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A SHADOW

Anetta Mona Chisa & Lucia Tkáčová

Furen Dai

Tracey Emin

Hackney Flashers 1974–1980

Rajkamal Kahlon

Joiri Minaya

Yoko Ono

Maria D. Rapicavoli

Aliza Shvarts

Betty Tompkins

Mierle Laderman Ukeles

“Sigh no more, ladies,” reads a line from feminist poet Adrienne Rich’s “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law.” Borrowing this line from Shakespeare’s song “Sigh No More Ladies” (*Much Ado About Nothing*)¹, her appropriation of the English playwright’s critique of men is fair, given her firsthand experience. Rich’s poem continues:

**“Time is male
and in his cups drinks to the fair.
Bemused by gallantry, we hear
our mediocrities over-praised,
indolence read as abnegation,
slattern thought styled intuition,
every lapse forgiven, our crime
only to cast too bold a shadow
or smash the mold straight off.
For that, solitary confinement,
tear gas, attrition shelling.
Few applicants for that honor.”²**

Originally published in 1963, “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” characterizes a time, not unlike 2020, marked by cultural and political transformation across the spectrum, seismic shifts that might now be referred to as intersectional in nature. Second-wave feminism gained momentum with the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, and when the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women submitted its final reports to President Kennedy. Friedan’s book, which addressed what she described as “the problem that has no name,” was written at a time when women who had been in the workforce through the Second World War were told that their fulfillment was instead to be found in housework and family, just as suburbs were growing exponentially.³ Perhaps more glaring in retrospect is the activism that occurred in response to racism and segregation: Martin Luther King made his “I Have a Dream” speech, and Malcolm X delivered “Message to the Grassroots.” It is also the year President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. In the midst of so much tumult, Rich’s prose about the aggressions familiar to domestic life would likely register as relatively mundane or of less consequence, yet it is these nuanced corners of the everyday, determined by men, that reveal the degree to which the systemic oppression of women is entrenched in Western culture.

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In recent months, many women's domestic lives have been fraught with complications due to the coronavirus pandemic, with government mandated lockdowns keeping non-essential workers at home. Time, according to Rich, is a male construct; in 'coronacime,' any hope of work-life balance has been undone, with reports of the burden of work falling disproportionately on women, regardless of their professional standing. She writes of the subjugation that underscores the array of institutions framing many women's lived experiences: marriage, motherhood, and the assumed, but often invisible role of homemaker.

In her renowned *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*, conceptual artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles denounced the tedium of domestic life, especially the underappreciated labor borne by mother and wife:

"Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time (lit.)

The mind boggles and chafes at the boredom.

The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs =

minimum wages, housewives = no pay."⁴

Less than a decade prior to writing this manifesto, while still a student at Pratt Institute in the early 1960s, Ukeles made *Second Binding* (1964), as part of a series she called *Bindings*, produced between 1963 and 1967. The piece was composed of knotted cheesecloth that she filled with rags, newspaper, and foil, colored with dye, structured with glue as a stiffening agent.⁵ She described the work as "sort of energy

