A Exhibition of Contemporary Art Reflecting 40 Years Since the Sex Discrimination Act

2015 marked 40 years since the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act in the UK, a law that aimed to change the landscape of our society. Curators Day+Gluckman have been exploring these themes for their project A Woman’s Place which questions and addresses the contemporary position of women in our creative, historical and cultural landscape through contemporary art.

Works by 24 women artists reflect the changes in art practice, within the context of sexual and gender equality, since the introduction of the Act. Some artists confront issues that galvanised the change in law whilst others have carved their own place in a complex and male dominated art world. The exhibition presents a snapshot of the evolving conversations that continue to contribute to the mapping of a woman’s place in British society. Body, femininity, sex, motherhood, economic and political status are explored through film, photography, sculpture, performance and painting.
Alison GILL

Alison Gill has re-made her piece ‘It’s All Over’ from 1993, which included the artist’s long plaited, sliced off and placed in a vetrine. A work inextricably linked to a moment in time or a rite of passage, the work was sold and subsequently ‘disappeared’. Twenty-two years later the artist is recreating the work, using bought hair, creating a multi-layered narrative on ageing, changing ideas of beauty, femininity and the values of production.

Helena Goldwater’s sustained performance practice is represented in the exhibition by images from the beginning of her career through to more recent work, wearing what has become her iconic red dress. Throughout her career this dress has remained a constant as the performances have evolved. The familiarity of the objects that she uses in the performances: hair, milk, ice for example, offer potent moments of exchange and transformation - both actual and psychological.

Joy GREGORY

One of the major artists to emerge from the Black British photography movement of the 1980s, Joy Gregory’s work engages with the discussions surrounding race, history, gender and aesthetics. Whilst social and political issues are integral to her practice, the work is rooted in the concepts of ‘truth and beauty.’ In Libertes we show two works ‘Kitten Heels’ from the series ‘Girl Thing’ 2002–10: a cyanotype in which the shoes are contrasted to suggest pieces of meat, and ‘Hair Grips’ from ‘Objects of Beauty 1992 – 1995’, an image recently used on the cover of a new edition of ‘The Second Sex’ by Simone de Beauvoir.

Margaret HARRISON

Founding the London Women’s Liberation Art Group in 1970, Margaret Harrison has been involved in art, action and feminism for four decades. The Last Gaze (2013) is an installation of a painting reflected in a cluster of car rear view mirrors. The image, based on the painting ‘The Lady of Shalott,’ (Waterhouse,1894), itself inspired by the Tennyson poem, tells of a cursed woman who can only view the world via mirrored images. The work highlights the historical dominance of the male author and the objectification of women. This work was part of her award-winning presentation for the 2013 Northern Art Prize and was recently purchased by mima following her solo exhibition in 2016.

Eleanor MORETON

Eleanor Moreton is interested in the ‘mystery of depiction’ and how the viewer relates to the painted picture. Her subject matter dissects the cultures that produced the original source material from which she works, from genre paintings through to photographs and illustrations. The paintings on show come from her series ‘Absent Friends’, a personal homage to the women musicians and writers that the artist admires. Moreton says of the women in the series that: “They are all women defined by their creativity and for whom a public image was secondary, undesirable or troublesome.”

Hayley NEWMAN

Hayley Newman’s work and activism are inextricably mixed. Her performances and crafted objects stem from her interest in the role of the individual and the collective, most recently in relation to current economic, social and ecological crises. For Libertes Newman is showing a selection from her series ‘Domestique’, a series of used, donated tea towels, dusters and dishcloths, which she has embroidered at home with trims, threads, beads and sequins to become an anthropomorphosed mass of faces conveying a range of emotions.

Freddie ROBINS

In 2011 Freddie Robins was commissioned by Day-Gluckman to create new work for ‘Fifties, Fashion and Emerging Feminism at Glyther Bristow Gallery. A drawing from the exhibition has now been realised as one of Robins’ trademark knitted works, ‘Bad Mother’. The work, which depicts a baby projecting from its parent’s head, is shown along with the wryly humorous ‘Bad Mother’, a burlesque voodoo object stabbed with knitting needles. Both works directly comment on the push-pull of creative practice with the demands of motherhood.

Frances KEARNEY

Frances Kearney’s photographs are considered tableaux of complex relationships. Her series, ‘Like Mother Like Daughter,’ explores the dynamics of the inter-dependence between mothers and daughters. For ‘Like Mother Like Daughter’, Hft the mother, taking some time out; is sitting on the sofa linking drinking straws in a repetitive act. The elder daughter looks on holding the baby. Do we read this as neglect or as a moment of calm and a creative outlet from the all-consuming demands of childcare? Kearney is non-judgemental, and the spiralling straws, a nod to the famous 1970s land art work ‘Sprial Jetty’ by Robert Smithson, suggests a creative internal landscape that exists beyond the persona of ‘mother’.

El MAJOR

Major’s photographs deal with personal identity and the manipulation of image. Major’s series ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’, uses archival images from the suffrage movement and footage of contemporary protests. The artist re-stages key historical moments; for example when suffragette Mary Richardson attacked Velazquez’s ‘The Toilet of Venus’ (also known as the ‘Rokeby Venus’) with a knife. By using her own portrait in the images Major continues the discussion, personally interrogating motive, and reflecting on the politics of today.

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Carey YOUNG

Terms and Conditions’ features a besuited female presenter speaking to camera in a welcoming tone whilst standing in an idyllic agricultural landscape, replete with references to the painterly landscape tradition. Her speech appears to discuss the ‘site’ but the text is actually a composite of disclaimers from corporate websites. In the rural setting, the speech seems both absurd and curiously apt. The material for Young’s artistic practice, including the tools and mechanisms used across corporate and political disciplines, critiques the interconnection between economics, art, justice and politics.

Alice May WILLIAMS

Recent Goldsmiths graduate (2014), Alice May Williams tells stories through video, drawing, text, music and installation. Her MA Degree show work ‘We Can Do It!’ resulted from the ‘googling’ of the words ‘Rosie the Riveter,’ the head-scarfed American World War II icon, and the multitude of images that came alongside. She likes to ‘dip in and out of different social groups, finding the gaps and overlaps in their identifying gestures, genres, colours, codes and languages’ to identify what it is that makes us part of a group.

Monica ROSS (1950 – 2013)

Monica Ross continues to be celebrated for her powerful, political performance work. For Libertes we have worked with the artist’s archive, showing one image from ‘Monument to Working Women’, a co-production by Shirley Cameron, Monica Ross and Evelyn Silver in Rochdale in 1985. Also on display is documentation of her celebrated final work ‘Acts of Memory’; solo, collective and multilingual recitations from memory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reached its 60th and concluding performance at the 23rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland on the day she died, 14 June 2013. A collective recitation was held in 2015 at the British Library to coincide with the exhibition Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy.