

10 Women Artists Shattering Expectations of Feminist Art

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Art

Charlotte Jansen

Poulomi Basu

Untitled, 2010-2021

Assembly

US\$900–US\$6,100

What does it mean to be a feminist artist today? These 10 emerging and mid-career artists are redefining the canon, centering female perspectives and histories in their works but in ways that eschew the—until now—rigidly patriarchal definitions of feminist art. And despite the continued disparity in the art world, a wealth of ideas and ambitions are breaking down barriers that have previously held feminist artists back. This might be the most expansive and inclusive era of feminist art yet.

Ilma Savari

B. 1969, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea. Lives and works in Oro Province.

Ilma Savari, *Eje - Breast Plate*, 2020. Courtesy of the Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery.

Ilma Savari lives in the remote Anahobehi village (Gora) in Ömie territory, a five-day trek up the volcanic slopes of Mount Lamington, Papua New Guinea. It was there that London-based gallerist Rebecca Hossack first met the Indigenous artist and encountered her textile paintings on *nioge*—or fine-grained, beaten cloth made from the inner bark of mulberry or fig trees—that Savari stitches additional details on top of with a superfine bat wing bone.

A traditional practice and a central feature of Ömie culture, the designs of *nioge* paintings are created and executed almost exclusively by women. Since the works contain a myriad of stories, spiritual teachings, and ancestral knowledge in their carefully choreographed patterns and colors, their makers undertake the role of keepers and protectors of Ömie history.

This past summer, Savari's work traveled nearly 9,000 miles away from the artist's home to be showcased in the [Royal Academy of Arts](#)'s "Summer Exhibition" in London. Savari became the first Indigenous Papua New Guinean artist to ever be presented in the annual show since it began in 1769. And this November, Savari will have her debut London solo exhibition, "Eye of the Sun," at the [Rebecca Hossack Art Gallery](#). It's another historic moment—until now, no Papua New Guinean woman artist has ever exhibited outside the country in a solo show.

Jenna Gribbon

B. 1978, Knoxville, Tennessee. Lives and works in New York.

Jenna Gribbon's lush, sensuous figurative paintings are fastidiously advancing the discourse around the female gaze. Almost exclusively featuring her partner, the musician MacKenzie Scott (a.k.a. Torres), Gribbon's works and the intimate ambience they conjure question what it means to see and be seen as, by, and for a woman. Even male spectators find themselves caught in the intertwined looks between the female subject and her female lover, Gribbon. Perhaps this is what female freedom and a truly emancipated gaze looks like.

In other moments, Gribbon pushes the significance of seeing and being seen beyond the personal charge exchanged between two women. Instead, she contemplates the power of self-projection and interposes a woman to square up against the reciprocal male gaze depicted by male painters throughout history. In her intervention at [The Frick Collection](#)

earlier this year, Gribbon's empowered, emotionally charged portrait of Scott was placed opposite [Hans Holbein the Younger](#)'s painting of Thomas Cromwell, who served as chief minister to King Henry VIII.

Cromwell also propelled the English Reformation that would enable the king to annul his marriage to Anne Boleyn and marry Anne of Cleaves—a marriage that would be annulled after six months and lead to Cromwell's own beheading. That Scott stands in confrontation with a man so representative of the corruption of male power, and who was so involved with the public destruction of women, makes a poignant statement about who is revered, celebrated, and loved.

There is still much more to be explored in the unique dynamics and details of Gribbon's work, which have become increasingly confident and bold. In scales that range from tiny to larger than life, her paintings are unafraid of being personal, sexually explicit, and romantic. In October, Gribbon will present new work at the [Collezione Maramotti](#) in Italy.

Dindga McCannon

B. 1947, New York. Lives and works in Philadelphia.

[Dindga McCannon](#)

[Four Women, 1988](#)

[Fridman Gallery](#)

[Price on request](#)

Dindga McCannon grew up in Harlem and developed her early practice in the 1960s during the [Harlem Renaissance](#) movement. She joined the Weusi Artist Collective and later formed—with [Faith Ringgold](#), Kay Brown, and 12 other young, Black women artists—the collective “Where We At” Black Women Artists Inc. (WWA) to specifically address the lack of Black women represented within the feminist art movement. McCannon became a prominent figure in the wider [Black Arts Movement](#) that took place from 1965 to 1975, and to many, her importance has never been in question. While raising two children, McCannon has worked prolifically as a fiber artist, muralist, and educator to foreground the experiences of Black women.

The mainstream art world's delayed recognition of McCannon, now 75, follows a familiar pattern—an outstanding Black woman artist who, despite her achievements, was ignored by the canon for far too long. This has been changing for McCannon since her participation in the [Brooklyn Museum](#)'s 2017 group exhibition “We Wanted a Revolution.” McCannon's first solo gallery show in the United States took place just last year at

Fridman Gallery in New York. And as she prepares to stage her first European solo show at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London, an international audience will soon get the chance to become more intimately familiar with the last 50 years of her artmaking.