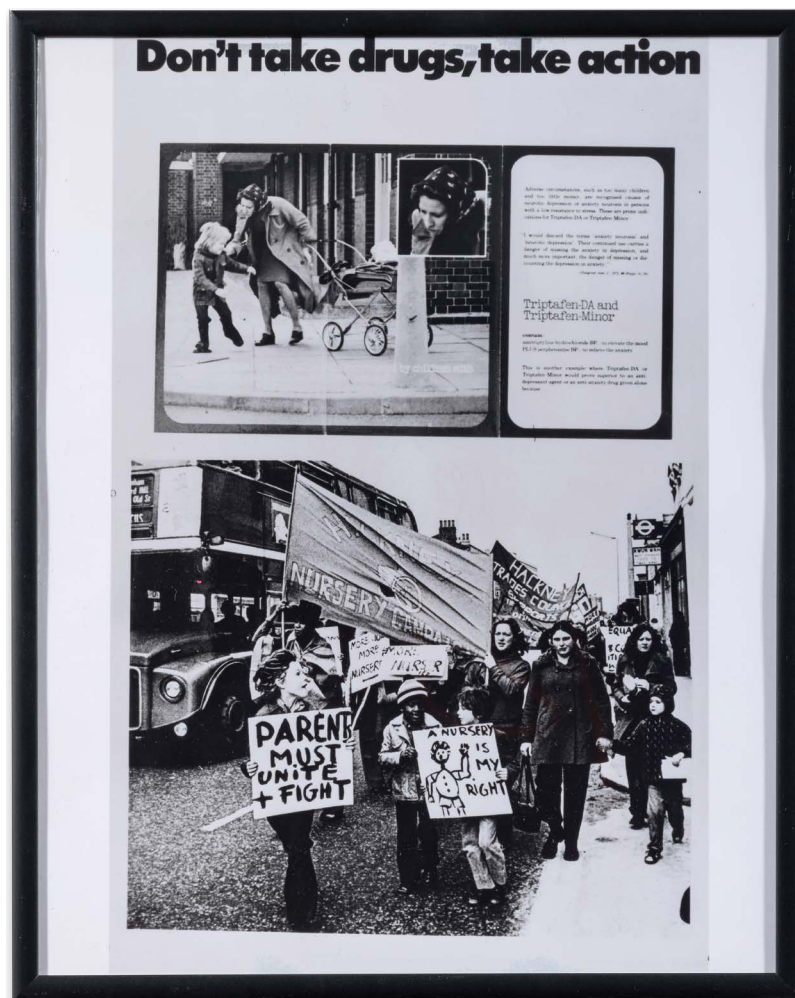


Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Second Binding*, 1964.
Cheesecloth stuffed with rags and newspaper, dye, and aluminum foil on canvas.

© Mierle Laderman Ukeles
On loan from the Jewish Museum, New York.
Purchased by Milton and Miriam Handler Fund, 2017-39.

Pods, where I stuffed them up to the point of bursting with rags.”⁶ The abstract bindings got her into trouble at Pratt “for what they said was pornographic art.”⁷ She took a leave of absence in 1964, returning in 1965, eventually choosing to withdraw because the “predominantly male administration” criticized her work for being “oversexed.”⁸ Rich’s poem and Ukeles’ artwork—both her manifesto and sculpture—signify two divergent yet related experiences of oppression of the 1960s: the implicit obligations of being a housewife and the restrictions placed on women in the academy.

U.K.-based collective Hackney Flashers, 1974-1980, rebelled against these confines of domesticity, particularly those endured by middle- and working-class women. In 1979, they organized a demonstration outside of London’s Hayward Gallery calling for free childcare and recognition of the needs of children under the age of five.⁹ Members of the collective included professional and amateur photographers—Jo Spence, An Dekker, Sally Greenhill, Liz Heron, Gerda Jager, Michael Ann Mullen, Maggie Murray, and Julia Vellacott, among others—based in Hackney, a predominantly working-class London borough. Calling themselves ‘flashers’ alluded to the slang term for photographers as well as an act of indecent exposure, “a metaphor for their photographic exposure of unjust social conditions.”¹⁰ In their photo-based series *Who’s Still Holding the Baby?*, 1978, the group challenged the dominant culture’s disdain for working-class women, many



Hackney Flashers, 1974-1980, *Untitled* (from *'Who's still holding the baby?'*), 1978. Label on verso Black and white photograph. Courtesy of Hackney Flashers Archive at Bishopsgate Institute, London.

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of whom were single, by highlighting the public welfare system's failure to provide adequate day care and educational resources for their children. *Untitled (from Who's Still Holding the Baby?)*, with the text Don't Take Drugs Take Action, critiqued the emerging culture of medication—namely, the antidepressant Triptafen, prescribed to women to ameliorate the distress of having to work both within and outside the home. Instead, Hackney Flashers called for collective action as a means to rise above the constraints they faced as women artists, many of them mothers.¹¹

In her manifesto, Ukeles presciently poses a nearly rhetorical question: "after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"¹² In what appeared to be a double bind—first being ostracized as an art student and later contending with the tedium of housework—Ukeles' experiences at home and in the academy were all too prevalent. Decades later, as an undergraduate art student at Yale University, performance artist Aliza Shvarts "explored questions of biological and epistemological reproduction,"¹³ through *Untitled [Senior Thesis]*, 2008, in which she effectuated repeated self-inseminations followed by self-induced miscarriages, in other words, monthly impregnations and abortions, as her senior year performance art piece.¹⁴ Despite being approved by multiple Yale faculty members—including an advisor who directly oversaw the project as it developed week by week—the piece was blocked from being included in the thesis exhibition by the administration, justified by claims that ranged from the work being inappropriate, to other faculty expressing fear over the artist's use of blood and the possibility that she was harmed in the making of the artwork.¹⁵ Whatever their logic, Yale's lack of support for Shvarts in realizing her senior project, which included an attempt to get her to sign a statement saying it was a fiction—a novel form of censorship—violated its stated commitment to free speech. Could this, and the isolation that Ukeles experienced at Pratt several decades earlier, be construed as sexism in the art academy? The irony in both schools' attempts to suppress these artworks is that the young artists were censored for depicting biology and anatomy, revealing the predominantly male administrations' overt discomfort with allusions to the (female) body as rendered by women. These suppressions also highlight the inability of many institutions and political entities to address reproductive management openly, further relegating it to the private domain, burden, and responsibility of women.

...

Newly commissioned for *Too Cast Too Bold A Shadow* is Shvarts' *Anatomy*, 2020, an installation assembled from a collection of graphic diagrams used by police departments across the United States, pulled from sexual assault evidence kits, colloquially known as rape kits. The piece is comprised of illustrations of



Aliza Shvarts, *Anthem*, 2020.

