at the Yale University Art Gallery from September 10, 2021, through January 9, 2022, the exhibition commemorates two recent milestones: the 50th anniversary of coeducation at Yale College and the 150th anniversary of Yale University’s admittance of its first female students who, flaunting historical precedent, were welcomed to study at the School of the Fine Arts upon its opening in 1869.

On the Basis of Art showcases more than 75 artists working in a broad range of media, including painting, sculpture, drawing, print, photography, textile, and video. Objects are drawn exclusively from the Gallery’s collection and span more than 15 decades as well as a wide range of stylistic approaches—from realism to abstraction to figuration—revealing how these modern and contemporary women artists have brought their life experiences and individual styles to their careers.

“We are thrilled to join the University in celebrating and commemorating the contributions and accomplishments of women at Yale,” says Stephanie Wiles, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Gallery. “It’s an honor to present this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue, which together offer deep insight about women artist-graduates of Yale. These women brought an unwavering determination, bold experimentation, and a spirit of risk-taking to their practice, qualities that were critical to their success in the international art world.”

Exhibition Overview

On the Basis of Art is curated by Elisabeth Hodermarsky, the Sutphin Family Curator of Prints and Drawings, with the assistance of Judy Ditner, the Richard Benson Associate Curator of Photography



Irene Weir (B.F.A. 1906), *The Blacksmith*, Chinon, France, ca. 1923. Watercolor on paper. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Irene Weir, B.F.A. 1906

and Digital Media; John Stuart Gordon, the Benjamin Attmore Hewitt Curator of American Decorative Arts; Keely Orgeman, the Seymour H. Knox, Jr., Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art; Sydney Skelton Simon, the Bradley Assistant Curator of Academic Affairs; and Molleen Theodore, Associate Curator of Programs.

“It is inspiring to highlight the extraordinary and varied work of these talented female-identifying artists,” shares Hodermarsky. “Although this diverse group of artists spans multiple generations, there are cross-connections in their work that engage history, feminist movements, and legacies of influence. The exhibition is the first of its kind, telling the history of the visual arts at Yale from a female perspective.” Accordingly, the exhibition is organized into six thematic sections that mix time periods and media, allowing visitors to observe these dialogues across generations.



Njideka Akunyili Crosby (M.F.A. 2011), *The Rest of Her Remains*, 2010. Charcoal, acrylic, ink, collage, and Xerox transfers on paper. Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with a gift from the Arthur and Constance Zeckendorf Foundation. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro, and David Zwirner

The first section, **Carving a Presence**, demonstrates the persistence of the genre of portraiture and includes works by Irene Weir (B.A. 1906), Audrey Flack (B.F.A. 1952), and Njideka Akunyili Crosby (M.F.A. 2011). **Sculpting Space and Place** features two- and three-dimensional objects by Eva Hesse (B.F.A. 1959), Sylvia Plimack Mangold (B.F.A. 1961), Howardena Pindell (M.F.A. 1967), and others whose oeuvres consider space, perception, surface, and depth. **Threading Myth, Legend, and Ritual** highlights artists such as Rina Banerjee (M.F.A. 1995) and Natalie Frank (B.A. 2002), who engage tradition and storytelling in their practice. With works by artists like Lois Conner (M.F.A. 1981) and Victoria Sambunaris (M.F.A. 1999), **Modeling Nature, Tracing the Human Footprint** presents the different ways in which artists have depicted the natural world and have examined humankind’s relationship with nature—as both nurturer/steward and user/abuser. **Drawing Identity** reveals how artists, such as Wangechi Mutu (M.F.A. 2000), Mickalene Thomas (M.F.A. 2002), and Angela Strassheim (M.F.A. 2003), have challenged societal labels and offered thoughtful and powerful critiques of cultural systems. Finally, **Casting History, Etching Memory** explores how Maya Lin (B.A. 1981, M.ARCH. 1986), An-My Lê (M.F.A. 1993), Mary Reid Kelley (M.F.A. 2009), and others have memorialized or reflected on our past.

Related Publication

A comprehensive catalogue accompanies the exhibition. It features an introduction by Elisabeth Hodermarsky and essays by Helen A. Cooper (P.H.D. 1986), the Holcombe T. Green Curator Emeritus of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Gallery; Linda Konheim Kramer (B.F.A. 1963), former curator at the Brooklyn Museum and former Executive Director of the Nancy Graves Foundation; and Marta Kuzma, the Stavros Niarchos



Wangechi Mutu (M.F.A. 2000), *Sentinel I*, 2018. Paper pulp, wood glue, concrete, wood, glass beads, stone, rose quartz, gourd, and jewelry. Yale University Art Gallery, Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund. © Wangechi Mutu

Foundation Dean of the Yale School of Art, the first woman to hold that role. It also includes catalogue entries on every artist in the exhibition and timelines that detail important milestones for women—at Yale, in the arts, and in the country.

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For more detailed information, visit artgallery.yale.edu/publication/basis-art-150-years-women-yale.

Credits

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Sylvia Plimack Mangold (B.F.A. 1961), *Opposite Corners*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, Susan Morse Hilles Fund. © Sylvia Plimack Mangold, courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York

The exhibition is presented in conjunction with the campus-wide celebration for 50WomenAtYale150.

Yale University Art Gallery

Founded in 1832, the Yale University Art Gallery is the oldest college art museum in America. Today, it is a center for teaching, learning, and scholarship and a preeminent cultural asset for Yale University, the wider academic community, and the public. The museum collects, preserves, studies, and presents art in all media, from all regions of the globe and across time, with a collection numbering nearly 300,000 objects.

General Information

The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. In accordance with Yale University's COVID-19 protocols, the Gallery is currently closed to the public. For reopening information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at artgallery.yale.edu.

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