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2019

A Body of Work

Ali Edelson

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A BODY OF WORK

ALI EDELSO
SOTHEBY’S INSTITUTE OF ART
PROFESSOR KATHY BATTISTA
CURATORIAL THESIS PROJECT
DECEMBER 2, 2019
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“A Body of Work”, the working title for this curatorial proposal, examines how a group of emerging female artists represent the female form in their work. The representation of the female form, and more specifically the female nude, has long been a key part of art history. For many years, men took ownership over women’s bodies as a commodity, especially in the case of nudes. In the 20th century, feminist artists began to take more power over the ways in which the female form was portrayed by either refusing to commodify or sexualize it or taking ownership over it themselves. Today, female artists not only grapple with the influence of the past, but also in present representations of women in the media. In the present media landscape, photoshopped bodies are used to sell everything from sex to burgers. Women are inundated with unrealistic points of comparison, greatly skewing their perceptions of their own figures. “A Body of Work” seeks to examine the ways in which contemporary female artists are following in the steps of their predecessors to reject the notion that there is a single ideal, and how they reflect the pressures that women are under today. Furthermore, it explores the idea of enlightenment aesthetics, questioning when “acceptable” depictions of the female form (or art) turn into the “unacceptable” (or pornography). “A Body of Work” examines women’s autonomy over their own bodies, and begs question regarding the consumption of contemporary feminist art.
The exhibition of “A Body of Work” is especially timely in this political and social climate. Women’s bodies are hyper-sexualized, but also shamed for taking ownership of their sexuality. Public breastfeeding is shamed; state-specific abortion bans threaten the health and bodily autonomy of millions of women. At the same time, hundreds and thousands of women are being energized by the #MeToo movement to report long-ignored instances of sexual harassment or assault. We are on a precipice—one in which many women are giving themselves permission to speak out and take control over their own narratives, but also one in which not everyone has that same luxury. Women are shamed into submission not only by lawmakers, but also by a culture at large. The media’s representation of female bodies is incredibly skewed, and often not even real. This has lasting impacts on women’s body image—according to a recent Psychology Today Body Image Survey, 56% of polled women wanted to change their bodies and 89%, an overwhelming majority, stated that they wanted to lose weight (David Garner, “Body Image in America: Survey Results,” Psychology Today, 2017). Women’s bodies are controlled by others at every turn. Art has long been a form of altering perceptions and social norms. By showing art that rejects societal and male consumption of the female form, “A Body of Work” seeks to provide a platform for women’s voices to be heard louder, both artists and viewers alike.
CHECKLIST

THE INCLUDED CHECKLIST IS THE EXACT DOCUMENT USED FOR THE SHOW. THEREFORE, THE FONT CHOICE AND SIZE ARE REFLECTIVE OF THE STYLISTIC CHOICES I MADE FOR ALL SHOW DOCUMENTATION.
Checklist

Qinza Najm
Virgin Mary
2017
60 x 60 inches
oil on canvas

Nichole Washington
Alter Ego
2019
48 x 60 inches
Photo, acrylic and spray paint on canvas
Bambou Gili
Untitled
2019
oil on linen

Anna Cone
Be Cool Hunny Bunny
2019
Archival pigment print on canvas
44 x 50 inches

Joanna Grochowska
Foiling Olga
Edition 1/3 + 1 AP
2016
65 x 100 cm
Digital Print (Epson UltraChrome) under acrylic glass
Lynn Bianchi
Tea Party II
1998
Gold-toned silver gelatin
20 x 24 inches paper size

Lynn Bianchi
Lalique
1998
Silver gelatin toned with gold
20 x 24 inches paper size
Anna Cone
If you’ll believe in me, I’ll believe in you
2019
archival pigment print on canvas
35 x 62 inches

Joanne Leah
(1) Pretzel,
(2)Prolong,
(3)Pact
2019
Edition 1/10
Unframed 16 x 10.75 inches; Framed 20 x 16 inches
Archival Pigment Print on Hahnemüle Photo Rag
Rebecca Goyette
Puritan Toybox 2019
18 x 12 x 21 inches
San built ceramic, necklace, and nipple clamps

Qinza Najm
Veil of Bullets
2018
66 x 44 inches Print on Aluminum,
Edition of 3
Joanna Grochowska
XXY
Edition 1/3 + 1 AP
2011
53 x 100 cm
Digital Print (Epson UltraChrome) under acrylic glass

Miranda Morris
Declining Nude
2018
72 x 48 inches
oil on canvas

Leah Schrager
Selfiegasm
2018
Edition of 5 + 2 AP, Edition 1/5
20 x 30 inches
Dye sublimation on aluminum
Indira Cesarine
Annie, Brooklyn 845pm
Edition of 15+1 AP
2019
12 x 16 inches

Indira Cesarine
Annie, Brooklyn 815pm
Edition of 15+1 AP
2019
12 x 16 inches

Indira Cesarine
Annie, Brooklyn 828pm
Edition of 15+1 AP
2019
12 x 16 inches
Indira Cesarine
Annie, Brooklyn 747pm
Edition of 15+1 AP
2019
12 x 16 inches

Leah Schrager
Flashburn
2018
Edition of 5 + 2 AP, Edition 1/5
16 x 19 inches
Dye sublimation on aluminum

Lynn Bianchi
Women with Umbrellas
1999
Gold-toned silver gelatin
20 x 24 inches paper size
Bambou Gili
Ophelia in the tub
2019
52 x 72″
EXHIBITION FLOORPLAN AND PHOTOS

NOTE: DIMENSIONS OF SPACE AND ART IN FLOORPLAN ARE NOT TO SCALE.

