

For immediate release:



**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

opening reception: September 12, 5:30-8:30 PM

symposium: October 3, 5-9 PM

artists talks: September 26, 6-8 PM, October 24, 6-8 PM

gallery hours: Monday-Friday 10-6

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

**New York, NY, July 16, 2018** – The Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY presents a groundbreaking exhibition *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.* It 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 artist talks on **Sept. 26 and Oct. 24**, 6-8 PM.

*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, called 'heroic' by Susan Brownmiller. 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. Recent works also address 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 mediums**: 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,'<sup>1</sup> which characterizes the male narrative of rape as a dramatic struggle culminating with romantic submission. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape*, Fawcett Books, New York, 1975

Recognizing the vastness of material, the exhibition narrows the selection of works to the rape of women. With a diverse roster of US artists, it presents subjects specific to American culture, not the artists' countries of origin, and explores such issues that inspired artists to treat the subject of rape as: fairy tales and art history, rape as a war crime, rape in the military, slavery, rape epidemic on Indian reservations, women trafficking, college rape culture, domestic violence, criminal trials, the role of social media, etc. *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.

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. *The Un-Heroic Act* is a sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts.

**ARTISTS IN THE EXHIBITION:** 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.

#### **ABOUT THE CURATOR**

**Monika Fabijanska** is an art historian and independent curator based in NYC, 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); she 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, NYC, 2003) with Aneta Szyrak.

#### **ABOUT SHIVA GALLERY**

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 Ricky Lee at [ricky@mrrickylee.com](mailto:ricky@mrrickylee.com) 347.385.2424 or the gallery at [gallery@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:gallery@jjay.cuny.edu), 212.237.1439 for inquiries, images and interview requests. You may also direct questions to the curator, [monika@monikafabijanska.com](mailto:monika@monikafabijanska.com); detailed updates at [www.monikafabijanska.com](http://www.monikafabijanska.com)

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#### **LISTINGS:**

<b>What:</b>	<b>The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.</b>
<b>When:</b>	September 4-November 2, 2018, Monday-Friday 10-6
Opening:	Wednesday, September 12, 5:30-8:30 PM
Symposium	Wednesday, October 3, 5-9 PM (Moot Court, 6th Floor)
Artist Talks	Wednesday, September 26, 6-8 PM (in the gallery) Wednesday, October 24, 6-8 PM (in the gallery)
<b>Where:</b>	Shiva Gallery, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, 860 Eleventh Avenue (btw 58th & 59th Street), New York, NY 10019, <a href="http://www.shivagallery.org">www.shivagallery.org</a>
<b>Transportation:</b>	1, A, B, C, D, trains to Columbus Circle; buses M11, M31, M57
<b>Admission:</b>	free

## LIST OF ARTISTS

*(by the date of the work creation)*

1. YOKO ONO, Japanese/American, b. 1933 in Tokyo. Lives and works in New York, NY
2. ANA MENDIETA, Cuban/American, b. 1948 in Havana, d. 1985 in New York, NY
3. SENGA NENGUDI, American, b. 1943 in Chicago, IL. Lives and works in Colorado Springs, CO
4. SUZANNE LACY, American, b. 1945 in Wasco, CA. Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA
5. LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON, American, b. 1941 in Cleveland, OH. Lives and works in San Francisco, CA & New York, NY
6. CAROLEE THEA, American, b. in Brooklyn, NY. Lives and works in New York, NY
7. GUERRILLA GIRLS, American, active since 1985 in New York, NY
8. JENNY HOLZER, American, b. 1950 in Gallipolis, OH. Lives and works in New York, NY
9. KATHLEEN GILJE, American, b. 1945 in Brooklyn, NY. Lives and works in New York, NY
10. ANGELA FRALEIGH, American, b. 1976 in Beaufort, SC. Lives and works in New York, NY and Allentown, PA
11. NATALIE FRANK, American, b. 1980 in Austin, TX. Lives and works in New York, NY
12. JENNIFER KARADY, American, b. 1967 in Elizabeth, NJ. Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY
13. SONYA KELLIHER-COMBS, Native American, b. 1969 in Bethel, AK. Lives and works in Anchorage, AK
14. ANDREA BOWERS, American, b. 1965 in Wilmington, OH. Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA
15. ADA TRILLO, Mexican/American, b. 1976 in El Paso, TX. Lives and works in Philadelphia, PA
16. KARA WALKER, American, b. 1969 in Stockton, CA. Lives and works in New York, NY
17. ROYA AMIGH, Iranian/American, b. 1981 in Mahshahr. Lives and works in Cambridge, MA
18. NAIMA RAMOS-CHAPMAN, American, b. 1987 in Brooklyn, NY. Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY
19. BANG GEUL HAN, Korean/American, b. 1978 in Seoul. Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY
20. GUERRILLA GIRLS BROADBAND, American, active since 2001 in New York, NY



Naima Ramos-Chapman, *And Nothing Happened*, 2016, color digital film, sound, 16 min ©2016 Naima Ramos-Chapman. Produced by MVM. Courtesy of the artist