

**to be a**

# Lady

**forty-five women in the arts**

September 19, 2012 – January 18, 2013

This exhibition is sponsored by Ownership at 1285 Avenue of the Americas as a community-based public service in partnership with Jones Lang LaSalle and organized by Norte Maar, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) founded on building and promoting collaborations in the arts.

Alma Thomas  
Charmion von Wiegand  
Louise Nevelson  
Alice Neel  
Barbara Morgan  
Irene Rice Pereira  
Janice Biala  
May Wilson  
Lenore Tawney  
Louise Bourgeois  
Edith Schloss  
Grace Hartigan  
Ruth Asawa  
Betye Saar  
Pat Passlof  
Jay DeFeo  
Susan Weil  
Lee Bontecou  
Viola Frey  
Judy Dolnick  
Kathleen Fraser  
Hermine Ford  
Mimi Gross  
Nancy Grossman  
Elizabeth Murray  
Judy Pfaff  
Genesis Breyer P-Orridge  
Mira Schor  
Mary Judge  
Nancy Bowen  
Lindsay Walt  
Michelle Jaffé  
Elisabeth Condon  
Tamara Gonzales  
Jessica Stockholder  
Brece Honeycutt  
Ellie Murphy  
Julia K. Gleich  
Austin Thomas  
Ellen Letcher  
Rachel Beach  
Vanessa German  
Kristen Jensen  
Brooke Moyse  
Nathlie Provosty

**“You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl...”**

—Mary Anne Evans aka George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876

## TO BE A LADY.

There’s an historical rhythm to the rise and fall in value placed on the meaning of words. For centuries, the word *lady* has been a nuanced term for women prescribed by social mores. Politeness, good manners, correct attire, and behaving properly shaped what it meant to be a *lady*. To be considered as such was once the goal of every woman across the economic spectrum. At least, that’s what the men thought.

The word lady, here, is a provocation.<sup>1</sup> For much of the early 20th century, women were up against the “lady painter” image which historian Linda Nochlin suggests was “established in 19th century etiquette books and reinforced by the literature of the times.”<sup>2</sup> Despite what might appear to be great progress for women in the arts, these societal expectations continue into the present, impeding recognition.

Today, “to be a lady” may retain a sense of status in some circles. In others, it’s more colloquial, saturated in prejudice, imparting a frivolous or non-serious sensibility. “*Lady* carries with it overtones recalling the age of chivalry: the exalted stature of the person so referred to, her existence above the common sphere,” writes Robin Tolmach Lakoff in her study of language and woman’s place. “This gives the term a polite sense at first, but we must also remember that these implications are perilous: they suggest that a lady is helpless, and cannot do things for herself. At first blush it is flattering: the object of the flattery feels honored, cherished, and so forth; but by the same token, she is also considered helpless, and not in control of her own destiny.”<sup>3</sup>

It could be said that an exhibition curated by gender only reinforces the theory that women and their art need special handling. So why another exhibition of just the *ladies*? Because, despite great progress, we still have a lot of ground to make up. Vestiges of another time remain. This is especially apparent given our canonization of the male Abstract Expressionists. Could it be true that there were no *ladies* contributing to the ingenuity and propagation of American abstraction in that period? Every artist must overcome boundaries — some being the result of traditional expectations imposed over time. For women in the arts, as in many other fields, a special fortitude and commitment can be seen in the work and lives of those who succeed. To many, even today, it’s been a grueling struggle against what Nochlin termed “those bailiwicks of white masculine prerogative.”<sup>4</sup>



**NATHLIE  
PROVOSTY**

(b.1981)

*Untitled (Vertical II)*,  
2010

Oil on canvas

84 x 46 inches

Courtesy of the artist

In addition to these hierarchical canonizations, contemporary culture remains transfixed even obsessed with the *Enfant Terrible*: those bad boys we all love to hate. This adulation is rampant in the art world and has risen to exhausting proportions in the world of dance. “Why are there no great women choreographers?” There is also a keen priority placed on youth; as if everyone over thirty lacks inspiration or creative pulse. Women remain a statistical minority in today’s gallery world.<sup>5</sup> “The way to beat discrimination in art is by art,” Eva Hesse once said.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past century, the *ladies* were in the forefront of nearly every art movement in America and have been the instigators of change. They can be credited with bursting open the once taboo subjects of politics, societal roles, sex, and gender with their work.

This exhibition brings together forty-five artists born over the last century who happen to be women. From our current vantage point, with more than a hundred years of women’s suffrage and progress behind us<sup>7</sup>, the term *lady* is irrelevant and I’d argue, the label *woman artist* is unnecessary. As Lee Krasner said, “I’m an artist not a woman artist.”<sup>8</sup>

This is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of women in the arts; it is a selection of artists I know, have come to respect and whose aesthetic I admire. Gender rarely factors into my curatorial criteria. These women have problematized and played with gender identifications and characterizations, from *lady to woman to other* in some form, consciously or unconsciously. Here, specifically, it’s the physicality of the art making process that I am drawn too.

A direct contact with materials connects the forty-five artists in this exhibition. Nochlin suggested that women artists are “more inward-looking, more delicate and nuanced in their treatment of their medium.”<sup>9</sup> I would add that their attentiveness to the process of making is what gives them the ability to flex and extend not only the physical limitations of the materials, but connect to a psychological meaningfulness as well. As Leonore Tawney wrote, “What you put on that canvas or paper must come from your deepest self, from a place you do not even know.”<sup>10</sup>



**BARBARA MORGAN**

(1900–1992)

*Pure Energy and Neurotic Man*, 1940

Gelatin silver print  
13 ½ x 10 ½ inches

Courtesy of  
Bruce Silverstein  
Gallery, New York

Whether it be Louise Bourgeois' corporeal sculpture, Grace Hartigan's expressive stroke or Lenore Tawney's transformative weave, these *ladies* exude a tactile process and manipulated rigor. This same rigor can be seen in a more recent generation of artists including Elizabeth Murray, Nancy Grossman, and Mira Schor. Irony and satire have no place in their kind of art making. Even when the work's meaning is tongue in cheek, these artists are engaged with materiality and form in ways that are not ironically distanced.<sup>11</sup>

Volumes have been written on many of the more historic figures included here. Their art lays the ground-work for those that followed. This exhibition juxtaposes the established with the emerging so we might compare

and contrast each generation building upon preceding ones; the ideas, even the process, is passed on. Further, as historian Eleanor Munroe suggests a *lady* "would not have to break with her past to become herself as, it seems, the creative male is impelled to overthrow his father by symbolically rejecting his art."

*Lady* is a term given to a woman by someone else. These ladies aren't asking to be given anything. When I look at these artists, each represented by a signature work, I wonder why women aren't more prominently represented? What are the barriers that still exist? Perhaps this exhibition will remind us the world is full of great artists, and many of them happen to be *ladies*.

—Jason Andrew  
*Curator*

1 I have grown familiar with many of the women selected for this exhibition and use the word *lady* affectionately and respectfully; yet at the same time I recognize the restraints that the term implies.

2 Linda Nochlin. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News* 69 (January 1971).

3 Robin Tolmach Lakoff. *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*. Oxford University Press: 2004, p 55.

4 Nochlin., op.cit.

5 In a 2010 survey of Chelsea galleries by the online watch group Brainstormers (Top Offenders 2010 <http://www.brainstormersreport.net/TopOffenders2010.html>) the highest percentage of women represented by a single gallery was 27%. This particular gallery is now closed. The lowest is a miserable 4%. In my own research I have found some improvement in 2012 with the best representation now reaching a whopping 35% (one gallery) and yet the lowest still at 4% level, with the averages being around 22%.

6 Cindy Nemser. "Art Talk: Conversations with 15 Women Artists." New York: Harper Collins, 1995, p.11.

7 There is more than a century's experience with women's suffrage. New Zealand gave all adult women the vote in 1893. In the US (apart from a brief experiment in NJ, ending in 1807) territories and states started giving women the vote with Wyoming (1869) and Utah (1870). The requirement in the federal constitution that all states grant female suffrage only came in in 1920, but there was 50 years' prior experience.

8 Michael Kernan. "Out of Pollock's Shadow: Her Life & Art Seen Whole at Last," *Washington Post*, October 23, 1983, L1.

9 Linda Nochlin. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Art News* 69 (January 1971).

10 Lenore Tawney, excerpt from lecture, September 1990, courtesy Foundation Lenore Tawney.

11 Eleanor Munro. "Originals: American Woman Artists." New York: Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1979, p 53.



**ALMA THOMAS**

(1891–1978)

*Red Scarlet Sage*, 1976

Acrylic on canvas  
46 x 36 inches

Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld  
Gallery LLC, New York

Alma Thomas, a child of the Deep South, began painting in her seventies. Celebrated as one of the greatest African-American artists, her vivid and colorful paintings draw inspiration from the natural world.