**EXPENSES AND BUDGET**

**SHIPPING AND INSTALLATION, COST OF SPACE, AND COST OF EVENTS**

**SHIPPING AND INSTALLATION**

*Note: Shipping cost noted in Pick-up in U-Haul is cost for all U-Haul transportation, both to and from artist studios. Shipping costs for Pick-up in U-Haul should not be added together, but seen as a single amount for all artworks transported via truck.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTIST</th>
<th>SHIPPING METHOD</th>
<th>SHIPPING COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynn Bianchi</td>
<td>Pick-up in U-Haul</td>
<td>$260.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indira Cesarine</td>
<td>Walk over from gallery</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Cone</td>
<td>Drop-off</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambou Gili</td>
<td>Pick-up in U-Haul</td>
<td>$260.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Goyette</td>
<td>Drop-off (but says she must be reimbursed for expenses)</td>
<td>$70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna Grochowska</td>
<td>DHL shipping from Poland</td>
<td>$600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Leah</td>
<td>Pick-up in U-Haul</td>
<td>$260.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda Morris</td>
<td>Drop-off</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinza Najm</td>
<td>Pick-up in U-Haul</td>
<td>$260.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah Schrager</td>
<td>Pick-up in U-Haul</td>
<td>$260.98*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niehole Washington</td>
<td>Pick-up in U-Haul</td>
<td>$260.98*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXPENSES

These expenses are not theoretical, but are all based upon the actual cost accrued by the end of the show.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY/TASK</th>
<th>COST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shipping/Transportation</td>
<td>$930.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WallPlay Space Rental</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WallPlay Security Deposit</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates of Insurance</td>
<td>$240.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Liquor License</td>
<td>$36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation Supplies (Hardware, tools, paint, etc.)</td>
<td>$320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverages for opening and closing nights</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous items for opening night and beyond (cups, napkins, toilet paper, trash bags, etc.)</td>
<td>$86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>$340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing (Eazel flythrough)</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>$6,653.74</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRESS RELEASE

THE INCLUDED PRESS RELEASE IS THE EXACT DOCUMENT USED FOR THE SHOW. THEREFORE, THE FONT CHOICE AND SIZE ARE REFLECTIVE OF THE STYLISTIC CHOICES I MADE FOR ALL SHOW DOCUMENTATION.
A Body of Work
Curated by Ali Edelson

November 8 – November 19, 2019
323 Canal Street, New York, 10013
Opening Reception: Friday, November 8th, 7 – 9 PM

Wallplay ON CANAL is pleased to present A Body of Work, a group exhibition curated by Ali Edelson that features twelve contemporary female artists whose work engages with how the female form is represented in art. The exhibit, on view from November 8 – November 19, features the works of Lynn Bianchi, Indira Cesarine, Anna Cone, Bambou Gili, Rebecca Goyette, Joanna Grochowska, Joanne Leah, Miranda Morris, Qinza Najm, Leah Schrager, and Nichole Washington. The exhibition is free and open to the public from 10:30 AM to 6:30 PM during its run.

A Body of Work examines how a group of contemporary female artists represent the female body in their work. The representation of the female form, and more specifically the female nude, has long been a key part of art history. For much of art history, men were the primary depicters and consumers of the female form in art—the female nude was both commodified and filtered through the male gaze. It was not until the 20th century that feminist artists gained notoriety for rejecting this status quo to take more power over the ways in which women’s bodies were portrayed. Today, female artists not only grapple with the influence of the past, but also in present representations of women in the media and online. In the present media landscape, photo-shopped bodies are used to sell everything from sex to fast food. Women are inundated with unrealistic points of comparison, greatly skewing their perceptions of their own figures. A Body of Work examines women’s autonomy over their own bodies, and begs question regarding the consumption of contemporary feminist art.

This exhibition is especially timely in our current political and social climate. Today, women’s bodies are hyper-sexualized and shamed in the same breath. State specific abortion bans threaten the health and bodily autonomy of millions. At the same time, countless women are being energized by the #MeToo movement to report long-ignored instances of sexual harassment or assault. We are on a precipice—one in which many women are giving themselves permission to speak out and take control over their own narratives, but also one in which not everyone has that same luxury.

Through mixed media, performance, painting, photography, and sculpture, these twelve female artists take back ownership of their own bodies and the narratives around them. Art has long been a form of altering perceptions and social norms: A Body of Work seeks to provide a platform for women’s voices to be heard louder, both artists and viewers alike.

10% of all sales proceeds will be donated to charities focused on female health and representation. More information is available upon request.

Space is limited. RSVP to aedelson27@gmail.com
For images, prices and more information please contact aedelson27@gmail.com
MARKETING AND PRESS COVERAGE

MARKETING

The majority of marketing for *A Body of Work* took place through word of mouth and social media. WallPlay also provided free marketing through their mail-serv and social media. Between the eleven artists featured in the show, they have over 100,000 followers on Instagram. With my own accounts and the wallplaynetwork Instagram included, information about the show reached close to 125,000 accounts (of course, there are likely people that follow several of these accounts, so 125,000 does not account for this and may be slightly inflated). Because each artist promoted the show on their own accounts, we were able to take advantage of advertising to a huge audience for free. The only press that was paid for is a collaboration with Eazel, though this has not yet been released and therefore had no effect on the number of visitors in the space (the goal of this collaboration is to permanently archive the exhibition for future records). The following photos show marketing material that was produced internally, as well as how it was shared and advertised by artists and Wallplay.
Facebook and postal card advertisement for *A Body of Work* featuring work by Joanne Leah, 2019.

