

Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985, Brooklyn Museum, New York

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Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960–1985, installation views, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2018.

Photos : Jonathan Dorado, courtesy of Brooklyn Museum, New York

Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985

Since the opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in 2007, the Brooklyn Museum in New York has advocated for the advancement of feminist art movements. Dedicating its fourth floor to the sole purpose of educating its public in feminist art, theory, and activism, it has permanently housed Judy Chicago's iconic *The Dinner Party* (1979) as well as over thirty-five temporary exhibitions, with the clear intention of broadening the scope of artistic discourse. It is also the most recent host to the exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*. Co-curated by Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta, the exhibition was first organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Bringing together more than one hundred and twenty Latin American, Latina, and Latinx artists representing fifteen countries, *Radical Women* provides a crucial overview of the historical and contemporary relevance of pioneer artists and collectives as they evolved during a watershed period of political upheaval and social change in the Americas.

The women in the exhibition—representing the avant-garde of performance, video, photography, and conceptual art—address a lacuna within dominant twentieth-century art discourse perpetuated by colonial and gendered biases. Divided into eight thematic sections—The Self Portrait, Body Landscape, Performing the Body, Mapping the Body, Resistance and Fear, The Power of Words, Social Spaces, and The Erotic—*Radical Women* is rich with strongly individualized, material-based and conceptual approaches to social, political, and aesthetic issues. Beyond the eight thematic groupings, one small gallery includes a map of the Americas and a chronological list outlining relevant events in each country represented in the exhibition. With all of its ambition to feature and organize a wide range of artists, *Radical Women* offers few, if no, moments of repose, choosing instead to occupy every available space with an object or wall text.

Although the encyclopedic nature of the exhibition might seem necessary to rectify the historical omissions it seeks to address, it proves to be limiting. In fact, sometimes it is difficult to decipher the interwoven subplots that link works with their respective artists and the particular contexts, countries, and/or years of production.

From the outset, an overhead video projection of the Peruvian performer Victoria Santa Cruz entitled *Me gritaron negra (They shouted black at me)* (1978) grapples with the exhibition's central themes of the body, activism, as well as race and ethnicity. Based on a childhood memory of a group of girls refusing to play with the artist because of her skin colour, the piece highlights the double oppression Santa Cruz faced as both a woman and an individual of the African diaspora. In the next room, documentation of Argentinian artist Lea Lublin's *Dissolution dans l'eau, Pont Marie, 17 heures* (1978)—a performance in which the artist printed a series of stereotypical questions about women on a white banner before dropping it into the Seine River where it dissolved—hangs alongside the banner itself. Both the documentation and the object play with the potency of language, spoken word, and performative reiterations to unsettle given social and artistic power structures. Despite the smaller and somewhat awkward shape of the galleries adjacent to *The Dinner Party*, a selection of engaging work energizes them. Brazilian artist Claudia Andujar stands out with her black-and-white photographs and collected personal identification documents entitled *Horizontal 2* and *Medical card*, from the series *Marcados* (Marked) (1981–1983), which chronicles the tension between Indigenous populations and a state apparatus that disregards them as illegitimate citizens.

Many of the artists featured in *Radical Women* are less known to general art audiences when placed alongside better-known figures such as Lygia Clark and Ana Mendieta



(artists that still deserve greater institutional recognition). The range and sheer magnitude of these works is enlightening. Documentation and props from Chilean artist Sylvia Palacios Whitman's *Passing Through* (1977) and *Slingshot* (1975) come to mind, both of which combine surreal art objects and wearables to create a movement practice that bridges Latin American pictorial sensibilities with the minimalist aesthetics of the 1970s American dance scene. In the same gallery dedicated to "Performing the Body," the pioneering video-dance piece by Brazilian artist Analívia Cordeiro entitled *M 3x3* (1973) brings together visually fragmented moving bodies with careful camera work in order to connect coinciding and simultaneous gestures. While this is the only section of *Radical Women* that explicitly cites the intersections of dance, performance, and theatre as powerful forms that artists employed to address the overarching theme of the political body, performative actions and interventions are at the crux of many of the works. Such is the case in Graciela Carnevale's *Acción del encierro* (*Lock-up action*) (1968) in which the artist invited the public to an opening reception at a gallery before locking the entrance to the venue with a padlock and leaving, forcing attendees to find their own way out. Wanting to comment on the ways in which acts of violence were carried out daily in her native Argentina, Carnevale's mise-en-scène foregrounded key performance and conceptual art tenets of the 1970s.

Like many survey shows, the artists and collectives presented demand more attention than they can be given in such a limited framework, which is especially salient given the intricately complex and singular regional, social, and political nature of each work on display. Regardless, *Radical Women* takes a period in art history saturated with the white male mythos and expands it, hopefully inspiring other generations of museum exhibitions to overcome the perversity

of the accepted canon. Ironically, the Brooklyn Museum recently found itself at the centre of a controversy after they hired two new curators who are white, including one for a position curating the museum's African art collection. This gesture, amongst others, prompted multiple community groups to rally in the museum's lobby on April 29th, 2018 calling for a Decolonization Commission, which underscores the complexities of "allyship" by art institutions—even those that seek to elevate and promote radical women.

Didier Morelli

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