

# “MAKING IT TOGETHER” by Jill Conner

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY March 2 · August 4, 2008



By early spring, the dialogue surrounding feminist art returned to New York City in two exhibitions that revisited the movement’s historic roots. While “WACK!” at P.S.1 showcased over 120 art stars, the Bronx Museum’s complementary “Making It Together: Women’s Collaborative Art and Community,” curated by Carey Lovelace, takes a behind-the-scenes look at feminist art, featuring a modest selection of videos, photography, and ephemera that addresses still-divisive issues like lesbianism, abortion, rape, and community building. Culled from the museum’s archives, this exhibition also reveals the strong contributions that Bronx-based Latina and African American women have made to the larger scope of women’s art.

Looming over the small lobby at the entrance to the museum is *Activism Is Never Over* (2008), a collaborative, site-specific mural by Doña, Muck, Toofly, and Lady Pink covering the history of the feminist revolution. It offers an abundance of significant names alongside individual portraits, scenes of protests, and a young African American girl, the entirety straddling a generation. On the opposite wall, the word “RAPE” appears to have been stamped in red, just below a photo-collage of Suzanne Lacy’s historic performance with Leslie Labowitz, called *Three Weeks in May, 1977*. As a reaction to the sexual violence confronting many women throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Lacy captured one aspect of the bitter debate that riveted American society at the time. In this particular rendition, one image depicts a woman blindfolding another, referencing society’s overall avoidance of the issues. Another features six nude women kneeling on a high beam while looking down over the skinned and dissected carcass of a goat.

The adjoining pink room not only pays homage to Sheila Levrant de Bretteville’s *Pink* (1974), but also contains a thoroughly documented history of the crowded intersection between feminism and art. *Touch Sanitation* (1971-80), by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, is a small video that features the artist first greeting city sanitation workers when they stop to empty garbage bins into a large truck and then shaking hands afterward, without wearing gloves. While the artist came to view domestic housework as a liberating experience, she also believed that those workers who kept cities clean were equivalent to the average family housewife.

But what really stands out here is the architectural rendering of Judy Baca’s extensive, long-term collaboration, *The Great Wall of Los Angeles: A Tattoo on the Scar Where the River Once Ran* (1976-84), no doubt due to the mural’s ability to reach out to so many members of the community. Baca’s vast public artwork extends for a half mile along the Tujunga Wash Drainage Canal in the San Fernando Valley, and involved the labor of 400 at-risk youths, 40 artists, 20 ethnic historians, and many community advisors.

Additional footage showing The All City Waitress Marching Band, performances by the Sisters of Survival, and scenes from the Spiderwoman Theater all reflect the extent to which art and feminism had managed to coalesce over twenty years to draw attention to women’s issues. As Carey

Lovelace writes, “All were, and are, feminists—part of that unruly, at times maligned, forward-looking movement that erupted in the mid-1960s. The art world has just begun, a bit reluctantly, to admit the degree of its impact.” Both New York City and Los Angeles saw the growth of organizations that became influential in exhibiting women’s art. Lucy Lippard, for instance, formed the Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Committee of the Art Workers Coalition, and in 1972 the A.I.R. Gallery opened in New York’s SoHo neighborhood. Likewise, the Los Angeles Women’s Building in Contemporary Culture was founded in 1973 and became a center for cultural innovation.

“Making It Together” is well named, pointing as it does to the power of collaboration, which even flexes the time-traveling power of placing the current art map between New York and L.A. squarely in the whole of the 1960s and ’70s, where L.A. at the time could largely be found only missing. You might have thought that any collaboration with feminism would seek to avoid revisionism.



(TOP TO BOTTOM) DOÑA, MUCK, TOOFLY, & LADY PINK, *ACTIVISM IS NEVER OVER*, 2008, MURAL BY LADY PINK, FIRST FEMALE GRAFFITI WRITER IN CONJUNCTION WITH A NEW GENERATION OF ARTISTS. PHOTO THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS. THE ALL CITY WAITRESS MARCHING BAND, CREATED BY JERRI ALLYN, LESLIE BELT, & CHUTNEY GUNDERSON, THE DOODAH PARADE, PASADENA, DECEMBER 1979. PHOTO REBECCA VILLASENOR. COURTESY THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS.