

## ***IS IT EVEN WORSE IN EUROPE?***

In 1986 the Guerrilla Girls launched a poster campaign on the streets of New York stating “*It’s Even Worse In Europe*”. This was an important moment after years of questioning the art world and campaigning in the USA, when they expanded their scope across the Atlantic to highlight sexism and racism happening in Europe, where different social and economic systems operate. They had looked into statistics and compared the figures of contemporary art institutions in the western world during the late eighties: They discovered that US privately funded institutions supported slightly more women and artists of colour than publicly funded European art institutions. Thirty years later, the Whitechapel Gallery invited the Guerrilla Girls to explore again diversity in art institutions in Europe by asking *Is it even worse in Europe?*

The project takes off from the 1986 poster campaign, and culminates in a body of major new research presented at the Whitechapel Gallery. The Guerrilla Girls sent a questionnaire to 383 European museums and art institutions, including the Whitechapel Gallery, with questions formulated to examine the pre-occupations of European institutions at present, and to critically look at the narratives they produce. Museum directors were invited to respond to questions about the inclusion of women and gender non-conforming artists, as well as artists from Africa, Asia and South America in their programmes and collections. The questionnaire also inquired about the funding of the institutions, drawing attention to the relationship between private economic interests, museums’ policies and programmes. Questions included for example: What percentage of the budget is from public resources? What percentage comes from private collectors or corporations? Financial queries about acquisitions also featured.

The Whitechapel Gallery display presents the original Guerrilla Girls’ poster from 1986, the completed questionnaires collected in 2016, a list of institutions that responded, as well as a list of institutions that did not respond. On the façade of the Gallery, a banner commissioned specially for the project, will hang for five months. It states that only 1/4 of museum directors answered the Guerrilla Girls’ questions.

*Is it even worse in Europe?* follows the series of projects that the Guerrilla Girls have completed over the last ten years as a result of the growing interest from international art institutions in their work. These projects have allowed the Guerrilla Girls to add a new

branch to their long and diverse practice of institutional critique. Since their participation at the 2005 Venice Biennale, where the group made new work about the Biennale and its history, the Guerrilla Girls have been doing feminist critique in a series of projects at the Istanbul Modern, ART Athena, the Shanghai ART Fair, the Gallery of Columbia College of Chicago, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Reykjavik Art Festival and the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. These projects have been testing the ability of feminist work to avoid being fetishized and deactivated by institutional machinery, specially in a perverse new context where many institutions are using, by over-exposing them, prominent feminist, artists of colour and gender non-conforming artists to create the illusion of diversity in their programs and collections.

This strategy from inside the art institutions must be understood within the context of another strategy they have been developing since the 90s: compiling their work in the form of a complete portfolio and making it available for educational and art institutions. Posters originally meant for the streets are now exhibited in the public sphere of museums and art centers to act as witness to the history of the collective and to become part of the historic record. It provides a document, a feminist history, that the group thinks must be shared among generations. This preoccupation with a feminist education perhaps explains why a large number of museums and art centers welcome the work of the Guerrilla Girls, especially where they are linked to educational institutions. Since 1985, the Guerrilla Girls have been conducting workshops, gigs, and other educational activities that transmit such feminist knowledge. This public work in colleges and universities, not only in the art departments but also in gender and political studies, is accompanied by their active presence on the internet where one can follow their various public projects alone and in association with other activists groups such as La Barbe, Occupy Museums, G.U.L.F., and The Illuminator.

It is the combination of these triple-track strategies inside art and educational institutions, on the street and on the net, that ensures the Guerrilla Girls remain the Conscience of the Art World today.

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*Guerrilla Girls: Is it even worse in Europe?*  
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