*A Body of Work* advertisement optimized for Instagram, featuring work by Joanne Leah, 2019.
Examples of social media posts from artists included in the show (from left to right: Lynn Bianchi, Indira Cesarine, and Bambou Gili)
Press coverage for *A Body of Work* includes the WallPlay website, a feature in the Tribeca Art & Culture Night schedule, and a write-up in *Untitled Magazine*. Articles are attached in the following pages, and links are below:

**Wallplay**: [https://www.oncanal.nyc/abodyofwork](https://www.oncanal.nyc/abodyofwork)

**Tribeca Arts & Culture Night**: [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58af430829687f87743b8d2e/t/5dcc86d767657b54bf1fac84d/1573684954442/TAC12+November+14.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58af430829687f87743b8d2e/t/5dcc86d767657b54bf1fac84d/1573684954442/TAC12+November+14.pdf)

Wallplay ON CANAL is pleased to present *A Body of Work*, a group exhibition curated by Ali Edelson that features twelve contemporary female artists whose work engages with how the female form is represented in art. The exhibit, on view from November 8 – November 19 and also featuring a one-night performance by artist Nicole Goodwin on November 15th, features the works of Lynn Bianchi, Indira Cesarine, Anna Cone, Bambou Gili, Rebecca Goyette, Joanna Grochowska, Joanne Leah, Miranda Morris, Qina Nahm, Leah Schrager, and Nichole Washington. The exhibition is free and open to the public from 10:30 AM to 6:30 PM during its run.

*A Body of Work* examines how a group of contemporary female artists represent the female body in their work. The representation of the female form, and more specifically the female nude, has long been a key part of art history. For much of art history, men were the primary depicters and consumers of the female form in art—the female nude was both commodified and filtered through the male gaze. It was not until the 20th century that feminist artists gained notoriety for rejecting this status quo to take more power over the ways in which women’s bodies were portrayed. Today, female artists not only grapple with the influence of the past, but also in present representations of women in the media and online. In the present media landscape, photo-shopped bodies are used to sell everything from sex to fast food. Women are inundated with unrealistic points of comparison, greatly skewing their perceptions of their own figures. *A Body of Work* examines women’s autonomy over their own bodies, and begs question regarding the consumption of contemporary feminist art.
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For images, prices and more information please contact aedelson27@gmail.com

For more information contact oncanal@wallplay.com
@a_edelson_ #oncanal
FESTIVAL HUB @ THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF ART
111 Franklin St.
www.nyaa.edu

THE DRAWING CENTER *
10/11 - 1/05 | The Pencil is a Key: Drawings by Incarcerated Artists
35 Wooster St.
www.drawingcenter.org

LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM *
9/28 - 1/19 | On Our Backs: The Revolutionary Art of Queer Sex Work
26 Wooster St.
www.leslie-lohman.org

ANITA ROGERS GALLERY
10/16 - 12/21 | William Scott, Paintings and Drawings: Fifties through Eighties
15 Greene St.
www.anitarogersgallery.com

DENNY DIMIN GALLERY
11/1 - 12/7 | Dana Sherwood: Horses for the Trees
39 Lispenard St.
www.dennydimgallery.com

THE UNTITLED SPACE *
11/8 - 11/22 | Frankie Rice: The Arches
373 Broadway, Suite 618
www.launchf18.com

Y2K GALLERY
11/2 - 12/21 | Lariissa Lockshin: Elephant Heart
373 Broadway, Suite 518
www.y2kgroup.nyc

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS: THE BLOCK GALLERY
11/14 | Block Gallery Open House: Onyedika Chuke, Alicia Grullon, Jessica Lagunas, Jasmine Murrell, Shani Peters
80 White St., 2nd Fl.
www.bronxmuseum.org/aim

POSTMasters GALLERY
10/19 - 11/27 | Canyon Castator: Infidel
54 Franklin St.
www.postmastersart.com

CHART
11/8 - 1/11 | After Virginia
74 Franklin St.
www.chart-gallery.com

BARNEY SAVAGE GALLERY :
10/18 - 1/16 | Emily Marie Miller: 8th House
87 Franklin St. 2nd Fl.
www.barneysavage.com

DREAM HOUSE - MELA FOUNDATION
11/1 - 1/16 | Sound and Light Environment: La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, Jung Hee Choi
275 Church St. 3rd Fl.
www.melafoundation.org

CHURCH STREET SCHOOL FOR MUSIC AND ART :
41 White St.
www.churchstreetschool.org

WHITE SPACE / WHITE STREET STUDIO :
11/14 | Group Show Celebrating 30 Years of White Street Studios
50 White St.
www.makeable.com

SOHO PHOTO GALLERY :
11/11 - 11/30 | Annual Alternative Processes Competition
15 White St.
www.sohophoto.com

DAVID WEEKS STUDIO
11/14 - 1/18 | Johanna Goodman: Selections from the Catalogue
38 Walker St.
www.davidweeksstudio.com

SAPAR CONTEMPORARY :
11/13 - 12/20 | Nature’s Afterlives: Gabriela Albergaria, Jorge Otero-Pailos
9 North Moore St.
www.saparcontemporary.com

CHERYL HAZAN GALLERY
11/1 - 12/21 | Cutting Edges: James Verbicky, Kristin Bauer, Pancho Luna, Paul Rousso
35 N.Moore St.
www.cherylhazan.com

STEVEN AMEDEE
11/14 - 12/28 | Jefferson Hayman: New Amsterdam
41 N.Moore St.
www.stevenamedee.com

ART PROJECTS INTERNATIONAL *
11/12 - 1/25 | #Lee: Small Drawings and Prints
434 Greenwich St.
www.artprojects.com

THE JOURNAL GALLERY
11/9 - 11/25 | Chris Succo
45 White St.
www.thejournalinc.com

TALK ART
6:15-7:00PM | Gallerist James Cohan on Twenty Years
@ James Cohan, 48 Walker St.

