

**For Immediate Release:**



Naima Suzanne Lacy, *Three Weeks in May*, 1977, paper, ink ©1977. Suzanne Lacy. Courtesy of the artist.

**THE UN-HEROIC ACT:  
Representations of Rape in  
Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.**

curated by Monika Fabijanska

September 4 – November 2, 2018

**Events:**

Opening reception: Sept. 12, 5:30-8:30 PM

First artists talk: Sept. 26, 6-8 PM

Symposium: Oct. 3, 5-9 PM

Second artists talk: Oct. 24, 6-8 PM

**New York, NY, September 4, 2018** – The Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY announces the public programming for the groundbreaking exhibition *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.* The exhibition will be on view at 860 Eleventh Avenue (between 58th & 59th Street, ground floor), New York, NY 10019, from **September 4 to November 2, 2018**, Mon-Fri 10-6. The **opening reception** will be held on Wednesday, September 12, from 5:30-8:30 PM. The exhibition, curated by Monika Fabijanska, will be accompanied by a **catalog and public programming**, including a **symposium** on October 3, 5-9 PM in the Moot Court, John Jay College, as well as **exhibition tours and artist talks** on September 26 and October 24, 6-8 PM in the gallery.

*The Un-Heroic Act* is a concentrated survey of works by a diverse roster of artists representing three generations – and including **Jenny Holzer, Suzanne Lacy, Ana Mendieta, Senga Nengudi, Yoko Ono, and Kara Walker** – which aims to fill a gap in the history of art, where the subject of rape has been represented by countless historical depictions by male artists. What makes women's works radically different is the focus not on the action or drama, but on the lasting psychological devastation of the victim: her suffering, silence, shame, and loneliness. Many works emphasize regaining control over the victim's sexuality and psyche and reclaiming the cultural narrative. Often strikingly beautiful, these works are rarely shown or their true meaning is obscured.

Fabijanska's research shows that **rape constitutes one of central themes in women's art, and the aim of the exhibition is to analyze its rich iconography in all art forms:** drawing, painting, sculpture and installation, photography, video, film, new media, performance, and social practice. Since she originated the project in 2015, the curator has identified more than 250 works about rape – just by the most acclaimed artists, from Käthe Kollwitz and Frida Kahlo to Louise Bourgeois, Niki de Saint Phalle, Shirin Neshat, to Tracey Emin.

The exhibition title refers to Susan Brownmiller's phrase 'heroic rape,' which characterizes the male glamorization of rape as a dramatic struggle culminating with romantic submission. It was coined by Susan Brownmiller in her groundbreaking book *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape* (1975). The use of the term 'rape' in the title of the exhibition reflects the selection of only those works that directly concern rape rather than the broader problem of sexual harassment. It also confronts society's reluctance to use the word that in four painful letters directly describes the utmost suffering of millions of women and bias toward euphemisms such as 'sexual abuse.' Only recently, thanks to the Me Too movement the use of the term has become more frequent, calling attention to the shaming of victims and lack of public debate.

The exhibition presents subjects specific to American culture and explores various issues that inspired artists to treat the subject of rape: domestic violence, child abuse, college rape culture, rape in the military, rape as a war crime, slavery, rape epidemic on Indian reservations, women trafficking, rape in public and political discourse, the role of media, criminal trials, and visual and literary tradition, especially art history and fairy tales. *The Un-Heroic Act* examines remarkably varied visual languages artists employed – from figuration to abstraction to text – depending on their purpose, from shocking the audience, evoking empathy, to healing.

*The Un-Heroic Act* is not so much an exhibition about rape as about the iconography of rape. The curatorial selection takes into account several elements at the same time: 1/ three generations of artists; 2/ ethnic diversity (artists of

American Indian, African American, and Asian origins, and Latinas); 3/ all visual mediums, from drawing to social practice; 4/ themes that inspired artists to treat the subject (from fairy tales and art history to rape as a war crime); and finally 5/ varied visual languages artists chose to tackle such sensitive subject.

**ARTISTS:** Yoko Ono, Ana Mendieta, Senga Nengudi, Suzanne Lacy, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Carolee Thea, Guerrilla Girls, Jenny Holzer, Kathleen Gilje, Angela Fraleigh, Natalie Frank, Jennifer Karady, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Andrea Bowers, Ada Trillo, Kara Walker, Roya Amigh, Naima Ramos-Chapman, Bang Geul Han, and Guerrilla Girls Broadband.

