

# ARTLINES



*Women's Caucus for Art • 2020 Summer Edition*



*amplifying*  
**INCLUSION**

In April 2019, the Northern California Women’s Caucus for Art curatorial collective presented F213, an exhibition that spotlighted contemporary feminist protest art and writing. F213 is short for Fahrenheit 213, one degree above the boiling point of blood. The title reflects the outrage that women were feeling — and continue to feel — about a wide variety of social, political, and environmental issues in the United States.

This powerful national exhibition featured a diverse mix of over 40 feminist visual artists who were each paired with feminist writers. Written responses took a variety of forms from scholarly interpretation, to poetry, to flash fiction.

The F213 curatorial collective deliberately selected an mix of multicultural, multigenerational feminist artists and writers in an effort to amplify as many different voices and messages as possible. They chose to include works that addressed contentious topics, as well as works expressing opposing viewpoints, with the understanding that their choices might create friction with viewers, or even participants.

At the 2020 College Art Association (CAA) conference in Chicago in February, F213 curators and participants presented the Women’s Caucus for Art (WCA) panel, *Amplifying Inclusion:*

*Intersectional Feminism in Contemporary Curatorial Practice.* The papers presented discussed the curatorial theory behind mounting a widely-inclusive feminist protest exhibition, the crucial need for social platforms of this sort, and the expected and unexpected challenges that organizers of this type of activist show might face.

*The Amplifying Inclusion panel featured:*

**Presenters**

- *Tanya Augsburg*, Professor of Humanities and Creative Arts, San Francisco State University
- *Priscilla Otani*, NCWCA Board & Arc Gallery Managing Partner
- *Karen Gutfreund*, Curator/Artist
- *Rosemary Meza-DesPlas*, Independent scholar

**Discussant**

- *Maria Elena Buszek*, University of Colorado, Denver

**Chair**

- *Sawyer Rose*, Artist and President of Northern California Women’s Caucus for Art

– Sawyer Rose

# F213. NCWCA's 2019 Intersectional Feminist Projust Art Exhibition

**Tanya Augsburg**  
San Francisco State University

Founded in 1973, NCWCA has a long track record of arts activism. NCWCA's curatorial practices over the past decade have shifted to align with contemporary art trends to the extent that it can as a non-profit that depends on volunteer labor with very little patronage and even less commercial sponsorship. In 2016 NCWCA moved to a primarily non-hierarchical collective curatorial model, and starting in 2018 with the planning of its national exhibition *F213* it no longer relies on outside jurors.

The exhibition's intentionally enigmatic title was an early outcome of its collective curatorial decision-making. *F213* is short for *Fahrenheit 213*, which happens to be one degree above the boiling point of both water and blood. *F213* is somewhat of a nod to the title of Ray Bradbury's famous dystopic 1953 novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, which anticipated large flat video screens, fake news, endless wars, and even weaponized robotic dogs. The jury is still out regarding how much it alludes to the so-called notorious "F" word, which, insofar as it does, links *F213* to NCWCA'S 2016 national show, *F\*CK U! In the Most Loving Way*. I don't think I need to spell out to what extent the "F" in the title also points to the even bigger and more notorious "F" word that is feminism. NCWCA members wanted to make it perfectly clear that we really don't give a fuck anymore about the types of decorum that have historically held women back.

*F213* originated as an angry reaction in response to the plethora of current social injustices. We

envisioned *F213* as a platform for feminist artists to voice their concerns about issues that mattered to themselves and their communities with which they identify. In so doing, the focus of *F213* was more on intersectional feminist artistic expressions of protest rather than activism. Accordingly, *F213* featured numerous works depicting oral protest and public protests. *F213* also showcased works depicting acts of individual protest.

The display of visual art in *F213* was accompanied by short written responses from writers selected by the curatorial team. Exhibiting art and writing together reified the importance of all forms of protest expression. We additionally created a library room, where we displayed books written or edited by *F213* artists and writers. The 2019 installation *Thirty Books: The F213 Protest Literature Library* was an exploration of the links among feminism, activism, protest, and human rights. Among the books selected were several widely recognized for their significance within literary traditions of protest.