*Creative art is for all time and is therefore independent of time. It is of all ages, of every land, and if by this we mean the creative spirit in man which produces a picture or a statue is common to the whole civilized world, independent of age, race and nationality; the statement may stand unchallenged.* —Alma Thomas



## ALICE NEEL

(1900–1984)

*Sunset in Spanish Harlem*, 1958

Oil on canvas

39 x 22 inches

Collection of AXA Equitable, New York

Alice Neel is one of America's finest painters who developed an expressionistic approach to the traditional forms of portraiture, landscape and still life.

*I never followed any school. I never imitated any artist. I never did any of that. I believe what I am is a humanist. That's the way I see the world, and that is what I paint [...] I think this strange life I've had has been a search for experience, and that all the experiences you can have is good for your work because it makes you more of a person. It forces you to have a broader view of life. Provided it doesn't kill you.* —Alice Neel

## LOUISE BOURGEOIS

(1911–2010)

*Life Flower I*, 1960

Bronze, painted white:

22 ½ x 34 x 23"

Bronze base:

27 ¾ x 15 ¼ x 15 ¼"

Courtesy Cheim & Read

Photo: Christopher Burke,

© Louise Bourgeois Trust /

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Louise Bourgeois is quite possibly one of the most celebrated sculptors our time. Her suggestive works express themes of betrayal, anxiety, loneliness, and abandonment. She is most recognized for mastering nearly every medium imaginable to further her explorations of the sexual female. *Life Flower I* can be considered one of the artists' 'classical landscapes'—the looping bands of bronze mimicking both the pedal of a flower and the laces of a bow, which the artist interprets as the linking of relationships between lovers and friends.



## GRACE HARTIGAN

(1922–2008) Grace Hartigan never entirely broke with the figurative tradition. One of the few ladies to break into the New York School of Abstract Expressionism, she challenged the notion that only men could paint big. Haritgan created this painting as a memorial to Marilyn Monroe.  
*Marilyn*, 1962  
Oil on canvas  
70 x 50 inches  
Collection of Hart Perry, New York

*I was never conscious of being a female artist and I resent being called a woman artist. I am an artist. Actually I don't like being called an artist anymore... I'm a painter.* —Grace Hartigan



## LEE BONTECOU

(b.1931) Lee Bontecou first arrived on the New York art scene making giddy sculpture that challenged artistic conventions of both materials and presentation. Her best constructions, deep studies in illusion, are at once mechanistic and organic, abstract but evocative. For some time she retreated from the art world to rural Pennsylvania. However, her art, now more than ever is being rediscovered.  
*Untitled*, c.1960  
canvas, blue jeans, wire,  
and welded metal  
20 ½ x 60 x 8 ½ inches  
Collection of halley k harrisburg and  
Michael Rosenfeld, New York, NY;  
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld  
Gallery LLC, New York, NY

*I was after a kind of illusion. With painting you have illusion. The surface is two-dimensional, so everything that happens on it is illusionary. I love that.* —Lee Bontecou

## VIOLA FREY

(1933–2004)

*Still Life Series (Aladdin)*, 1987

Ceramic

66 x 28 x 22 inches

Collection of Juide and Howard Ganek,

Courtesy of Nancy Hoffman

Gallery, New York

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Viola Frey expanded the traditional boundaries of ceramic sculpture making mammoth work in clay that often depict men in suits and ties and women in dresses with old-fashioned hairdos. Her influence expanded far past the Bay Area where she spent most of her life teaching and creating art. Primitive and childlike in style, Frey's work couples a rawness and innocence with the cold persona so commonly associated with the shallowness of suburban culture.



## NANCY GROSSMAN

(b.1940) No other artist has explored gender and personal identity more than

*Potawatami*, 1967

Leather collage using

horse harnesses and chain

63 x 37 ¾ x 13 inches

Michael Rosenfeld

Gallery, LLC, New York

Nancy Grossman. Her use of straps, spikes, zippers, leather and ropes, imply sexual ambiguity with concerns about the physicality of the body. Tactile and provocative, her work continues to shape and influence generations.