Reproductions of sexual assault evidence collection kit diagrams, set-up boxes, inkjet prints on paper.

Courtesy of the artist.

genitalia found in the kits, which vary widely by state, demonstrating that within our culture, as it pertains to legal guidelines, the body is not fixed, but open to interpretation. Implemented by forensic nurses and law enforcement officials to denote the extent of criminal effect on survivors of sexual assault, the interpretive nature of these evaluative tools is puzzling for two reasons: first, for the omission of critical anatomical details, and second, for their lack of recognition of transgender identification by the injured party, considering the disproportionate number of assaults on non-binary individuals.¹⁶ According to the artist, the most glaring oversight in the design of the kits is their material inability to determine whether the act involved consent, which she posits is the critical metric in understanding culpability and proportion in cases of assault. In contextualizing *Anatomy*, and an earlier artwork titled *Anthem* which similarly classifies the rape kits by state, Shvarts cites Harvard Professor and essayist Elaine Scarry for her pioneering writing that identifies three spheres in which consent operates: medicine, political philosophy, and marriage law.¹⁷ Scarry points to the free citizen's underlying inalienable right to the self, recognizing the body as "the ground of consent [...] and subsequent civil rights."¹⁸



Furen Dai, *Love for Sale*, 2020.
Video (color, sound), 7:03min. Video still.
Courtesy of the artist.

The absence of consent, acquiescence, and consent itself represent a through line connecting the different generations, historical periods, and cultural references taken up in many of the artworks presented in *To Cast Too Bold a Shadow*. The institution of marriage is a legal contract based on the premise of consent, but consent to what exactly? Two projects that elaborate on the negotiations of marriage are Furen Dai's *Love for Sale*, and Maria D. Rapicavoli's *The Other: A Familiar Story*, both 2020, which demonstrate Scarry's notion of consent in connection with marriage law as it pertains to women in starkly different settings. In *Love for Sale*, Dai documents verbal exchanges between parents in five different marriage markets held in public parks throughout Beijing, where they attempt to match their offspring to potential partners. Their commentary calls attention to the gender inequity in Chinese culture, in which men are the "hot commodity," and women age out of being seen as viable matches much sooner than their male counterparts. The video provides insight into the mindset of the parents

who circulate within these markets, sometimes alone, offering prospective buyers a view of cell phone snapshots of their progeny. It also reveals how they assess their children's status through the lenses of education, class position, and immigration, reflected in the other parents' level of interest in brokering a potential match. Dai's narrative consists of snippets of transcribed conversation she recorded, accompanied by her father and a female friend, providing fly-on-the-wall access to this matchmaking ritual. The artist's voice is intermittently audible, but it is the parents who lead the exchange.

"Hey girls, which year were you born?"

1988.

Both were in 1988? My son is old, born in 1974. I like you both. Unfortunately, you were born in 1988.

Young lady, don't waste your time anymore.

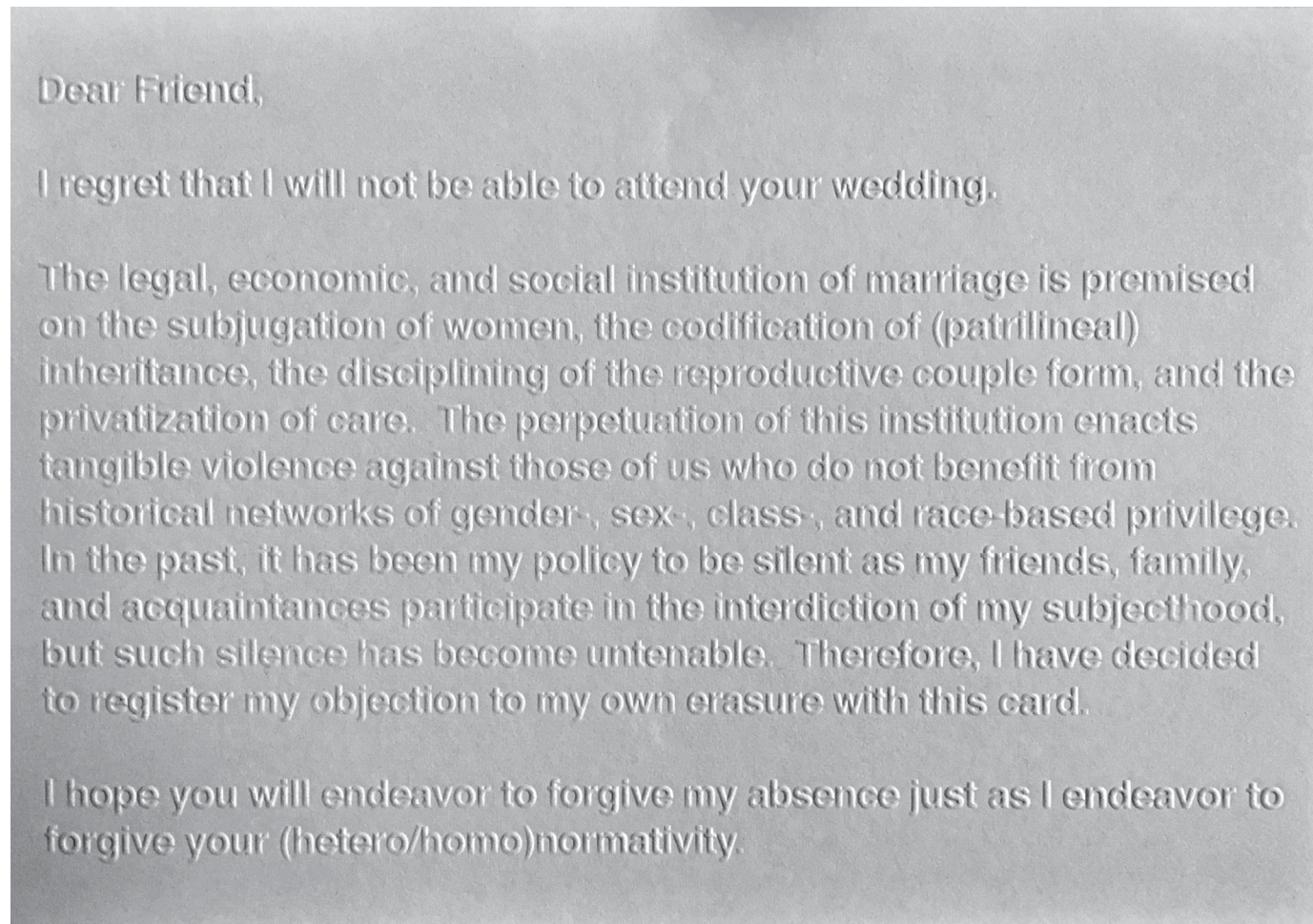
You have a better selling price, if you are under 30. Once you pass 30, your price drops. Once you pass 35, your price gonna get worse.