Favianna Rodriguez, *Undocumented. Unafraid.*,  
Offset litho, 24 x 18 inches, 2010



When I looked up the word protest in the dictionary, I found the etymology of its root -test to be sexist. One can find the root in many words besides protest, namely testimony, testicle, and testes. Basically, words with the root -test indicate the act of bearing witness or giving a solemn oath. Such acts were originally associated with masculinity since ancient Hebrews and Romans were commonly believed to have held their male genitals or the genitals of other men when making a solemn declaration or oath. Hmm....

Quite frankly, I would bet my last dollar that I am not the only one who thinks that the continuing usage of the word protest today—in 2020—with its lingering association to cis men’s sexual anatomy, is a bit problematic for those who do not identify as cis male. Thus, I wish propose an alternative word for thinking about F213: *projust*. To me, this neologism suggests in gender-neutral terms the promotion of social justice. I believe that this word substitution *projusts* patriarchal language, which is why I ultimately prefer to describe F213 as an intersectional feminist *projust* art exhibition.



Top: Lenore Chinn, *RISE RESIST UNITE*, Modern archival print, 13.4 x 20 inches, 2017

Middle: Linda Friedman Schmidt, *Protest*, Discarded clothing, 22 x 22 x 1 inches, 2012

Bottom: *30 Books Close Up*, photo credit Tanya Augsborg



# EXORCISM *thro*

## ***Maria Elena Buszek,*** **The University of Colorado Denver**

I am proud to have been among the writers who contributed to the *F213* catalog, but was disappointed to be among the participants unable to make it to the run of the show in San Francisco. So, I have relished the opportunity to revisit the exhibition with its curators and artists at the College Art Association conference, as they reflect upon what they discovered in

The artist with whom I was paired for the catalog, Kate Kretz has spoken of her creative process as “exorcism through creation,” and like so many feminist artists, her work since the lead-up to the 2016 election has turned to the president and the “MAGA” culture of which he is both symptom and commander. Her piece in *F213* is part of a series of stripped-down, but instantly recognizable drawings of only his mouth—distorted into the made-for-TV scowls, snarls, and shouts one recognizes from his every media appearance—which have the powerful effect of isolating and disempowering the messages they convey. But, cathartic though her work may be, it has had real-world repercussions that remind us of the danger artists face in speaking out in our current political climate, and the courage they must continually summon to do so—a fact that came into sharp focus just months after *F213* at Kretz’s solo exhibition in San Francisco at Jen Tough Gallery. Because Kretz’s work about the president, gun culture, and

toxic masculinity has drawn the attention of trolls who have threatened the artist and her family, the gallery was forced to hire security for Kretz’s show, which one couldn’t help but notice looming protectively, if ominously, in photos from the opening. In our panel, Karen Gutfreund mentioned activist artists’ goal for their “messages get absorbed into the culture at large,” but we must never lose sight of the darker side of what is possible when those messages advocating for justice represent a threat to another’s unquestioned supremacy.

The morning after the opening, my fellow panelist Tanya Augsburg shared on Facebook the ways that Kretz’s work in the Tough show was still churning in her thoughts: “Great protest art such as Kretz’s keeps us awake at night. It invades our dreams after we finally drift off, reminding us to take action once we wake up.” And, it requires courage to take action—especially at a moment when resistance to sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia has inspired the threatening, and even violent backlash that artists like Kretz have encountered.