6:30-8:00PM | Meet the curator: Johanna Goodman about her monumental fabric people
@ David Weeks Studio, 38 Walker St.

6:30-8:00PM | Meet the curators: Gabriela Albergaria & Jorge Otero-Pailos
@ Sapar Contemporary, 9 N. Moore St.

7:00-9:00PM | Panels to the People: A comics reading series showcasing cartoonists & animators
@ Pearl River Mart, 395 Broadway

EXPLORE YOUR SENSES
6:00-7:30PM | Mystery Collaborative Story with hécate magazine x Hidden Currencies
@ The New York Academy of Art, 111 Franklin St.

6:00-9:00PM | “The Freedom of Speech Itself”, an audio documentary by Lawrence Abu Hamdan
@ Alexander and Bonin, 47 Walker St.

8:00-9:00PM | Live Jazz Performance by Michael Eaton and Individuation Quartet
@ Church Street School for Music and Art Upper Level, 41 White St.

MEET ARTISTS, CURATORS, & GALLERISTS
6:00-8:00PM | Meet the Curators + Exhibition Walkthrough
@ CHART, 74 Franklin St.

6:00-8:00PM | Meet the Curators + Exhibition Walkthrough
@ Off Paradise, 120 Walker St.

6:00-9:00PM | Open House at the Block Gallery
@ AIM at the Block Gallery, 80 White St.

6:00-8:00PM | Open Studios Michael Jenkins, Erin Ko, Janine Shellito, Regina Silvers, Aly Stosz
@ White Street Studio, 50 White St.

6:00-8:00PM | Meet the Gallerist
@ Postmasters Gallery, 54 Franklin St.

6:00-8:00PM | Exhibition walkthrough
@ Art Projects International, 434 Greenwich St.
TRIBECA ART + CULTURE NIGHT | NOV. 14
6-9PM

Tribeca Art+Culture Night is a quarterly downtown Arts festival that presents an exceptional program of exhibitions, performances, talks, and workshops. TAC Night celebrates artistic and creative diversity in all its forms - Visual Art, Design, Theatre, Dance, Music and Crafts, in spaces throughout Lower Manhattan. We also curate private & customized Art Experiences including Tribeca Art Walks.

For this upcoming edition, our fall program focuses on the theme of Intersections to explore the unique ways Art connects us to the many facets of humanity and the world at large. It also examines the roles that Art plays in creating meaning and defining purpose for people across the globe. In this special edition, TACN Festival draws audiences to five critical intersections - Art x Justice, Art x Seduction, Art x Nature, Art x Legacy and Art x Absurd - found in the works and events showcased in our featured venues.

SPONSORED BY

TRIBECA CITIZEN

Art Frankly;

ARTCARDS.CC

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www.tribecaartnight.com
#tribecaartnight
@tribecaartnight
team@tribecaartnight.com

1. FESTIVAL HUB @ THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF ART
111 Franklin St.

2. THE DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St.

3. LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM
26 Wooster St.

4. ANITA ROGERS GALLERY
15 Greene St.

5. DENNY DIMIN GALLERY
39 Lispenard St.

6. MONICA KING CONTEMPORARY
39 Lispenard St., East Entrance

7. THE UNTITLED SPACE
45 Lispenard St. #1W

8. ON CANAL
325/323 Canal St.

9. CHARLES MOFFETT
265 Canal St. #306

10. OFF PARADISE
120 Walker St.

11. PEARL RIVER MART GALLERY
395 Broadway

12. JAMES COHAN
48 Walker St.

13. ALEXANDER AND BONIN
47 Walker St.

14. APEXART
291 Church St.

15. SFA ADVISORY
45 White St.

16. THE JOURNAL GALLERY
45 White St.

17. LAUNCH F18
373 Broadway, Suite 618

18. Y2K GALLERY
373 Broadway, Suite 518

19. THE BRONX MUSEUM: THE BLOCK GALLERY
80 White St., 2nd Floor

20. POSTMASTERS GALLERY
54 Franklin St.

21. CHART
74 Franklin St.

22. BARNEY SAVAGE GALLERY
87 Franklin St., 2nd Floor

23. DREAM HOUSE - MELA FOUNDATION
275 Church St. 3rd Floor

24. CHURCH STREET SCHOOL FOR MUSIC AND ART
41 White St.

25. WHITESPACE / WHITE STREET STUDIO
50 White St.

26. SOHO PHOTO GALLERY
15 White St.

27. DAVID WEEKS STUDIO
38 Walker St.

28. SAPAR CONTEMPORARY
9 North Moore St.

29. CHERYL HAZAN GALLERY
39 North Moore St.

30. STEVEN AMEDEE
41 North Moore St.

31. ART PROJECTS INTERNATIONAL
434 Greenwich St.
"A BODY OF WORK" FEATURING 12 FEMALE ARTISTS ON VIEW AT WALLPLAY ON CANAL THROUGH NOVEMBER 19TH

Curated by Ali Edelson

Anna Cone
Nichole Washington
Joanne Leah · Lynn Bianchi
Miranda Morris · Rebecca Goyette
Bambou Gili · Joanna Grochowska
Leah Schrager · Nicole Goodwin

Nov 8 · 19
CATALOGUE ESSAY

DISCLAIMER

This catalogue essay does not describe a proposed exhibition for the purpose of a thesis project. Rather, it has been written after the completion of my physical show, which was the culmination of six months of working independently to find and secure artists, find and secure gallery space, and manage press, installation, promotional events, and sales as a part of this project. A Body of Work included eleven female artists, remained on display for two weeks, and was completely self-financed. The show was held from November 8th to November 19th, 2019 at a gallery space rented from Wallplay on Canal Street in New York City.