Boys are different, they are as good when they are 40."

Dai's presence in her video—apparent only in the soundtrack—maintains a lightness as she cheerfully fields queries about her age, education, and interests. Perhaps her stature as an artist with a career in the West gives her a critical distance from these conventional pressures. Regarding marriage, Aliza Shvarts' criticality goes even further in her *Homage* series begun in 2017, a collection of works that follow the form of Adrian Piper's conceptual artworks *My Calling (Cards)* #1 and #2 (1986-1990). Similar to Piper's cards, Shvarts' *Homage* is also a ready-made response: an RSVP to a wedding invitation that hails the viewer to become attuned to the operation of an unmarked power dynamic, namely, the codification of patrilineal inheritance. Her refusal goes beyond declining the invitation; she objects to the institution of marriage wholesale:

"Dear Friend, I regret that I will not be able to attend your wedding [...] The perpetuation of this institution enacts tangible violence against those of us who do not benefit from historical networks of gender-, sex-, class-, and race-based privilege. In the past, it has been my policy to be silent as my friends, family, and acquaintances participate in the interdiction of my subjecthood, but such silence has become untenable [...]"

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Aliza Shvarts, *Homage: Congratulations*, 2020.
Embossed paper wedding RSVP cards.
Courtesy of the artist.

In contrast to Shvarts' and Dai's resistance to marriage, Maria D. Rapicavoli's film, *The Other: A Familiar Story*, tells a darker tale of imposed matrimony. Her two-channel, projected film stitches together the protagonist's fragmented memories of her journey, one of stark dislocation from Catania, Italy, to Lawrence, Massachusetts. The experimental narrative follows a woman, forced to emigrate to the United States through marriage against her will, leaving her children and previous partner behind in the process. Rapicavoli cites Simone de Beauvoir's writings on the construct of woman as other, a term that has



