

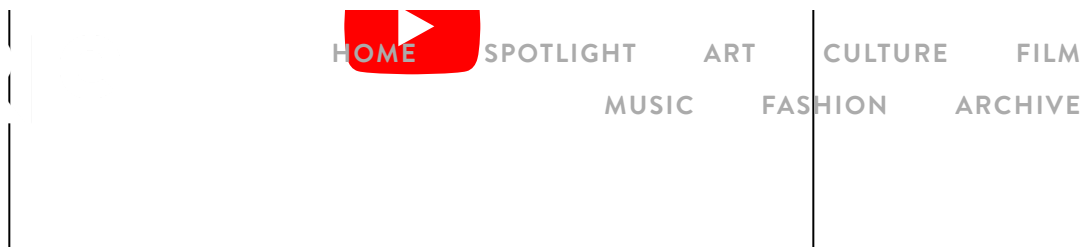


FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE OF THE 1970S: A REVIEW

For the feminist avant-garde movement of the 1970s, now celebrated in an exhibition at [The Photographers' Gallery](#), the body represented a socio-political site used to explore the dynamics of gender and power. Performance and visual art were instruments of fighting violence and inequality, and it employed the body as the artistic medium of choice in exposing social injustice.

FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE OF THE 1970...





An Interview with the curators of the exhibition Gabriele Schor, VERBUND COLLECTION, and Anna Dannemann, The Photographers' Gallery.

Curated by Gabriele Schor and Anna Dannemann, the exhibition comprises 150 works from the Verbund Collection in Vienna, and is organised thematically: the first section, titled “Domestic Agenda,” is dedicated to the role of the woman as housewife and bride; the second, “Seductive Body,” features artists who used their own body as works of art; the third section centres on the concept of normative beauty and the limits of the body, while the fourth, “Alter Ego: Masquerade. Parody and Self-Representation,” is a deconstruction of stereotypes of female identity.

The artists worked with versions of embodied femininity, exploring new identities, capable to rebel against the rules of patriarchy, and, with irony and boldness, to reclaim their own body, setting it free from social constraints and influences. Although embracing diverse creative approaches, the red thread of the exhibited artists is their search for a subjective, unexpected, and illuminating answer to the same question: what does it mean to be a woman in the 20th century?





S.O.S. Starification Object Series by Hannah Wilke.



Wedding Invitation, 1973 by Penny Slinger.

Ana Mendieta and Hannah Wilke are two perfect examples. For Ana Mendieta, this search translates into exploring the image and experience of woman of colour, attempting to redefine racial and gendered difference, and escape from the dictate of cosmetic and fashion industries, that transform every female body into an object of male desire. For Hannah Wilke, exploring womanhood at this important time in history is to turn the personal into universal, into an object of art. She uses the beauty of her own nudity and physical presence to fight sexual prejudices, thus being, again, in control of her body and its representation.



On Giving Life, 1975 by Ana Mendieta.



Untitled (*Siluetas Series*), circa 1978 by Ana Mendieta.

Corporeal self-representation is preferred as channel of communicating and embodying values and political stances: the surreal, theatrical portraits of Cindy Sherman, the poetic, lyrical work of Francesca Woodman, the nakedness of Orlan, the daring portrait of Penny Slinger in a wedding gown uncovering her vagina, and last but not least, the symbolic “Some Living American Women Artists” of Mary Beth Edelson, where feminist artist are represented in a sarcastic resetting of The Last Supper.





Some Living American Women Artists / Last Supper, 1972 by Mary Beth Edelson.

Today, matters of race and gender are still central to activists' agendas. Black feminists, whose voices were once altogether silenced, are now the frontrunners of a powerful discourse of affirmation, doubled by diverse artistic practices that focus on the identity and experience of black womanhood, exploring their transformations, rather than reinforcing their definitions. An example of this is the underground collective of black artists who support the Black Lives Matter movement.

The future of feminism lies not only in the power of remembering and celebrating the pioneers' work, but in actively creating new alliances and connections, fighting both sexism and racism. If feminist artists of the 1970s were among the first generations to turn their bodies into political weapons and tools of personal and cultural advancement, today's feminism needs a similar process of understanding the body, subjected to new politics of visibility and representation, in order to provide a competent answer to the question: what does it mean to be a woman in the 21st century.

Feminist Avant-Garde of The 1970s is open until 27th January at The Photographers' Gallery.

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