## ELIZABETH MURRAY

(1940–2007)  
*The Unscrew Painting*, 1993  
 Oil on canvas on wood  
 73 x 71 x 12 inches  
 Courtesy of The Murray-Holman Family Trust and Pace Gallery, New York  
 Photo: © 2012 The Murray-Holman Family Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Photo by: Kerry Ryan McFate / Courtesy Pace Gallery

Elizabeth Murray rid the world of the rectangular picture plane, building stretchers and shaped forms that better represent the way she saw the world. Her distinctive canvases break with the art-historical tradition of illusionistic space in two-dimensions, jutting out from the wall as sculptural form. Murray blurs the line between the painting as object, and the painting as a space for depicting objects. Her bold work reveals a fascination with dream states and often depicts the psychological underbelly of domestic life.

## JUDY PFAFF

(b.1946)  
*Miss Dworkin*, 2003  
 Ink, oilstick, encaustic and doily on Japanese paper  
 125 3/8 x 53 3/8 inches  
 Courtesy of Ameringer / McEnery / Yohe, New York  
 © Judy Pfaff/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



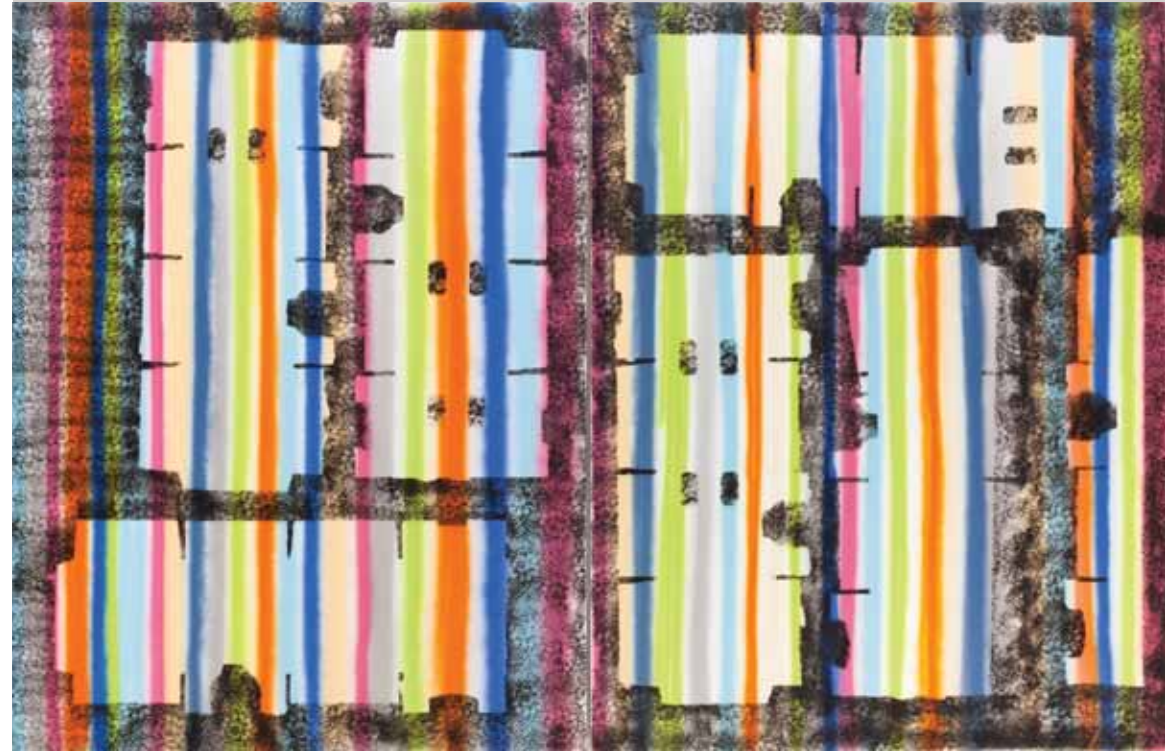
## MIRA SCHOR

(b.1950)  
*Silence...speech, noise*, 2010  
 Ink, oil and gesso on linen  
 18 x 30 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist and Marvelli Gallery, New York



## NANCY BOWEN

(b.1955) Nancy Bowen offers a poetic commentary on our quickly changing material culture. Like an artistic archeologist in an age of globalization and post-industrialization, she salvages ornament and craft traditions by incorporating them into her sculpture.  
*Exalt*, 2008  
Glass, wax, mirror, epoxy resin  
50 x 54 x 34 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