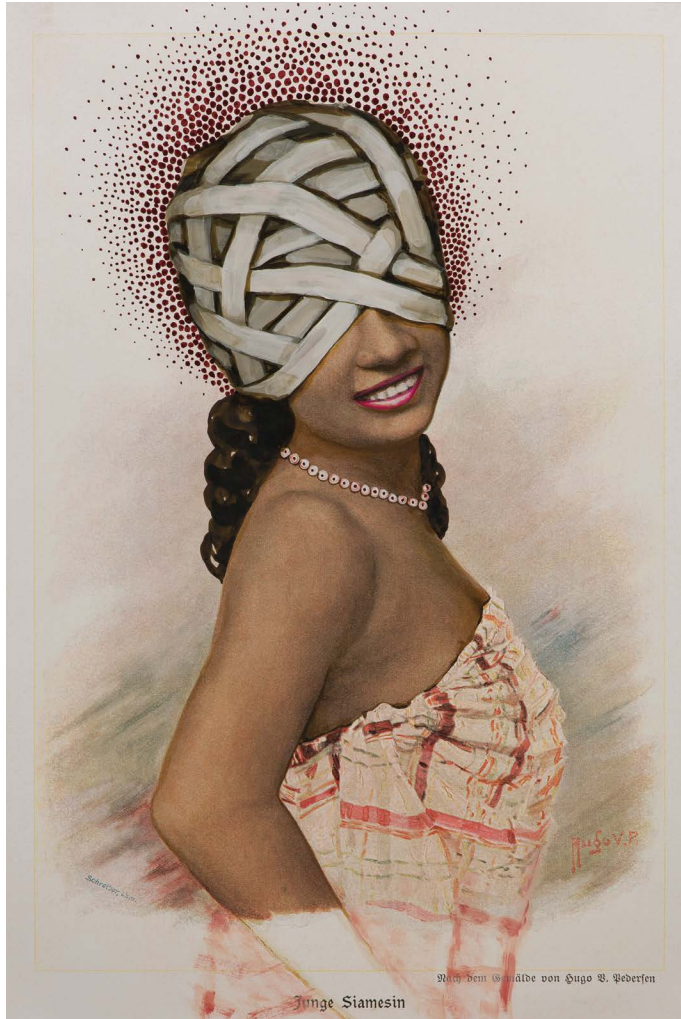
Maria D. Rapicavoli, *The Other: A Familiar Story*, 2020.
Two channel video installation with sound, 19:40min. Video Still.
Photo courtesy of MDR.

come into wider circulation in recent years. To other, that is to say, the act of othering, has emerged in vernacular parlance to describe the treatment of marginalized individuals as alien. In Volume I of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir wrote,

“it is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One. But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view.”¹⁹

Rapicavoli's interest in *The Second Sex* (1949) is for de Beauvoir's unlocking of the woman's conventional status, freeing her from the "minor" status that forced her to be the other without having the right or the opportunity to build another condition for herself. As a result, the woman's identity is split into two realities: one in which she has no right to a voice, and a second that is largely foreign to her. This duality becomes even more significant when the other is an immigrant, who was dragged against her will to a foreign country. According to the story handed down to the artist, the woman was first coerced into marrying her husband and then into following him to the United States. Passing through Ellis Island, she moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts, near Boston, where she worked in one of the textile factories, which, at the time, was employing countless immigrants. The otherness of the woman is therefore

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Rajkamal Kahlon, *Untitled (Pin Up)*, 2017.
From the series *Do You Know Our Names*,
Gouache and acrylic on archival digital print.
Courtesy of the artist.

double: she is other to her husband and other in the social context of the United States where she must lead a new life.

According to de Beauvoir, it was a woman's cross to bear, this condition of otherness, or second-class status that has been absorbed into broader cultural knowledge as the experience of being subservient to, or less than, the dominant identity (in her writing, men). The main character in *The Other: A Familiar Story* is loosely based on a member of the artist's family named Mena. During the development of the project, Rapicavoli opted to remove Mena's name from the film's script. Omitting the character's name opens up the story, making for a more universal, relatable ordeal. While the redaction ensures that this specific woman's history is not exploited, it raises questions about visibility, particularly in relation to immigration, and how it contributes to an individual's sense of safety and legal protection. It is one thing for the artist to choose to redact her name, but quite another when larger political and social forces prevent the names of individuals and groups from being known, enabling oppression and dehumanization.

Rajkamal Kahlon's series *Do You Know Our Names?* (2017) modifies photographic material

to question how photography has been used to document the colonial subject. The series is based on nineteenth-century portraits of women appropriated from imagery in *Die Völker der Erde* (People of the Earth), an 1890 German book on anthropology that Kahlon bought at a used bookshop in Vienna. The artist's painterly interventions rehumanize those whose histories have long since been reduced to nameless

anthropological subjects. She digitally enlarged a selection of portraits of women and then embellished them with acrylic paint in a similar manner to the coloration techniques of nineteenth-century photography studios. As Rapticavoli's project universalizes the story of Mena in *The Other: A Familiar Story*, Kahlon's interventions restore the humanity of the portraits' subjects by adorning them in present-day attire and with dotted, lined, and bandaged decorative elements that range from whimsical patterns to suggestions of disease. A gauze headwrap is both bandage and blindfold, obscuring the subject's gaze from legibility.

Artworks by Kahlon and Joiri Minaya question how colonization has shaped the cultural conditions women have faced throughout modern history. Like Kahlon's appropriated illustrations, Minaya's use of found art



Joiri Minaya, *#dominicanwomengooglesearch*, 2016.
Mixed media installation.
Photograph by Stefan Hagen.
Courtesy of the artist.

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Joiiri Minaya, *Sex Tourist and White Local Predator Painting in Art History #2 (After Gauguin #2)*, 2015.
Postcards and postcard stand.
Courtesy of the artist.