McCannon's oeuvre ranges from intricately detailed quilts and sumptuous textile works to dazzling wearable art, all of which wrest traditional needlework—which she learned from her mother and grandmother—from the domestic domain and into a radical new terrain. Themes of sisterhood, solidarity, and the importance of marking women's achievements in history are salient throughout the diverse forms of McCannon's practice.

Soheila Sokhanvari

B. Shiraz, Iran. Lives and works in Cambridge, England.

Soheila Sokhanvari

The Dancing Queen (Portrait of Jamileh), 2019

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

Sold

Soheila Sokhanvari

MKULtra 9, 2020

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

Price on request

This October, Soheila Sokhanvari will take over the Barbican's Curve gallery with dozens of dazzling portraits of Iranian feminist icons to explore the intersections between culture, gender, fashion, and feminism. Titled "Rebel Rebel," Sokhanvari's first major institutional solo show in London will examine the stories of women—a theme that has long occupied her work. The exhibition will pay homage to major female figures active in Iran from 1925 to the Revolution of 1979—a period of emancipation and liberation for women that soon collapsed.

Sokhanvari's portraits made with crude oil on paper depict Persian pop cultural icons, including the celebrated singer Googoosh, dancer Jamileh, and actress Forouzan. Set against a background of intensely detailed patterns steeped in symbolism that often references Islamic interiors, the women are shown wearing glamorous attire and hairstyles that reflect both their epoch and sex appeal. Taken as a whole, the works create an evocative compendium of Iranian feminine creativity and vitality.

Sungsil Ryu

B. 1993, Seoul, South Korea. Lives and works in Seoul.

Sungsil Ryu, installation view in P21's booth at Frieze Seoul, 2022. Photo by Lets Studio. Courtesy of Frieze and Lets Studio.

When the international art world descended on South Korea's capital for the inaugural edition of Frieze Seoul, among the local standout artists was Sungsil Ryu. At the fair, Ryu presented a video and installation work telling the story of a group of older men who go on a "pleasure vacation"—a holiday where men are entertained by young women—that ends in a macabre twist.

Born, raised, and still based in Seoul, Ryu takes primary inspiration from her surroundings. "I'm interested in the interactions between the locality and materiality of Korea," she explained in an interview with GirlsClub.Asia. A 2018 sculpture graduate of the Seoul National University, Ryu has since pivoted to the digital realm, creating performances, installations, and videos that feverishly address and reject traditional Korean gender roles. In her darkly comical works, the chaos of consumerism and its specific effect on women is conveyed in a heady mix of brash aesthetics, biting satire, and fantasy.

Eva Stenram

B. 1976, Sweden. Lives and works in Berlin.

Eva Stenram

Drape (Cavalcade V), 2012

Raum mit Licht

Eva Stenram

Drape (Cavalcade III), 2012

Raum mit Licht

With an artistic practice that began in 2007, Eva Stenram isn't a new name in the feminist sphere, but her ideas are constantly renewing and relevant. When the Swedish artist opened the largest exhibition of her work to date, "Cadastral," at Copenhagen's Fotografisk Center this past August, the depth of her ideas and extent of her influence was made clear.

Stenram's most famous body of work is perhaps "Drape" (2011), an enigmatic series of collages that excavate images of women's silk stocking–donned legs from pop cultural, erotic, and pornographic publications, and embed them into cozy domestic scenes. Stenram has continued to produce works that incisively comment on the way we disembody and objectify women in all forms of visual culture, particularly through the medium of photography.

Stenram uses the reconstructive act of collage as a deft political mode, a way of regaining control over the passive experience of viewing women's bodies. But her works are always purposefully open-ended to present and encourage, rather than expose, an interrogation of the way we are used to looking at women.

Tala Madani

B. 1981, Tehran, Iran. Lives and works in Los Angeles.

Tala Madani

Untitled, 2020

David Kordansky Gallery

Price on request

Known for her bitingly satirical, sardonic paintings, Tala Madani has been pushing the notion of feminist art forward for 15 years. Informed by experiences often related to being a woman today, Madani's works drag up the subconscious realm through phallic symbols, slippery depictions of hypermasculinity, morphing figures, and even cartoonish babies eating a mom made of feces. Her current solo exhibition "Biscuits" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, marks the first North American survey of Madani's work and includes her paintings as well as lesser known animations.

A big part of Madani's impact has been her ability to transgress what is expected of women artists. She's not afraid to be gross, crass, or slapstick. Her works might make the viewer wince and want to look away, but they certainly can't be forgotten once seen. Dealing with deep-rooted, cross-cultural stereotypes, history, and human experience, Madani recenters the feminine as the default way of seeing the world.

