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Left: Ipek Duben's *Sherife IX, X, XI*, price on request, will be on show in *Social Work* at Frieze London

Above: Frieze London's *Social Work* panel of leading female art historians, curators and critics

THE XX FACTOR

The quest to bring overlooked female artists to the fore is finally bearing fruit, says **Francesca Gavin**. And it's a cultural shift that's inspiring collectors

In the wake of the #metoo social media storm a petition swept through the art world, exposing the sexual impropriety of male artists, curators and gallerists. It took its name from a slogan from American neo-conceptual artist Jenny Holzer's 1978-87 *Truisms* series: *Abuse of Power Comes As No Surprise*. Renewed interest in Holzer, who has always created work addressing the inequality of power, is a fitting starting point for a cultural turnaround that is seeing older female artists being reappraised, and younger artists who work with feminist content becoming hot tickets – and both being given prominence in major museum shows and art fairs.

Clearly, just because an artist is a woman, it does not make their work feminist. Yet the act of repositioning a female artist can reflect feminist endeavour. Alongside Holzer, fellow American conceptual artist Barbara Kruger is another well-established figure being discovered by a new audience. Since the 1970s, Kruger's signature work, juxtaposing monochrome photographs and using bold, provocative statements in slashes of red, has oscillated between feminism and the brutality of modern capitalism. Her last show at Sprüth Magers in Berlin last winter, which partly referenced feminist literary icon Virginia Woolf, was a huge success with record attendance; at Basel, in June, some of her pieces were selling for around \$450,000. She is currently working on the largest exhibition a woman has ever staged at the Art Institute of Chicago, which opens in 2020.

"I've always thought of feminisms as plural rather than singular – as a way of being that simultaneously reflects issues of race, class and gender," Kruger explains. For her, and other artists incorporating feminist ideas into their work, the focus is never solely around being a woman. "If you take the work *Your Body is a Battleground* [pictured on final page], which was done in 1989, there's an image of a woman, but I was also interested more generically in a medicalised body and the stereotypical images of beauty standards," she adds. "This was the time when Aids was raging virulently. It was a comment on the body as a site of control, objectification and containment."

Kruger's work feels even more vital today, as her gallerist Philomene Magers, of Sprüth Magers, notes: "The world today is unfortunately a place where inequality and a very brutal kind of capitalism have become the daily business." Sprüth Magers has always had feminist artists on its roster, and is now feeling the benefit of renewed interest in their





Left: artist and filmmaker
Lynn Hersman Leeson. Right:
Reach from the artist's
Phantom Limb photographic
series, \$45,000



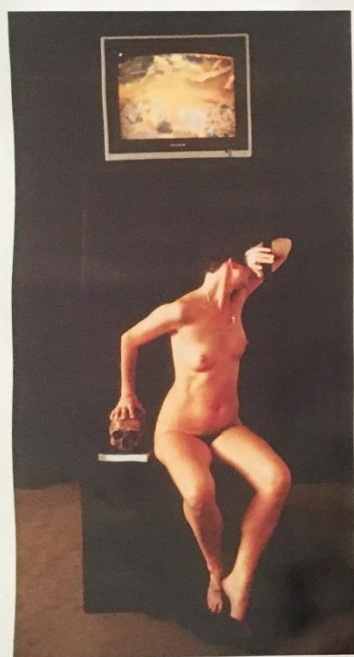
Below: artist Juno Calypso.
Left: Calypso's *Eternal
Beauty*, £4,000



howtospendit.com



Near left: artist Zoë Paul specialises in craft-based works. Above: Paul's *Land of the Lotus Eaters*, \$120,000



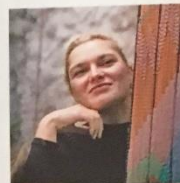
Near left: the late sculptor, photographer and installation artist Helen Chadwick captured by Kippa Matthews. Above: Chadwick's *Ruin*, £30,000

work. "Very few galleries represented female artists in the early '80s. So when I opened the gallery in 1983 the gender theme was very important for me," Monika Sprüth recalls. "I have shown Rosemarie Trockel, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer from early on and still do. The gallery played a role in shifting awareness and supporting female artists from the beginning. Sometimes it was seen as provocative – even offensive." A new generation of galleries, including Arcadia Missa in London and Bridget Donahue in New York, now share the gallery's focus, representing both a new wave of feminist artists (many under 30) and older ones who were overlooked.

Elsewhere, there has been an almost frantic search by established galleries to "rediscover" and represent older female artists and their estates, thanks to the current commercial success of a few such women. Romanian artist Geta Bratescu (pictured overleaf), who sadly died last month, is a perfect example. Seemingly emerging from nowhere, in 2017 she had an impressive institutional exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, a major presentation at art fair Documenta, and represented Romania at the Venice Biennale, where Hauser & Wirth announced it was representing her. The artist, first collected over a decade ago by Manuela Wirth, did not necessarily describe herself as a feminist. Her broad practice ranges from films of studio experiments, often featuring herself as a protagonist, to skilful drawings of birds or her own hands, to popular collages on paper (example pictured overleaf, price on request) and sculptural assemblage. Yet Bratescu's repositioning can be seen as reflecting a feminist agenda – an active desire to bring female artists to the fore. During her career, she refused to conform to her political environment or expectations of gender. This is an artist who represents the struggle of women in the art world. "There is a sense of lapses, repetitions and failure in the work, which I think is a comment on a feminist struggle," says Hauser & Wirth senior director Neil Wenman, adding that the rediscovery of an artist of her calibre reflects a desire among collectors for authenticity, confidence of expression and a comprehensive body of work.