INTRODUCTION

A Body of Work showcased 23 works of art from eleven female artists working across different artistic disciplines. The artists Lynn Bianchi, Anna Cone, Nichole Washington, Joanne Leah, Miranda Morris, Rebecca Goyette, Bambou Gili, Joanna Grochowska, Leah Schrager, Qinza Najm, and Indira Cessarine participated. ¹

There is no single narrative and no universal truth that can capture what it means to be a woman today. Therefore, in order to achieve the show’s proposed goal of allowing

¹ A performance was originally planned with performance artist Nicole Goodwin, which would have meant that 12 artists were participating. However, she failed to show up for the event, resulting in its cancellation, and as such is not considered an artist who participated in the show.
women to rewrite their own narratives about the female form, it was paramount to include a wide range of ages, races, religions, and body types represented in the work of the artists selected, as well as including a range of artists themselves. It was also important to feature works across a variety of mediums while still maintaining curatorial integrity and visual harmony within the space. Nonetheless, even showing the works of eleven diverse artists could capture only a fraction of the female experience.

The following three sections, “Women as Subject: The Female Nude in the Arts”, “Women as Object: Women in the Media”, and “Rewriting the Narrative”, discuss the foundation upon which *A Body of Work* was built. Of course, these overviews are nowhere near comprehensive—multiple books have been written on each topic alone. However, they provide a necessary, if limited, view into how *A Body of Work* came to be.

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**PART 1: WOMEN AS SUBJECT: THE FEMALE NUDE IN THE ARTS**

There is perhaps no subject throughout art history that is as ubiquitous as the female nude. In each period of art (Western art in particular), one of the seminal pieces of the movement is a female nude. Greek sculpture has Aphrodite and Venus de Milo, while The Renaissance boasts *The Birth of Venus*. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres shocked those in the Neoclassical movement with *Grand Odalisque*, and later Impressionist artist Pierre-Auguste Rodin said of his famous *Nude Seated on a Sofa*, “I never think I have finished a nude until I think I could pinch it.”

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seminal to the development of all modern painting. Of course, this list is nowhere near exhaustive. However, it is no coincidence that the creators of these defining art pieces are all male artists.

As Norma Broude summarizes in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, “More than any other theme, the nude could demonstrate that art originates in and is sustained by male erotic energy. This is why many ‘seminal’ works of the period are nudes. When an artist had some new or major artistic statement to make, when he wanted to authenticate to himself or others his identity as an artist, or when he wanted to get back to ‘basics’ he turned to the nude.” 3 The female nude was more than just the subject of art—it was art—and until the 20th century, art was primarily dominated by men. This means that outside of the women they saw in their everyday lives, the viewers of these works saw women defined and re-formed by the male gaze of the artist. By providing male artists complete control over the ultimate portrayal of their female subjects, “the procedures and conventions of high art [were] one way of controlling this unruly [female] body and placing it within the securing bodies of aesthetic discourse.” 4

Throughout the history of the female nude, there have clearly been aesthetic changes as styles evolve and movements ebb and flow. Nonetheless, each era has granted male artists control over their subjects, albeit in different ways. Early nudes were a search for perfection—the creation of the ideal woman. As Aristotle himself decreed, “Art completes what nature cannot bring to a finish. The artist gives us knowledge of nature’s unrealized ends.” 5 That is, the artist need not rely on a single reality—rather he could use

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bits and pieces of individual women to create one perfected whole. As art began to move away from the classical, this search for control did not disappear, but merely changed forms. In one of Carol Duncan’s best known pieces of writing, “Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting”, she discusses how the male artist has continued to exert control over women through the female nude into the modernist movement. In experimenting with stylistic distortions, she argues that “abstractions of the female body in modernist art [are] a form of cultural subjugation of women by men.”

Even photography, which was thought to portray reality directly, allowed artists a hand in molding their subjects. Even before digital editing techniques, photographs were manipulated to better represent the artist's intent. As Kenneth Clark states, “Consciously or unconsciously, photographers have usually recognized that in a photography of the nude their real object is not to reproduce the naked body, but to imitate some artist’s view of what he thought the naked body should be.” In his book *The Naked and the Nude*, which is considered by many to be a seminal work in the study of the nude in art, Clark goes on to claim, “It is necessary to labor the obvious and say that no nude, however abstract, should fail to arouse the spectator some vestige of erotic feeling even though it be only the faintest shadow—and if it does not do so, it is bad art and false morals.” By asserting that the female nude must always incite some form of arousal, Clark suggests that sexuality is an innate element of the control exerted over the female form by male artists. While there were women working as artists during this time, it was not until the

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6 Nead, *The Female Nude*, 44.
8 Ibid., 8.
beginnings of the feminist movement in the arts in the 1970s that women rejected this narrative en masse, and female artists began to take this control back.

PART 2: WOMEN AS OBJECT: WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Today, in a culture where our main form of cultural consumption is no longer limited to fine art, art is no longer the arbiter of the ideal. Today, the media, including advertising, television, movies, print, and social media, has begun to dictate these norms. Just as art could alter a subject to define or fit into the female ideal of the period, women today can be warped, stretched, and squeezed to fit our modern expectations of beauty. The difference today is that, unlike art, which carries an innate implication that the image has been filtered through the eyes of the artist, media masquerades as an exact reflection of reality.

In 2017, marketing experts made a startling claim: they estimated that the average American was being exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 ads per day. And operating under the long-time mantra of advertisers, “sex sells”, we can see barely clothed women being used to sell everything from hamburgers and beer to perfume and cars. This trend does not seem to be going anywhere: the share of magazine ads featuring sexualized women has increased from less than one-third to one-half in the last 60 years. By showing thin, young, scantily clad women in their advertisements, companies have been able to demonstrably drive up sales. This capitalization on the female body is only amplified in advertisements that are aimed at women themselves. “The $300-million-a-year diet

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industry, the $20-billion cosmetics industry the $300-million cosmetic surgery industry… have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties.” 1011 “Beauty”, or how we define such, has become a form of currency, something that is commodified and is thus limited. By implying that the women in these advertisements are beautiful, diet and cosmetics companies are able to convince women that they can’t be … unless, that is, they buy their products.