Joiiri Minaya, *Sex Tourist and White Local Predator Painting in Art History #4 (After Grau Araujo)*, 2015.
Postcards and postcard stand.
Courtesy of the artist.

historical references complicates the fetishization of the other. In both of their works, the other refers to non-European women, and more specifically, Minaya's work scrutinizes the fetishization of women of Dominican descent. *#dominicanwomengooglesearch* (2016) is based on images generated by search engine results for the phrase "Dominican women." The three-dimensional, kinetic installation of female body parts is comprised of "flat muscular stomachs, headless wet torsos, crossed legs, long hair, floating hands, breasts, and buttocks."²⁰ The work combines images of the female body with tropical symbols, deconstructing the effects culturally specific fantasies have had on the agency of women, specifically

those from developing parts of the world. Curator Tatiana Sante Rosa writes, “their assertive gazes might suggest empowerment, but numerous images belong to ‘dating websites’ and follow a visual standardization that discloses their staging and production,”²¹ reiterating the contradictions inherent in cultural appropriation.

A second installation by Minaya is mounted alongside *#domincanwomengooglesearch*, featuring a series of twenty-five postcard-sized digital collages. Displayed on a metal postcard rack, many of the collages appropriate art historical images, including Gauguin’s paintings of adolescent girls, some of which are layered with digital techniques, others completed through erasure, exposing a gray, checkered background, a digital motif denoting transparency, or the absence of content. As a group, the postcards index surreal snapshots of women’s bodies advertising sex tourism: a grinning middle-aged white man is surrounded by women whose figures have been erased; two women recline on a pixelated background, labeled with the web address *loveme.com*, which links to the dating website, A Foreign Affair International Matchmakers. Given the contemporary context, Minaya’s project begs more rhetorical questions: Has colonialism really ended? Does human trafficking, in its discreet international web, enable this legacy of exploitation to continue? The ease with which Minaya’s imagery is viewed reveals the conflictual tension between the beauty of these works and their depictions of exploitation.

Applying handwritten text onto reproductions of historical artworks, two of Betty Tompkins’ recent series call out injustices of abusive gender inequity. *Women Words* and *Apologias*, both 2018, were made in direct response to the #MeToo movement, which went viral in the fall of 2017, when actress Alyssa Milano posted the following statement to Twitter: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.”²² It was African American activist, Tarana Burke who coined “Me Too,” naming the movement long before it was popularized through social media.²³ Burke described how in 1997 she heard the story of a young girl who had been sexually abused. “I didn’t have a response or a way to help her in that moment, and I couldn’t even say ‘me too.’”²⁴ In spite of the emergence of language that has made a more empowered and nuanced discourse possible, many workplaces and institutions uphold cultural climates that continue to prevent employees from speaking up.

Released in 2019, the feature film *The Assistant* discloses the entrenched sexism that has pervaded the independent film industry for several decades. Set in an office that is silently managed by a young assistant named Jane, the storyline feels eerily familiar and contemporary; she is at a loss for words—shut down—in her attempts to take a stand against “the web of silence that enabled a very modern horror

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Betty Tompkins, *Apologia (Caravaggio #1)*, 2018.
Painted text on torn out page from art history book.
Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P-P-O-W, New York.

story.”²⁵ Written by Australian filmmaker Kitty Green, the film is focused on the shadows of powerful men: the inadvertent accomplices played by those in supporting, adjacent positions in the company. Interestingly, this fictional film, with its parallels to Harvey Weinstein’s story, began as a project about consent on American college campuses, and later developed into a portrait of an industry in which complicity and abuse are intertwined.²⁶



Tracey Emin, *Why I Never Became a Dancer*, 1995.
Single screen projection and sound (shot on Super 8 transferred to DVD).
Video with sound, 6:40min. Video Still.
Courtesy of the artist and White Cube gallery. © Tracey Emin.

Reminiscent of Kahlon and Minaya's appropriation of historical images, Tompkins' *Apologia* series (2018) features pages torn from art history books over which the artist painted pink text derived from the language of apologies delivered by male celebrities. Statements, most likely written by publicists, were issued by famous figures like Matt Lauer and R. Kelly, who have been publicly accused of rape and assault, each by multiple women. Individual works in this series employ contrite declarations made in the wake of the #MeToo movement, questioning their authenticity. Female lived experience informs the works in Tompkins'

series *Women Words* (2018) which similarly applies text onto art historical images, with words based on phrases generated from submissions by people around the world, and contain pejorative language men have used to describe women.²⁷ Tompkins' piece *Apologia (Caravaggio #1)*, 2018, features the print of a painting *The Lute Player* (ca. 1596–97) by Caravaggio, which depicts a boy playing a lute. Pink, handwritten text across the boy's body and face reads: "R. Kelly has close friendships with a number of women who are strong and independent, happy, well-cared for and free to come and go as they please. We deny the many dark descriptions put forth by instigators and liars who have their own agenda for profit and fame." In another, *Apologia (Caravaggio #3)*, 2018, is a transcription of Matt Lauer's official statement: "There are no words to express my sorrow and regret for the pain I have caused others by words and actions. To the people I have hurt, I am truly sorry. As I am writing this, I realize

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the depth of the damage and disappointment I have left behind at home and at NBC. Some of what is being said about me is untrue or mischaracterized, but there is enough truth in these stories to make me feel embarrassed and ashamed. I regret that my shame is now shared by the people I cherish dearly [...]"