Recognizing Priscilla Otani’s point today that “an activist show by its nature is intended to incite discomfort and strong motions among viewers,” it is laudable that the artists and organizers of *F213*

# ough CREATION

were so willing to own the image of the “angry woman” that Tanya’s presentation contextualized, and the work that Rosemary Meza-DesPlas shared seeks to unleash. Karen compared this work to those canonical images of war that we’ve all studied, singling out Francisco Goya’s *Disasters of War* etchings among the points of both origin and departure for the artists in the *F213* exhibition—which I noted with interest, having just last week re-read Linda Nochlin’s 1988 essay “Women, Art, and Power,” in which she draws our attention to this very series and how it reinforces the awfulness of women’s anger, in its conflation of desperate women driven to action with “wild beasts.” This still-powerful image of the moment that, to quote Karen, women “turn anger, fear, and grief into action” is simultaneously what feminist artists wish to inspire and are up against.

I’d like to conclude with perhaps the most difficult, and necessary action that the panelists addressed, which required the courage of the *F213* artists and organizers to confront their own blind spots and biases. As Priscilla Otani put it, when the goal of the exhibition was to “provoke thought, discomfort, and discourse,” it seems natural that those provoked would include those within the Women’s Caucus for Art—which has experienced turmoil and factionalism as well as sisterhood as it has sought to represent the increasingly

diverse spectrum of feminist artists that themselves represent our changing world in the decades since the WCA’s foundation in 1972. Priscilla’s unvarnished narrative of ways that *F213* had to negotiate the myriad positions and perspectives of both its participants and audiences—to say nothing of the “exhaustion” of women of color too often thrust into the position of mediator in these moments—reminds us of the work we’ve yet to do in not just the feminist art community, but the feminist community writ large. Jennifer C. Nash writes of this exhaustion in her extraordinary 2019 book *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*; it is an exhaustion born of the presumption that applying intersectionality is “politically virtuous,” even as we limit and pressure those whom we perceive as responsible for its work. She proposes that, instead of feminism’s frequent treatment of intersectionality as territory to be assigned and defended, we might instead “imagine its radical work to be an embrace of ideas of intimacy, proximity, vulnerability, and mutual regard.” The panelists’ reflections on how they stepped to, stepped back from, listened to and acted in concert with one another—not always with confidence or certainty, but definitely with openness and respect—represent another kind of activist work that we must all have the courage to pursue.

# Art as

# Slow Change

**Karen Gutfreund,**  
Curator/Artist

A Chinese proverb says “I hear and I forget; I see, and I remember.” A striking characteristic of human memory is that pictures are remembered better than words. Art goes directly to our emotions, then to our minds. It gives voice to our time, our issues, our deepest concerns.

Oscar Wilde once said that “life imitates art” more than “art imitates life.” Pop culture and artistic expression is assimilated into the common vernacular and then personal identity is formed through consumption of this contemporary culture whether it is music, film, or visual art. Cultural transformation is necessary for lasting change, but that requires a shift in beliefs and values. Rallies or protests will not have a lasting impact unless the issues resonate as true with the general public. A society’s culture creates their politics—what they support and live by, or what they will deem intolerable and reject. Often what is important, desirable, and sought after is created and visualized by the artists in our midst. They, the influencers, initiate and shift the conversations. Once society embraces those ideals, they become embedded in the culture. Think of civil rights, women’s rights, human rights, LGBTQ rights and income inequality; the shift in attitudes and ideals creates the new normal—what is perceived as right and correct, shifting the culture in ways big and small. Artists do tend to be the progressive and empathetic thinkers.

## Who Tells the Stories?



Vanessa Filley, #MeToo



Art tells the stories and history—it enlightens, expresses outrage, concern, compassion, agreement, and dissent. But it is in this grey area through visual storytelling where activist art lives and has its power. Art affects people on so many levels. It is a slow form of activism.

Using art for social commentary is not a new phenomenon. Art helps humanize and actualize emotions, injustices, hopes, and fears. It can elicit a visceral reaction, provoke, and then inspire us to action. Art is not just about depicting beauty. The art and culture feed into each other and can cause transformation as a result. Once you've seen something you can't unsee it and these powerful images stay in one's heart and mind and return again and again to reflect upon. Change doesn't happen overnight, but with this exposure, conversations with and to the broader public are possible.