The notion of a cultural ideal for women—often thin, young, and white—is reinforced in the mass media. Brands recognize this unattainable ideal and feel the pressure to uphold it: “Kate Betts confessed, in The New York Times Style section, to having removed accomplished actress Renee Zellweger from the cover of Vogue because she was ‘too fat’ after having gained some weight—that is having become the size of an average woman… newspapers speculate that Elizabeth Hurley was fired as Estee Lauder’s spokeswomen because, at thirty-six, she was ‘too old’.” 12 As we begin to truly understand how much our culture is exposed to these “ideal” women every day, both consciously and unconsciously, we can understand that its effects are much more far reaching, and dangerous, than those affected by the portrayal of women in art:

“In a US study of over 500 working class girls age 11 – 19, nearly 70% reported that pictures in magazines influenced their conception of the ‘perfect body shape’. Over 45% indicated that such images increased

11 The number cited here are in fact woefully outdated. Since this study, the U.S. Weight Loss Market has rocketed up to a value of $66 billion, and in 2018 the United States spent a total of $8.78 on cosmetic procedures.
their desire to lose weight, and the more often an adolescent girl read women’s magazines, the more likely she was to report being influenced by media to think about the perfect body, to be dissatisfied with her own body, and to want to lose weight. A similar study of nearly 800 Australian adolescent girls found that almost 90% desired the ideal slender body shape promoted in the mass media. According to three cross-sectional investigations and one longitudinal study of large samples of girls ages 10 – 18, wanting to look like celebrities and models in the media is a strong predictor of weight concerns, dieting behavior, and binge eating. 

There is no doubt that the ways in which media represents the female form have had an influence on how women view themselves for many decades. However, the majority of the women showcased in the media today do not actually exist. Just as artists perfected their female subjects, contemporary media companies use Photoshop to smooth, thin, and blur the woman on the other side of the lens. While there are no definitive statistics on the percentage of photos in the media that are Photoshopped (we must distinguish the type of editing we are discussing here with photo editing that erases background distractions or fixes lighting levels), there are a bevy of examples of leaked before-and-after images that render the subject unrecognizable. This phenomenon is not limited to mass media: in a study of 1,710 adults, 50% admitted to editing photos of themselves before posting them

on social media; when we look at the figures for women alone, this number jumps to nearly 75%. These statistics confront us with a startling truth: the vast majority of women we see online, in print, on the screen, and in advertisements have been manipulated to fit a perceived societal construct of beauty. Bombarded with these images, women heavily invest in beauty products, fad diets, and devote countless hours to measure up to an ultimately unattainable media depiction of beauty. There is no longer an ideal artist controlling female bodies, but a culture at large that has control over the women who inhabit them.

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**PART 3: REWRITING THE NARRATIVE**

It would be overly simplistic to state that women only took control of their image during the feminist art movement of the 1970s. It would also be overly simplistic to believe that the methods developed during that period are still in use by all feminist artists today. As Linda Nochlin expressed in 2003, “Perhaps 70s feminism, powerful and necessary though it was, is now outmoded; feminism has transformed and is itself transformed in contemporary practice. Feminist politics today is far more multivalent and self-aware’ the battle lines are less clearly drawn. The binaries – oppressor/victim, good woman/bad man, pure/impure, beautiful/ugly, active/passive—are not the point of feminist art anymore.”

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In *A Body of Work*, the eleven artists—Lynn Bianchi, Anna Cone, Nichole Washington, Joanne Leah, Miranda Morris, Rebecca Goyette, Bambou Gili, Joanna Grochowska, Leah Schrager, Qinza Najm, and Indira Cesarine—focused on a range of aesthetic practices, but found a common interest in recapturing the narratives that have been told about women throughout time in art and media. By representing the female body through a woman’s eyes, their art allows them to rewrite the narrative of what it is to be a woman today without a filter applied. The ways in which these artists retake ownership of their own representation is an individual act of rebellion, but can be grouped into four overarching methodologies: 1. Reframing the past (Anna Cone, Miranda Morris, and Lynn Bianchi); 2. De-personalizing the body (Joanna Grochowska and Joanne Leah); 3. Rejecting cultural narratives (Qinza Najm and Nichole Washington); and 4. Embracing cultural narratives (Leah Schrager, Indira Cesarine, Bambou Gili and Rebecca Goyette). The following sub-sections will further explain how each artist utilizes these modes in their work, and how they fit together to form *A Body of Work*.

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**PART 3A: REFRAMING**

The artists who utilize this form of reclamation do not flatly reject classical portrayals of the female form. Rather, they reuse the classical artistic themes and tropes used to portray women and contemporize them through the insertion a new subject who does not conform to classical ideals. In Lydia Nead’s *The Female Nude*, she notes “… The female nude has been the focus of a certain idealist aesthetic of wholeness and containment and whilst the female body has indeed been the object of relentless display within this
framework, it has at the same time rendered certain bodies invisible within the defining boundaries of art. Women whose bodies do not conform to the ideal are beyond the field of vision, and the right to self-definition may mean an insistence on the right to make and be visible.” 16 By re-engaging with the canon that for so long controlled women, Anna Cone, Lynn Bianchi, and Miranda Morris begin to take control over the canon itself.