## TAMARA GONZALES

(b.1959) Tamara Gonzales pushes paint to the optical extreme through her unique process of spray painting through found lace tablecloths, doilies, and curtains. Vibrant and witty, layered and textured, she combines large gesture with tight pattern to create compositions that at once mimic the grand heroic gestures of the postwar painters, while capturing an all-over free spirit found in the graffiti that appears daily on the streets near her Bushwick studio.  
*Plastic Fantastic*, 2011  
Spray paint on canvas  
65 x 100 inches (dyptych)  
Courtesy of the artist  
Photo: Jason Mandella



## JULIA K. GLEICH

(b.1965)  
*The Decker Fall*, 1984–2012

Video  
Courtesy of the artist

Julia K. Gleich's choreography bridges gaps between traditional ballet form and the conceptuality of post-modern dance. Accomplished on many artistic fronts, her video sketches, much like her choreography, play off time, distance, and memory. In *The Decker Fall*, Gleich reclaims a moment of choreography where Zola Budd and Mary Decker collide in the 1984 Olympics. Decker's fall fueled controversy, shattered the dreams of both women, and garnered attention for women athletes as ambitious and ruthless competitors. At 4:58.4, a fall becomes theater.



## AUSTIN THOMAS

(b.1969)  
*Round Place Square*, 2010  
Collage with ink and graphite  
42 x 42 inches  
Private Collection, Brooklyn  
Photo: Jason Mandella

Austin Thomas works in collage, sculpture, social architecture, maintaining an overall simplicity. Her varied artworks are broadly described as 'delineating and creating social sculpture.' Like a Precisionist, Thomas tightly balances seemingly random elements of cut, torn, folded, and glued paper to create deceptively delicate studies which seem caught sometimes in the act of unfolding. Sketching is a vital part of her art making, yet in all her work, the sculptural form takes precedent.



## VANESSA GERMAN

(b.1976)

*Toaster*, 2011

Found glass bottle, hand wrought beads; fabric, earth, string, thread, hair, mantle bird, electric outlet, cowrie, buttons, spark plugs, old doll parts, plaster, wood, wood paint, vintage match books, found toaster, image; slave ownership photograph of

Delilah, found jewelry, found carved wooden banana, fabric

31 ½ x 14 x 12 inches

Courtesy of the artist and

Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York

Vanessa German calls on a variety of skills to create symbolic works composed of found objects. She explores issues such as race and gender. Her sculptural arrangements challenge cultural myths and stereotypes.

*As a sculptor, I always work on the things that I love, create things that rise out of that place of ethnic clarity for me.* —Vanessa German

## BROOKE MOYSE

(b.1978)

*Mount*, 2011

Oil on canvas

72 x 80 inches

Courtesy of the artist

Photo: Jason Mandella

Brooke Moyses champions the heroic in painting yet her compositions have a miniaturist approach. Major decisions are referenced through a dialogue with short gestured statements of color and shape. At times, referencing old masters like Titian, her paintings offer a distilled experience which develops slowly over time: as one moment is revealed, the next is hidden. Moyses remains transfixed by landscapes both real and imagined.



**Norte Maar for Collaborative Projects in the Arts** is a 501(c)3 non-profit arts organization founded in 2004 by curator Jason Andrew and choreographer Julia K. Gleich to create, promote, and present collaborations in the disciplines of the visual, literary, and the performing arts: connecting artists, choreographers, composers, writers, and other originating artists with venues and each other.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

This exhibition would not have been possible without the loan of significant works from the artists, their estates and their galleries. Our sincere thanks to them all and their associates. Additional thanks to Christina Zuccari owner of Moro Conservation Studio Inc., Jerry Kurian at Steven Amedee Framing, and Sameea Kasim at Keith Artcore Fine Art Services Inc., for each of their facilitations in their area of expertise. Also thanks to Julia K. Gleich for her endless supply of energetic support; Anastasia Gyle for initial assistance; Mira Schor for her guidance and suggestions; Colin Thomson, Director, 1285 Art Gallery, for his facilitation and advice; and also Linda Florio, Florio Design, for her creative work.

Norte Maar is supported by the Friends of Norte Maar. For more information please visit: [www.nortemaar.org](http://www.nortemaar.org)

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For an complete list of works as well as expanded biographies of the artists please visit: [www.nortemaar.org](http://www.nortemaar.org)

**On view September 19 through January 18, 2013**

Gallery hours: Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.  
1285 Avenue of the Americas Art Gallery  
Between 51st and 52nd Streets, New York City

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