Richard Saltoun is a gallerist who has the representation of artists with feminist heritage on his agenda. Having launched in 2012, he opened his Mayfair space in February this year with the show *Women Look at Women*, curated by Paola Ugolini, including work by the late New Zealand artist Alexis Hunter and septuagenarian Austrian avant-garde artist Renate Bertlmann. For Saltoun, the decision to work with historical feminist artists was because he felt they had been undervalued for too long and it was time to change this. "There was a gap in the market, and I don't mind admitting it," he says. "These were just very good artists where there was little competition. For me, there's an element of pragmatism."

Saltoun notes that collector interest in this work in part reflects an increase in female collectors who connect to the content, and adds, "If the world is populated by 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female, you have to reflect that." Next year, Bertlmann is representing Austria at the



Venice Biennale, the first time a female artist has solely represented the country. Saltoun is also devoting booths at the next Frieze Masters to German artist Annegret Soltau's 1970s project documenting her pregnancy; at Frieze London to the late British sculptor, photographer and installation artist Helen Chadwick (pictured bottom with example work far left, £30,000) whose work sold for around £50,000 at Art Basel in June; and at Miami Basel to the late installation artist Shelagh Wakely. Such prominence is yet another sign of the high currency of established feminist artists among today's collectors.

As if to prove the point, New York/San Francisco-based artist Lynn Herschman Leeson (pictured on previous pages), who has just had two major shows at HeK in Basel and Kunst-Werke in Berlin, says: "I found a \$20 price tag on my drawings from the 1970s; several recently sold for \$45,000." A pioneer of working with technology, new mediums and kinetic elements, Herschman Leeson creates artworks that resonate with a technologically literate new audience, but in the past, museums and galleries refused to consider her output as art. "I tried to give away the *Roberta* series of 178 works to two Bay Area museums. Both turned it down, saying it was not art. The appraised value of that work now is over \$2m," she observes wryly. "My art is not specifically about feminism but about freedom. It is about not accepting the limitations of a repressive culture." Her *Phantom Limb* photographic series (example work pictured on previous pages, \$45,000) explores the idea of women being captured and exploited by media. "I like to use new tools to talk about the issues key to this time: identity, censorship and empowerment."

In a similar media-focused vein, Mira Schor, who received her MFA from CalArts in 1973 and attended its Feminist Art Program, often uses text and punctuation appropriated from theory, or news phrases from *The New York Times* and cable news outlets for the recurring elements of italic, hand-drawn words in her work. These represent "the private, personal, embodied" as much as "the public, politics, the news, war," says Schor, who has always seen feminism as a subtext in her work (prices from \$5,000). "I want to bring my experience of living inside a female body into high art in as intact a form as possible," she says. "I hope people are attracted by the refreshing honesty, integrity, inventiveness and risk." Last spring, she was one of the standout artists at Frieze New York, showing with Lower East Side gallery Lyles & King.



Left: Romanian artist Geta Bratescu. Right: Bratescu's *Jocul Formelor (Game of Forms)*, price on request

This month, Frieze London is following the success of last year's historical feminist section *Sex Work* with a theme entitled *Social Work* (example work pictured on opening pages, price on request). The artists and galleries on show (not all yet announced at time of going to press), selected by a panel of leading female art historians, critics and curators (pictured on opening pages), will celebrate women who challenged the status quo in the 1980s, who embraced new mediums such as photography, video and performance to look at identity, labour and visibility. "Female artists at the time were looking to the future – excluded, they sought out other mediums. It was a very different approach, referencing the world of music, cinema and much on polyvalent forms of address," explains Whitechapel Gallery director Iwona Blazwick. "It all came together in a new kind of feminist sensibility. A less agitprop, more nuanced exploration of under-representation. Plus, it was gorgeous to look at." The fair's aim with this section is to introduce collectors to artists they may not have heard of.

Today's emerging artists working with feminist content who are gaining attention include Athens-based Zoë Paul (pictured on previous page). The 31-year-old makes craft-based works (beaded curtain pictured on previous page, \$120,000) that are influenced by the women in her home village. "I want to add to the discourse around giving non-high-art mediums, often aligned with women's work, a voice," she says. "The best way to be feminist is through example, and building on what other strong women have pioneered." Although her methods are seen as historically "feminine", such as beadmaking and weaving, they are also representations of strong female spaces. "I am very interested in non-hierarchical art making, the idea that

creativity comes out of community rather than the individual as genius. My method of making is rooted in the geography, climate and culture of where I am making it."