*The exhibition is organized by the Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY. Generous funding for the exhibition is provided by the Affirmation Arts Fund and Sarah Peter. Public Programming Artists' Fees are made possible by the Elizabeth A. Sackler Museum Educational Trust. The catalog is made possible, in part, by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation. Additional support was provided by Sigmund A. Rolat and Beth Rudin DeWoody. Special thanks to Masterpiece International for critical coordination and making shipping of several works possible. John Jay College Cultural and Visual Arts productions are made possible in part with funds allocated by NYC Council Member Helen Rosenthal and the New York City Council and the Office for the Advancement of Research. The Un-Heroic Act is a sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts.*

## PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

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**WED., SEPTEMBER 26, 6-8 PM**, Shiva Gallery (ground floor), John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 860 Eleventh Avenue  
**EXHIBITION TOUR & ARTIST TALK: *Rape in the Social Context***

The evening starts with a tour of the exhibition with curator **Monika Fabijanska**. Following **Christen Clifford's** (New School) introduction to the history of rape, artist **Jennifer Karady** will discuss her exploration of the psychology of life after war which includes a story about military sexual trauma and her collaboration with U.S. veterans, while **Ada Trillo** will talk about her project *How did I get here?* in the context of women trafficking, rape and prostitution, and *femicidios* – violent homicides of women on the U.S.-Mexican border. Moderated by professor **Shonna Trinch** (John Jay College).

**WED., OCTOBER 3, 5-9 PM**, Shiva Gallery (ground floor) and Moot Court (6th floor), John Jay College, 860 Eleventh Ave  
**SYMPOSIUM: *Iconography of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.***

5:00 PM – Tour of the exhibition with curator Monika Fabijanska, *Shiva Gallery, ground floor*

5:40 PM – Opening remarks: professor **Katie Gentile** (John Jay College), *the Moot Court, 6th floor*

6:00 PM – *Introduction to the iconography of rape:* curator **Monika Fabijanska**

6:30 PM – Panel I: *The Social Dimension and Political Action:* **Guerrilla Girls, Bang Geul Han, and Sonya Kelliher-Combs**, moderated by writer **Nancy Princenthal**

7:30 PM – Panel II: *The Iconography of Rape and History of Art, Literature and Film:* **Natalie Frank, Kathleen Gilje, and Naima Ramos-Chapman**, moderated by **Carmen Hermo** (Brooklyn Museum)

8:30 PM – Social time in the gallery

**WED., OCTOBER 24, 6-8 PM**, Shiva Gallery (ground floor), John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 860 Eleventh Avenue  
**EXHIBITION TOUR & ARTIST TALK: *The Personal Sphere***

The evening starts with a tour of the exhibition with curator **Monika Fabijanska**. Artists **Angela Fraleigh** and **Roya Amigh** discuss what artistic means artists employ to tell personal stories.

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

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**Monika Fabijanska** is a New York-based art historian and independent curator who specializes in women's art and feminist art. She originated the idea and provided curatorial consulting and institutional support for The Museum of Modern Art acquisition and retrospective exhibition of the feminist sculptor Alina Szapocznikow (2012); consulted on *WACK! Art in the Feminist Revolution* with curator Connie Butler (MoCA LA, 2007); and *Global Feminisms* with Maura Reilly (Brooklyn Museum, 2007). She produced and co-organized *Architectures of Gender: Contemporary Women's Art in Poland* (SculptureCenter, 2003) with Aneta Szylak.

## ABOUT SHIVA GALLERY

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The Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY is a 4,000 sq. ft. art facility opened in 2013 on the ground floor of JJC's building near Lincoln Center. It established a profile, noted in the coverage by *The New York Times*, as a venue devoted to socially engaged art. Shiva Gallery provides an unrestricted forum for artists and curators to explore issues that challenge our precepts of social justice and human rights and the engaged role that the arts play in this process. The whole JJC campus is fully ADA compliant. For more information, visit [www.shivagallery.org](http://www.shivagallery.org)

Please contact the gallery, [galleries@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:galleries@jjay.cuny.edu), 212.237.1439 for inquiries, images and interview requests. Questions to the curator: [monika@monikafabijanska.com](mailto:monika@monikafabijanska.com). Detailed updates for press: [monikafabijanska.com](http://monikafabijanska.com)