

# WOMEN IN REVOLT! ART AND ACTIVISM IN THE UK 1970–1990

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## LARGE PRINT GUIDE



WE SAY NO TO EMPTY ABSTRACTIONS, to the 'art for art's sake' philosophy of the privileged white middle-class male artworld. WE THE OPPRESSED cannot afford this empty play with words and forms, for us the important task is to convey to people, to WOMEN – their dignity and strength and beauty.

Anne Berg and Monica Sjöö

**Images on Womenpower** – Arts Manifesto 1971

### **Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–1990**

presents two decades of art as provocation, protest and progress. Taking the 1970 National Women's Liberation Conference as its starting point, the exhibition explores the relationship between art and the women's movement in the UK. It brings together women who made art about their lives and the inequalities that informed them, acknowledging that the personal is political.

Arranged chronologically, the exhibition addresses the social and political contexts that influenced the art women were making in the 1970s and 1980s. It focuses on artists who were organisers, agitators and community leaders. It includes women who worked independently and those who

practised in collaboration. Together, these women formed a movement defined only by its range of perspectives, many of which undermined and challenged each other. As a result, the artworks on display are as diverse as those who made them. They remind us there is no single experience of being a woman, an artist or an activist.

**Women in Revolt!** showcases more than 100 artists, introducing a constellation of voices rather than a few individual stars. It recognises and celebrates a wide-ranging network of women who challenged the art world and society. By acknowledging the actions these artists took and the relevance their art still holds, the exhibition hopes to give them the attention and credit they deserve.

### **Room 1**

#### **Clockwise from room entrance**

#### **RISING WITH FURY**

In the early 1970s, women were second-class citizens. The Equal Pay Act wouldn't be enacted until 1975. There were no statutory maternity rights or any sex-discrimination protection in law. Married women were legal dependants of their husbands, and men had the right to have sex with their wives, with or without consent. There were no domestic violence shelters or rape crisis units. For many women, their multiple intersecting identities led to further inequality. The 1965 Race Relations Act had made racial discrimination an offence but did nothing to address systemic racism. While trans people were gaining visibility, a 1970 legal case challenged the legitimacy of trans lives, finding that sex assigned at birth could not be changed. The 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act gave people with disabilities the right to equal access but failed to make discrimination unlawful. In 1967, the Sexual Offences Act had partially decriminalised sex between two men, but gay people wouldn't have equal rights until the 2000s.

In 1970, more than 500 women attended the first of a series of national women's liberation conferences. Sally Alexander, one of the organisers, notes it was the beginning of 'a spontaneous, iconoclastic movement whose impulse and demands reached far beyond its estimated 20 thousand activists'. Many of these activists were also members of organisations like the Gay Liberation Front (founded 1970) and Brixton Black Women's Group (founded 1973). Together they marked a 'second wave' of feminist protest, emerging more than 50 years after women's suffrage. They understood that women's problems were political problems, caused by inequality and solved only through social change.

The artists in this room made art about their experiences and their oppression. They worked individually, and in groups, sharing resources and ideas, using DIY techniques, and showing unfinished artworks. Their subject matter and practices became forms of revolt, and their art became part of their activism.

Penny Slinger born 1947

Born England, works UK and USA

#### **Spirit Impressions – 2**

#### **Spirit Impressions – 3**

#### **Spirit Impressions – 4**

#### **Spirit Impressions – 5**

1974

4 Xerox self monoprints

While teaching part time at Portsmouth College of Art, Slinger used the photocopier in the faculty office to make what she called 'copy art'. Placing her face and hands on the flatbed of the copier, Slinger found that by exerting pressure on the machine the process took longer allowing her to produce images she describes as 'ghostly and other wordly' self-portraits.

Courtesy of the Artist, Richard Saltoun Gallery London and Rome, and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo

X84172. X84171. X84169. X84168

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#### **Open Invitation – Ready for Consummation**

#### **Bride and Groom – Ceremonial Cutting of The Cake**

#### **Wedding Cake – Open Secret**

1973

3 photographs

These photographs document a performance in which Slinger wore a handmade wedding cake costume. The artist describes the series as 'both a parody of a wedding ritual, and recreation from a woman's point of view'. The images were included in Slinger's 1973 solo show at Flowers gallery, London. Deemed too controversial for public display, the police raided and shut down the exhibition shortly after it opened.

Courtesy of the Artist, Richard Saltoun Gallery London and Rome, and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo

X84164 – 6