In an era when ongoing controversies over sexual assault reverberate from the upper echelons of the media and film industries to the halls of justice, it can be difficult to distinguish desire from power, and what constitutes abuse. Known for autobiographical and confessional artworks, British artist Tracey Emin reflects on her coming of age in Margate, in the 1995 video *Why I Never Became a Dancer*. Her camera winds through the faded grandeur of the seaside town, which is part of the English Riviera, forming a travelogue of its streets and shoreline, with Emin's lens trained on places like the beach, the pub, an alley, a green, a park, and a hotel, where as a thirteen- and fourteen-year-old student, she escaped the confines of school, seeking freedom in sexual adventures with older men. Likening these experiences with the release felt while dancing, she says, "That's where I got my real kick, on the dance floor. It felt like I could defy gravity, as if my soul were truly free." Once, as she performed in a dance competition, the music was drowned out by men chanting "Slag! Slag! Slag!" Realizing how pathetic these older, predatory men were,



Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964/2003.

16mm film transferred to DVD, 8:08min. Film Still.

Performance at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York, on March 21, 1965

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co.

her narration continues, “I left Margate. And I left those boys. Shane, Eddie, Tony, Doug, Richard: this one’s for you.” The video ends triumphantly with Emin ecstatically dancing to Sylvester’s 1978 drag anthem “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).”

Where was consent in Emin’s sexual awakening? For many, consent only comes with the autonomy of adulthood, enabled by a set of privileges not shared by all across the political spectrum. Elaine Scarry’s analysis of consent is grounded in political philosophy, medical practice, and marriage law, where citizenship affords the individual right to determine what shall be done with one’s own body. Difficult to parse is the degree to which pleasure, or the activation of the senses, muddies the line between consent and dissent, and how age, race, and gender contribute to an individual’s power to grant or withhold consent. Originally staged in 1964, Yoko Ono’s participatory performance *Cut Piece* (1964/2003) invited audience members, one by one, to cut off a piece of her clothing, which they could keep. Turning the striptease on its head, Ono forced participants, and to a lesser extent viewers, to contend with the dynamics implied not just by removing, but by cutting away parts of her clothing, collapsing what might be an act of seduction for some into a potentially violent action. Ono’s rules gave the artist the right to end the performance when she saw fit, ensuring that she maintained agency in the outcome.



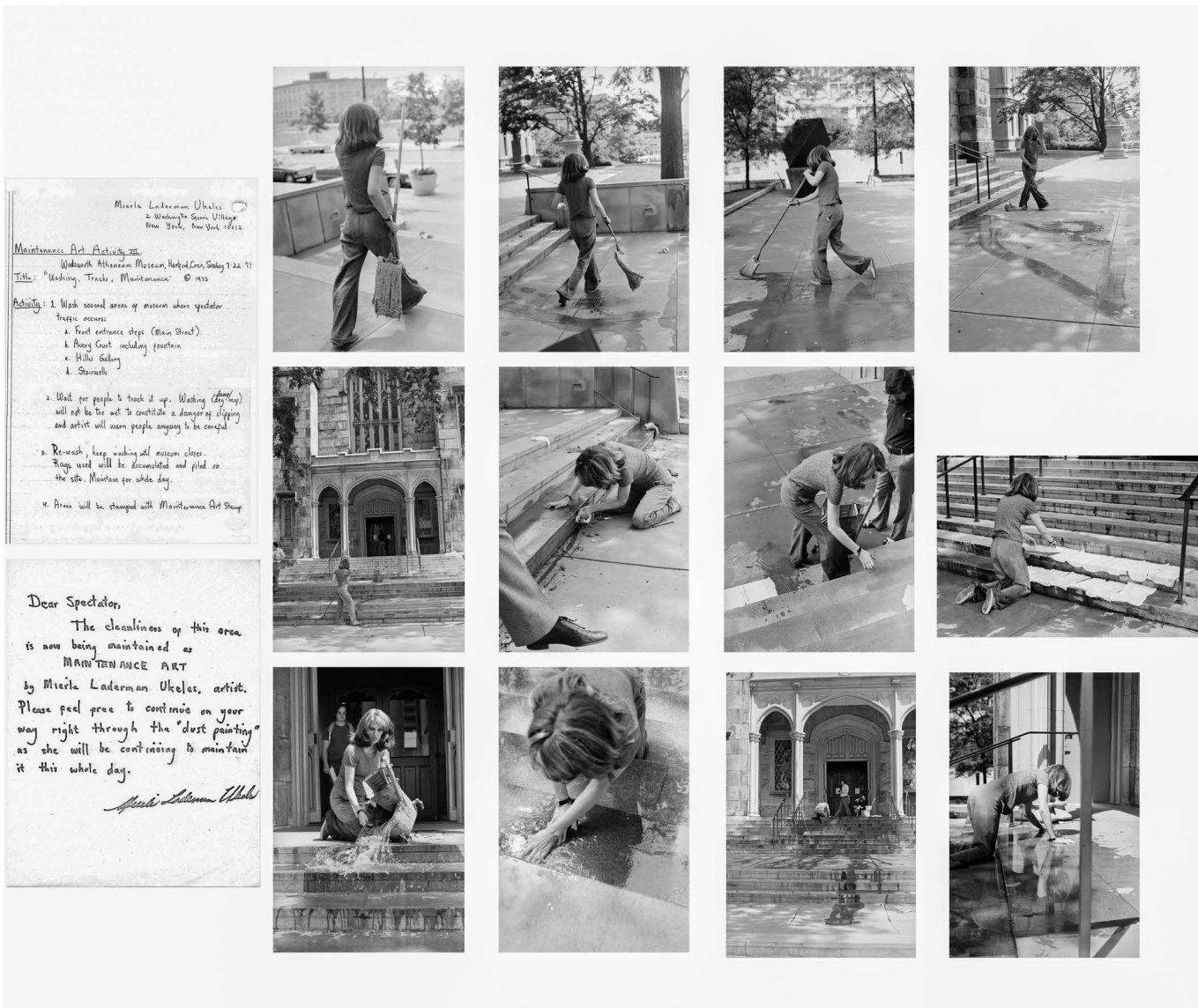
Anetta Mona Chisa & Lucia Tkáčová, *Caryatids*, 2013.
Installation of two bookstacks with giclee print.
Courtesy of the artists.