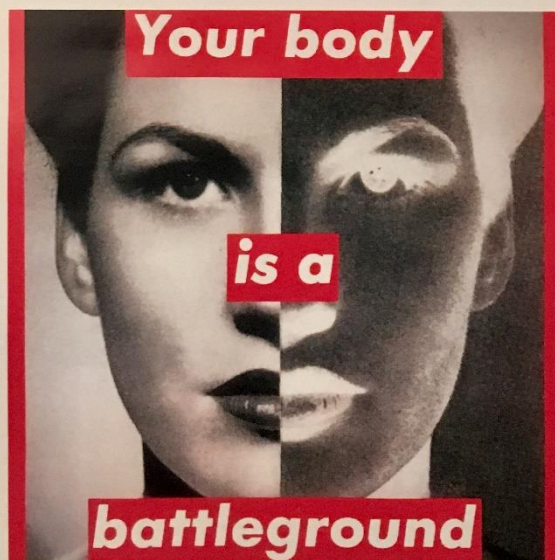
However, "the content and message [of feminism] is the same as it was in the past," argues photographic artist Juno Calypso (pictured on opening pages). "I feel like every generation is treated like they invented feminism. Now, it's just been amplified through social media. As long as women are mistreated and oppressed, feminist art will resonate." Calypso first garnered serious attention by disseminating her work (from £2,000) online. She now has over 98,000 Instagram followers. "I read many feminist texts on beauty and the body, and the self-portraits I made after that were like a silent montage of the [reaction to that] research and personal experience," she says. Her atmospheric images take the ideas of Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* and share it with a new generation. The crux of her work hinges upon, as she puts it: "That disappointment in yourself – it's a very relatable topic for both men and women". Her best-known photographic works feature the artist with wigs

and beauty massage masks (example work pictured on opening pages, £4,000), à la Cindy Sherman, in Las Vegas-style interiors posing in front of mirrors, and this feminist critique of beauty culture is well positioned in the social media stream of selfies and idealised bodies.

"Art should be included in the global articulations of this new moment of feminism – a moment that looks at the present and learns from the past," says Andrea Giunta, co-curator of the groundbreaking touring show *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985*, which has travelled from LA and New York and is now at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo until November 19. It features 280 works by 120 female artists, looking at the women's bodies as a form of expression of social and political criticism, including works by some of the most influential artists of the 20th century such as Lygia Pape, who currently has a show at Hauser & Wirth New York, and Ana Mendieta, whose estate is managed by Alison Jacques and Galerie Lelong.

London-based collector Valeria Napoleone is known for her pioneering focus on "talented female artists working today", and is acutely aware of the shift towards works with a feminist agenda. "There is more attention – and more understanding," she says. "These artists were once looked at as just political activists. People were looking at art with the male gaze." She dismisses any fear that this movement is a superficial and faddish trend: "These artists are very talented. It is not just about feminism, but producing great work. Let's not relegate it into a corner." ♦

Right: Barbara Kruger's *Your Body Is A Battleground* (from the Broad Art Foundation)



FEMINIST INTUITION

Alison Jacques Gallery, 16-18 Berners St, London W1 (020-7631 4720; alisonjacquesgallery.com). **Arcadia Missa**, 14-16 Brewer St, London W1 (07947-809 753; arcadiamissa.com). **Barbara Kruger**, see Sprüth Magers. **The Breeder**, 45 Lasonos St, GR 10436, Athens (+3021-0331 7527; thebreedersystem.com). **Bridget Donahue**, 99 Bowery, New York, NY 10002 (+1646-896 1368; bridgetdonahue.nyc). **Frieze London**, frieze.com/fairs/frieze-london. **Galerie Lelong**, 528 W 26th St, New York, NY 10001 (+1212-315 0470; galerielelong.com). **Geta Bratescu**, see Hauser & Wirth. **Hauser & Wirth**, hauserwirth.com. **Helen Chadwick**, see Richard Saltoun. **Ipek Duben**, see Pi Artworks. **Jenny Holzer**, see Sprüth Magers. **Juno Calypso**, junocalypso.com and see TJ Boulting. **Lyles & King**, 106 Forsyth St, New York, NY 10002 (+1646-484 5478; lylesandking.com). **Lynn Herschman Leeson**, lynnherschman.com and see Bridget Donahue. **Mira Schor**, miraschor.com and see Lyles & King. **Pi Artworks**, 55 Eastcastle St, London W1 (020-7637 8403; piartworks.com). **Pinacoteca de São Paulo**, Praça da Luz, São Paulo, Brazil (+5511-3224 1000; pinacoteca.org.br). **Richard Saltoun**, 41 Dover St, London W1 (020-7637 1225; richardsaltoun.com). **Sprüth Magers**, various venues including Oranienburger Strasse 18, Berlin 10178 (+4930-2888 4030; spruehmagers.com). **TJ Boulting**, 59 Riding House St, London W1 (020-7229 6591; tjboulting.com). **Whitechapel Gallery**, 77-82 Whitechapel High St, London E1 (020-7522 7888; whitechapelgallery.org). **Zoë Paul**, zoepaul.hotglue.me and see The Breeder.