Anna Cone’s two works in *A Body of Work* are perhaps the most overt examples of this methodology. *Be Cool Hunny Bunny* and *If You Believe in Me, I’ll Believe in You (IYBMIBY)* call upon classical imagery not only in their content but as objects themselves. Using canvas hand-sewn to antique rugs and hung from gold vintage rods, Cone presents two tapestries that would be welcome in any collection of classical art, if not for their contemporary subjects. Within backgrounds woven together from elements of Old Master paintings, Cone includes two unlikely subjects: *Be Cool Hunny Bunny* features a nude overweight woman of color in repose, while *IYBMIBY* shows a nude black woman reaching out to engage with elements of her surroundings. Both women look out at the viewer unapologetically, and radiate power—there is no sense of the chastity that classical female nudes embodied in their downturned gaze and hands draped over their bodies. The subjects in Cone’s works know that they belong in these settings, and do not apologize for it. By glorifying women who do not fit into the classical art historical ideals of beauty, Cone allows for a broader standard of beauty within the larger classical lens. Here, the artist does not utilize her position behind the lens to control her subjects—instead, by celebrating them as they are, she empowers them.

16 Nead, *The Female Nude*, 60.
In artist Lynn Bianchi’s work, the classical ideal of the female nude is also subtly undermined, here by imbuing an element of the bizarre. In the three pieces included in this show, all of which are from her most famous series titled *Heavy in White*, Bianchi juxtaposes classical figures with ordinary settings and activities. At first glance, her figures look as if they could have stepped out of a classical stone monument. However, Bianchi includes women of all sizes and races, and rather than participating in a somber and chaste depiction of the sublime, they laugh, eat, joke, and play freely. While the nude figures are formally placed, their actions are light, even humorous. Bianchi’s paintings turn the classical ideal on its head by letting the individuality of these women shine through, by rejecting that there is a single definition of beauty among her subjects, and ultimately by making the extraordinary ordinary.

At first glance, it is not abundantly clear how the work of Miranda Morris is a re-imagining of the past for a contemporary audience. In *Declining Nude*, a traditionally attractive woman turns her back to the viewer as she lies against an unmade bed. The work calls to mind the extensive genre of reclining nudes that were so often painted by male artists. However, unlike classical reclining nude paintings, this piece is split into two canvases. A chasm separates Morris’s subject and the blanket she leans on—there is a kinetic energy that suggests she may slide off the canvas altogether. At closer look, the subject is not positioned in an artist’s studio either, but rather asleep on an unmade college dorm bed. And perhaps most importantly, the subject of the painting is Morris herself. Here, Morris takes back control of the narrative around the female form in the most literal sense: by positioning herself as both creator and subject, she has assumed complete ownership over the work’s narrative.
Within the historical art canon, the female nude has come to encompass many different themes and motifs, some at odds with each other, including chastity, desire, motherhood, virility, youth, and perfection. All of these concepts and more can be attributed to the ability of the viewer to project their own views and desires onto the depicted female body. In John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing*, he notes the importance of viewership and gaze, explaining “Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.” 17 In *A Body of Work*, artists Joanna Grochowska and Joanne Leah remove one half of this equation by excluding or obscuring the faces, and thus the gaze, of their subjects. By de-personalizing and abstracting the body, the subjects are no longer identifiable and can be freed from the typical assumptions that accompany imagery of the female body.

Throughout Joanna Grochowska’s practice, she never refers to the theme of her work as the female form—she refers to all of her subjects as a faceless human form. Whether draped, as in *Foiling Olga*, or cut from the frame completely, as in *XXY*, both subject’s identities are hidden from the viewer. Her pieces are striking in their depersonalization, as they are still deeply intimate. In this sense, the viewer is acutely aware of their inability to fully gaze upon, and fully take control over, the faceless human forms when

their gaze cannot be met. By removing a key element of the female nude and making the personal unidentifiable, Grochowska is able to shed the many associations that it would otherwise carry.

Joanne Leah’s work also centers around the practice of bodily detachment. In her work, the female body is styled and contorted in a way that separates individual body parts and rearranges them into a stylized object. In the vein of Surrealism, Leah’s photographs confuse the viewer’s understanding of the body as subject, ultimately transforming it into a fragment that has meaning beyond that which is already ascribed to the female form.

PART 3: REJECTING

While rewriting past narratives or deconstructing classical depictions of the female form are both successful means of regaining artistic control, they both inherently recognize the long-standing tradition that surrounds the female body and its depictions. In the works of Qinza Najm and Nichole Washington, the artists seek to directly challenge contemporary assumptions that are placed upon women today. They recognize the power of the female nude in art and use it to their advantage—the women in these works do not obey the aesthetic laws of the past nor do they bow to the stereotypes that have been assigned to them in the present.

Qinza Najm has used the body throughout her practice in order to explore “the circumstances surrounding its physical occupation of space, the norms and laws that govern bodies as political subjects, and the uneven burden these norms often place on
women and minorities.” Najm’s work often features a stretched or distorted figure (often herself), which suggests the manipulation of the female form yet also alludes to its capacity for transformation. Najm’s work is marked by symbols obtained from her own life experiences, including her upbringing in Pakistan, and her adult life in the United States.

_Nirvana (I am Un (covered))_ comes from the artist’s series “Bottled Up”. In the work, a woman wearing a hijab kneels within the confines of a glass perfume bottle. The subject’s eyes are the only portion of her face that is visible, but beneath her veiled head her body is completely nude. Of the series, Najm explains, “Perfume is a luxury item, an expectation of feminine loveliness, a scent memory that wraps you in a blanket of fuzzy nostalgia… In the series ‘Bottled Up,’ distorted bodies conform to the insides of perfume bottles in an expression of the oppressive beauty norms and expectations women face, and exploring the violence done to women’s bodies by misogyny and objectification.”

This painting subverts the expectations of the viewer surrounding Pakistani women, forcing them to recognize the violence that their predetermined perceptions carry.

