

You Go Girl!

Over the past several years, the Heckscher Museum of Art has mounted a series of exhibitions that have explored various aspects of the Permanent Collection. Like most public institutions, the Museum's holdings are predominantly comprised of work by male artists. The cultural environment in the western world may seem gender neutral today, yet female artists throughout history faced numerous challenges not experienced by their male colleagues. The scholarly studies by feminist historians like Linda Nochlin and others of the 1970s explored some of the many obstacles faced by women artists until the late-19th century, most notably the lack of access to formal training, the conventions that prevented them from studying the nude model at a time when depiction of the human figure was crucial to artistic achievement, and a social setting that situated women firmly in the domestic realm as wives, mothers, and guardians of the home. Although women achieved more freedoms in the early-20th century, most significantly the right to vote, they continued to compete for recognition within a system of galleries, museums, and universities dominated by men. Artists of the 1970s addressed the plight of the female artist and the patriarchy of the art establishment in protests at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and elsewhere. Howardeena Pindell, Ce Roser, and many others joined together to form numerous activist organizations and cooperative galleries that provided women artists an opportunity to network, exhibit their work, and advance their cause to end discrimination against women in the arts.

Early feminist artists like Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago challenged traditional boundaries by incorporating crafts traditionally associated with women in their work, drawing upon the long history of women in the applied arts. Others, such as May Stevens and Audrey Flack, worked within traditional

mediums to challenge male authority in overt or subtle ways. Most women, however, created art similar in form and content to that of their male colleagues, as reflected in the majority of work by women artists in the Museum's collection. While artists such as Emma Stebbins, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Georgia O'Keeffe, Esphyr Slobodkina, Betty Parsons, and Jane Wilson achieved widespread recognition for their artistic and cultural accomplishments, many others, less well known, produced equally significant work that broadens our visual and intellectual experience, as evidenced by the artists in *You Go Girl!*