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The preservation of agency is work, yet another example of the additional labor women take on, in order to keep our end of the “patriarchal bargain,” a phrase coined by post-colonial theorist and researcher Deniz Kandiyoti.²⁸ For *Caryatids*, 2013, artist duo Anetta Mona Chisa & Lucia Tkáčová staged a photograph in which several women perform a tableau vivant of caryatids, reenacting a classic Greek architectural feature, in which each woman holds up a column. In *Caryatids*, the columns are built out of books. The photograph is flanked by actual towers of stacked books, borrowed from the Rubin Foundation curatorial team’s offices, symbolizing the tenuous balancing act between art and life, one especially familiar to women. The piece drives home an awkward question: how long can [these] women continue to uphold the very institutions that exploit them?

In the reception of these artworks, the historical weight of misogyny looms large, from outright abuses to more subtle forms of sexism. It is a burden that has largely been relegated to women to sort out amongst themselves, on their own terms. *To Cast Too Bold A Shadow* presents artistic gestures of resistance and rejection of this bargain. Furen Dai and Aliza Shvarts prompt questions about the inequities produced by marriage. The Hackney Flashers engaged in direct action when they demonstrated outside of the Hayward Gallery, in pursuit of affordable child care, and the protagonist in Rapicavoli’s film became politicized when she took part in the famous “Bread and Roses” strike of 1912, that was begun by immigrant women, and culminated with 23,000 men, women and children joining the effort.²⁹

Situated somewhere between symbolic gesture and activist intervention is Mierle Laderman Ukeles’ two-part performance, *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Inside*, July 23, 1973, and *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside*, July 23, 1973. In realizing these ritualistic cleanings at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, she scoured the floors of the galleries, and outdoor public spaces, “without break or interruption,” as many visitors stepped around her, with a few children—but no adults—offering to help.³⁰ While the work aggressively called out the institution’s tendency to keep the labor of the museum’s upkeep out of public view, Ukeles’ practice, steeped in the ethos of acknowledging maintenance work has continued to gain visibility, from her early works, until the present day. Some will wonder why cleaning, at home or in a cultural institution, is attributed value as art. As Ukeles wrote in her *Maintenance Manifesto*, “MY WORKING WILL BE THE WORK.” Once women’s work is accepted as work, perhaps that is when a true state of gender equity can finally be realized.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside*, July 23, 1973.

Part of Maintenance Art performance series, 1973-1974.

Performance at Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT.

© Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Art on back cover

Betty Tompkins, *Women Words (Titian #5)*, (Detail) 2018.

Painted text on torn out page from art history book.

Image credit: Courtesy of Betty Tompkins and P-P-O-W, New York.

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Maria Rapicavoli's two channel video installation *The Other: A Familiar Story*, 2020, was supported by the Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, under the Italian Council program (2019).



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The 8th Floor is an exhibition and events space established in 2010 by Shelley and Donald Rubin, dedicated to promoting cultural and philanthropic initiatives and to expanding artistic and cultural accessibility in New York City.

The 8th Floor is located at 17 West 17th Street and is free and open to the public. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., by appointment. The8thFloor.org

THE 8TH FLOOR



Endnotes

- 1 Shakespeare, William. "Sigh no more, ladies sigh no more," *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1598–1599. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50653/song-sigh-no-more-ladies-sigh-no-more>.
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