Najm’s other work in the show, _Veil of Bullets_, from the “Stretched(ed)” series also features cultural symbols that are inspired by the artist’s life. This work centers around a photo of Najm from a previous performance, in which the artist “wore a 40-pound veil laden with 1,100 plus empty bullet casings representing the number of honor killings that occurred in Pakistan during the previous year, as well as the 1,100 children and adults killed during school shootings in the US, as an entry point to talk about global traumas.

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19 Ibid.
Najm’s oversized figure kneels upon a Persian-style rug, which is ubiquitous in the Middle East, serving as the center around which a family’s domestic lives revolve. By contrasting a personal symbol of the home with the universal violence in our world today, Najm navigates the uneasy clash between the personal and the universal in a world in which Middle-Eastern women have very little control. Najm’s works, while informed by her personal experiences, have a universal reach in their subversion of the stereotype.

Nichole Washington’s work also challenges multiple personal stereotypes that she has faced, including both gendered and racial. In Alter Ego, she has used multifarious practices to re-formulate an image of herself. Her self-portrait has been made brightly colored, standing tall and surrounded by the symbology that Washington uses throughout her practice to speak her own coded language. In discussing the impetus behind this piece, Washington discussed the fact that women, and especially black women, are often seen as powerless. Here, she has rejected that norm by turning herself into a goddess, a protector, and a woman whose power bears no questioning.

PART 3: EMBRACING

Throughout art history, there has always been a fine line between the sublime and the obscene in regard to the depiction of the female nude. There are no clear definitions of what makes a female nude art and what makes it pornography—for many years the legal

view on the subject was “I know it when I see it”, and even the Miller Test for Obscenity that is in use today leaves much room for subjectivism and interpretation. 21 Art has often been forced to tip-toe around this blurry boundary: “In the texts of the sex-life class manuals… it was seen that sex and sexuality could not be allowed to dominate the representation of the female body; sex has to be implicit rather than explicit in order to keep the art/contemplation coupling intact and to maintain the conventional polarity of art and pornography.” 22 Nonetheless, these works were most commonly painted through and for the male gaze. During the 1970s feminist art wave, many female artists rejected depictions of the female body altogether. In this final discussion of methodology, I highlight artists who embrace female sexuality as a means to take control of it back into their own hands. Leah Schrager, Rebecca Goyette, Indira Cesarine, and Bambou Gili often work with a tongue-in-cheek approach, challenging the perception of viewers and forcing them to question how they draw their own boundaries between the sublime and obscene.

Artist Leah Schrager acts as the model, photographer, artist, and performer for all of her work. In the first of her two photographs featured in the show, titled Flashburn, depicts the artist in a provocative position, though all nudity is obscured by the flash of a camera. This photo toys with the distinction between art and pornography: while positioned in a suggestive pose, there is no nudity in view. This playful approach is woven throughout Schrager’s work, especially in her online performance art that includes

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21 Even the contract I signed for the space was vague on the topic, with a clause that “Lessee agrees to not use the Facility for any obscene or pornographic purposes, including any obscene, nude, or semi-nude live performances or modeling.”
22 Nead, The Female Nude, 55.
the Instagram persona Onaartist. Schrager embraces her sexuality, and in doing so explores the celebrity and commercialism that surround the provocative female body today.

Rebecca Goyette likewise embraces female sexuality as a means to promote female agency over their own bodies. Blatantly rejecting Puritanical sexual preoccupations, Goyette takes her work into the realm of fantasy in which sexual desire has no boundaries. In *Puritan Toybox*, which was built specifically for this show, Goyette fills the gown of a Puritan woman with ceramic phallic necklaces, yonic faces, anal beads, nipple clamps, and other evocative objects. She does not simply recognize female sexuality here—she pushes it to the forefront of the art. By filling the work with overt sexual overtones, Goyette takes a clear stance on female sexuality in art and positions women at the helm of their own sexuality.

Indira Cesarine’s series *Annie, Brooklyn* is not necessarily an overt display of sexuality, but instead a demystification of a subject whose work is rooted in sex. This series follows a young sex worker around her own home, capturing everything from the inside of her refrigerator to the “Don’t Knock Just Yell” sign on her bedroom door. It is not the subject’s nudity that makes these photographs feel so intimate; rather, it is the invitation into her home and personal life. Cesarine’s works accept the sexuality of their subject without pause—by allowing the viewer to relate to her on an individual level, she undermines preconceived stereotypes regarding female sexuality and its commercialization.

Bambou Gili’s paintings do not shy away from the female form. Her colorful subjects do not invite the male gaze so much as gaze unabashedly back out at the viewer.
There is a sense of humor behind these two works hidden in small details: a spilling can of Montauk beer, an oversized T-shirt depicting a sexualized female body not quite lining up with the young woman donning it. These works represent the contemporary young woman as one who is unafraid of her body, who invites viewers in with a pointed gaze, and who exists outside of the canon of the traditional female nude.

CONCLUSION

In society today, women are not solely controlled by images. There are laws that attempt to seize control over our bodies, religious doctrines that control our sexuality, and violence that controls us physically. How then, can challenging female imagery truly make a difference in a culture that is intent on exerting control over the female form? As Amelia Jones states in her essay in *Feminism and the Visual Culture Reader*, “By attending to, rather than repressing or disavowing, our embodiment as informing our conception and experience of gender in ourselves and others… [we] expand the feminist understanding of how visuality contributes to our understanding of who we are as embodied subjects.” 23 Challenging the ideal, especially in an industry controlled by men, in a brave and vulnerable act. Through *A Body of Work*, these eleven artists were given a platform to do so, taking the first steps towards challenging the foundation of female visual culture at large.

23 The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 473.
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