Also, within the "art as activism" movement, there is a ground-breaking crusade in who can tell the stories and who is represented. Historically, the art world has been a white man's club for what is shown in art galleries, nonprofits, and museums. As with the #MeToo movement, breaking away from patriarchal stranglehold, activist art is giving added voice to underrepresented women, people of color, and LGBTQ individuals.

In conclusion, activist art does the following: art as representation of political injustice, art as seed of political alternatives, and art as builder of and bridge to community. In addition to documenting injustice, art can gesture towards new ideas, solutions, and priorities. This perspective is that art can seed political and cultural alternatives and create a new normal. Art gives us a vision and a means by which to communicate to others in the here and now, and to dream the impossible dreams of what could be.

*"I hear and I forget, I see, and I remember."*



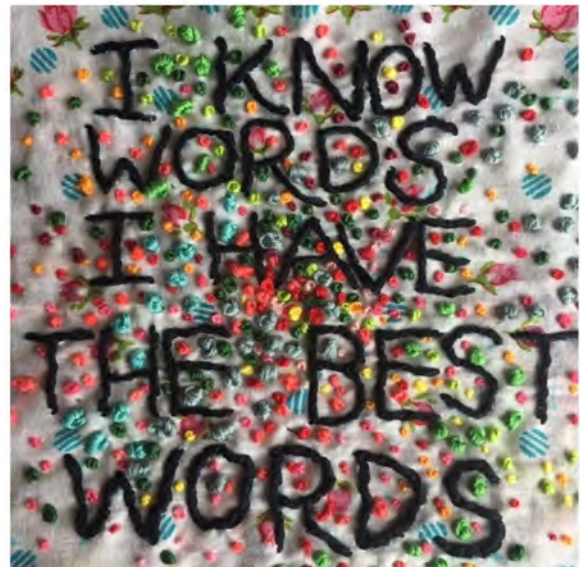
Veronica Cardoso. *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky/La niña que se cayó del cielo*

## "Art as Activism"



JR, Mayra. A picnic takes place on JR's Giant Picnic, a photograph of the eyes of a Dreamer at the U.S./Mexico border in Tecate, Mexico

## "Art as Slow Change"



Diana Weymer, *Tiny Pricks Project*

# Navigating Inclusivity in Curatorial Activism

***Priscilla Otani,***  
NCWCA Board & Arc Gallery Managing Partner

The far-reaching national curation of art and writings in the Northern California Women's Caucus for Art's (NCWCA) *F213* exhibition brought to the forefront a range of artists and writers whose collective works amplified messages of protest and change. Although these works brought vision and depth to the exhibition, they also provoked uncomfortable questions and issues.

One situation that surfaced had to do with a website banner incorporating photographs of the featured participants. The photographs consisted of one Caucasian moderator, two Asian writers, two Caucasian writers, and one Black artist. The artist specifically did not want her face shown and her publicist provided a photograph of her with her back to the camera. Since she was not the only artist or writer to present her back or obscure her face, I did not think anything about it.

The day before *F213's* opening, I was contacted by a fellow curator. I learned quickly that the banner was hugely problematic in the context that it was used. It was perceived by her and others that this was a negative stereotype of an "angry Black woman." I contacted the artist and discussed various options. Her solution was to swap out her portrait with her photography in the show.

Other issues that surfaced during the exhibition had to do with notoriety, censorship, and appropriation. Each of them was addressed as soon as the curators became aware of them. Unfortunately we did not have effective solutions to everything because either the issue surfaced after the fact or because by addressing concerns of one person, another person felt disenfranchised.