Poulomi Basu

B. 1983, Kolkata, India. Lives and works in Essex, England.

Poulomi Basu

From the series Centralia #45, 2010 -2020

TJ Boulting

£1,740–£5,280

Poulomi Basu's focus on the ecological, cultural, and political issues experienced specifically by South Asian women such as herself gives voice to those often considered voiceless. The unstoppable Basu has been ferociously advocating for women through her practice as a transmedia artist and activist for more than a decade. Shifting between mediums based on what's most effective for conveying her message, Basu has to date worked with photography, installation, virtual reality, and film. Her aesthetic is defined by rich storytelling and galvanizing visual imagery, often introducing surreal colors and mystical landscapes influenced by magical realism, sci-fi, and speculative fiction.

Basu has collaborated with the United Nations, Action Aid, and WaterAid on campaigns raising millions in aid for young women and girls, and has brought the world's attention to the way women's bodies are weaponized in political conflicts rarely acknowledged in the world press. She has previously spread awareness on the fight for Indigenous land and sovereignty in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, as well as the states of Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand. The conflicts and the Indigenous women at their forefront were the subject of Basu's multi-layered docufiction *Centralia*, which tied for first place for the 2020 Louis Roederer Discovery Award Jury Prize presented by Rencontres d'Arlesand, and was one of the four shortlisted works for the 2021 Deutsche Börse Foundation Photography Prize.

Following her fascinating institutional solo exhibition at Autograph in London this past spring, Basu will participate in Unbound, the nonprofit independent project by Amsterdam's Unseen, curated this year by Damarice Amao, photography curator of the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Sahara Longe

B. 1994, London, England. Live and works in London.

One of Sahara Longe's most striking paintings to date is an approximately six-foot-tall portrait of a naked mother and child. Longe's interpretation of the widely venerated water deity Mami Wata portrays the goddess as both mystical and relatable. The portrait could easily be read against beatified classical depictions throughout Western art history of white mothers. Here, Mami Wata's strong, stable figure faces the viewer directly as she holds her child proudly and confidently on her shoulders, a bold reflection of her own physical power and strength.

With a backdrop of water, animals, and nature, the painting has a Renaissance-like atmosphere, as many of Longe's oil paintings with their expressive brushwork, careful compositions, and sumptuous palettes do—and deliberately so. A fundamental part of the figurative painter's practice is the insertion and inclusion of Black people, especially Black women, in the historical and art historical canon. "Representation is extremely important and growing up I never saw representations of myself in museums and galleries and it had a very profound effect on me," Longe told She Curates. "That want of being able to see Black people depicted in paintings (and not holding a bowl of fruit in the background) really propelled me to choose the path I did."

Longe has been steadily garnering interest in her work since graduating in 2018 from Charles H. Cecil Studios in Florence. A solo booth with Ed Cross Fine Art at 1-54 London in 2021, and her participation in the Great Women Artists Residency and subsequent group exhibition at Palazzo Monti, drew further attention to Longe's oeuvre. Earlier this year, Longe was picked up for gallery representation by London's Timothy Taylor, which will present a solo booth of new paintings by the artist at Frieze London 2022 in October.

Bisila Noha

B. 1988, Spain. Lives and works in London.

Bisila Noha

Kouame Vessel, 2021-2022

THROWN

"With my practice, I want to build bridges and unite us all," ceramist and activist Bisila Noha told the gallery Thrown. Before turning to pottery seven years ago, Noha studied diplomacy, translation, and interpretation in Spain, where she grew up. Now based in London, she works with clay, using a common form of expression that extends back over centuries, shaped by women's hands in communities all over the world.

Noha's supple and sensuously sculpted ceramics, such as her abstract porcelain studies and clay vessels, allude to fertility goddesses and African shapes in a nod to her Equatorial Guinean background. They also pay homage to a long history of women potters and ceramic artists, from Ladi Kwali and Kouame Kakaha to ancient practitioners in Morocco and Mexico. Keeping their craft alive through her own, Noha creates earthy, urgent, and raw surfaces and textures that leave the traces of her hands and labor visible.

In addition to her art practice and several other roles, Noha works at London LGBTQ+ Community Centre Project. A passionate social justice and LGBTQ+ advocate, Noha is a leading voice in a new generation of feminists not only posing questions about women's

rights, but also coming up with solid, tangible solutions—whether in the form of clay or in creating spaces for others to thrive. Noha will have a solo exhibition of new work opening on October 20th at Galerie Revel in France.

Charlotte Jansen

Correction: A previous version of this article misstated that Jenna Gribbon will have a solo exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO in October.

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