Design Credit: Priscilla Otani  
Portraits courtesy of each artist

An activist show by its nature is intended to incite discomfort and strong emotions among viewers. We should also expect that we, as curators, will experience discomfort. No matter how busy we are, we must observe, be attuned to the background noise, and listen to concerns individuals have. And it is important to address these concerns right away, whenever possible, and not wait until after the exhibition is over. If I were to add one thing to future inclusive exhibitions, it would be to create an opportunity for artists, writers, and curators to discuss the works in the exhibition once the works are hung but before the doors open to the public. Just because the curators succeed in bringing together a diverse group of artists and writers, it doesn't mean that everyone will naturally get along. What inclusivity offers is an opportunity to broaden ourselves and our audience. It is important to take the time to listen, discuss, and be ready to modify our own preconceived framework. Only then can we really learn, and grow as artists, writers and curators.

What You  
*Whispered,*  
Should Be  
*Screamed*

*Rosemary Meza-DesPlas,*  
Independent scholar

*What You Whispered, Should be Screamed*, a hand-sewn human gray hair drawing from 2018, was featured in the exhibition *Fahrenheit 213*. By late 2017, #MeToo took center stage; it starkly highlighted the plight of women within a culture supporting rampant sexual harassment and misconduct. Narratives of sexual impropriety, reported in social media, newspapers, and television, suffused our daily lives. Hushed tones circulated warnings about who gropes and grabs in the workplace. For years there were knowing whispers about many of the accused men.



Rosemary Meza-DesPlas,  
*What You Whispered,  
Should Be Screamed*,  
Hand-sewn human hair  
(gray), 34x36x4 in, 2018

*What You Whispered, Should be Screamed* and other artworks from 2018 became part of a series I titled *Jane Anger*. The title of this series refers to a British writer who published the pamphlet *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women* in the 16th century. *Jane Anger*, an exhibition, opened at Amos Eno Gallery in Brooklyn, NY on February 1, 2019. In conjunction with the exhibition, I also presented a spoken word performance wherein a poem was presented every fifteen minutes; the poems, some only a couple of minutes in length, reflected short bursts of anger. Artworks in this exhibition explored the concept of anger as a tool for change by juxtaposing found imagery from social media, art history, and mass media. My focus revolved around how social movements, Black Lives Matter, Women's Marches, Times Up and #MeToo, harness anger in order to foreground an array of gender-based burdens.

*Thirty*  
*Books*

- Stacey Abrams, *Minority Leader: How to Lead from the Outside*
- James M. Jasper, *The Emotions of Protest* • Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* • Debbie Levy, *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark* • Mark Manson, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck* • Samhita Mukhopadhyay, and Kate Harding, eds. *Nasty Women: Feminism, Resistance, and Revolution in Trump's America* • T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Present, 2nd Ed.*
- Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* • Soraya Chemaly, *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*
- Basil Rogger, et al, eds., *Protest: The Aesthetics of Resistance* • Julia Serano, *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* • Upton Sinclair, ed., *A Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest* • Akiba Solomon and Kenrya Rankin, eds., *How We Fight White Supremacy: A Field Guide to*

## The F213 Protest Literature Library

### A NCWCA Members Interactive Installation

- Black Resistance* • Re/Search #13 (Andrea Juno & V. Vale, eds.), *Angry Women* • Re/Search #12 (Andrea Juno & V. Vale, eds.), *Modern Primitives* • Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists*
- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* • Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* • Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* • Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* • Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis, *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S.-Mexico Border* • Hillary Clinton, *What Happened* • Cooper Brittney, *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* • Aruna D'Souza, *Whitewalling: Art, Race, & Protest in 3 Acts* • Marguerite Elliot and Maria Karras, *The Woman's Building & Feminist Art Education 1973-1991* • Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* • Roxane Gay, ed., *Not That Bad* • bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*
- Rebecca Traister, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* • Nellie Wong, ed., *Talking Back: Voices of Color* •



WOMEN'S  
CAUCUS  
*for ART*

P.O. Box 1498  
Canal Street Station  
New York, NY 10013

Subscribe to our Newsletter

***PULSE***

Follow us on Social Media



**@ArtWCA**



**@WomensCaucusForArt**



**@nationalWCA**

**[www.nationalwca.org](http://www.nationalwca.org)**  
**[president@nationalwca.org](mailto:president@nationalwca.org)**