

CATHARINE CLARK GALLERY

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Hartford Courant

**'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?'
Maybe. But the Guerrilla Girls have a home at New Britain
Museum of American Art**

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The Guerrilla Girls (including Frida Kahlo at right) in 2015 at a New York gallery opening. The celebrated artists/activists are part of the "Some Day is Now: Women, Art & Social Change" exhibit at the New Britain Museum of American Art, where they will also a virtual lecture and workshop. (Andrew Hinderaker)

New Britain Museum of American Art knew it couldn't have an exhibit called "Some Day is Now: Women, Art & Social Change" without the Guerrilla Girls. The firebrand art activists, who wear gorilla masks and

name themselves after famously subjugated or unsung female artists, have made a career out of challenging sexism and other unjust practices at major arts institutions. Their preferred medium: billboards, fliers and broadsides. Their work can't be ignored, and not just because the artists all look like gorillas.

"They are such celebrated artists," says Lisa Williams, associate curator of NMBAA and co-curator of "Some Day is Now." "I really wanted to bring them to the museum. They forced efforts towards change. They exposed gender imbalance and prejudice. They embarrassed major art institutions. And after these years, they are still committed."

The museum went further, purchasing a copy of the Guerrilla Girls' "Portfolio Compleat" for its permanent collection. The portfolio consists of more than 100 provocative posters and fliers issued since 1985.



A collection of 48 posters, the work of a feminist collective using humor, satire and attention-getting graphics to "expose gender and ethnic bias as well as corruption in politics, art, film, and pop culture." Outrageous stuff, in all sorts of ways. The exhibit remains on display through March 12 at the Baltimore Museum of Art, 10 Art Museum Drive. Museum hours 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Free. artbma.org. (Baltimore Museum of Art / Handout)

A couple dozen prints from “Portfolio Compleat” are in the “Some Day is Now” exhibit through Jan. 1.

Now hanging on the gallery walls: A sign reading “We sell white bread. Ingredients: White men, artificial flavoring, preservatives. Contains less than the minimum daily requirement of white women and non-whites.” First plastered on walls *outside* art galleries in the late 1980s, that and other stinging rebukes of the art world now hang in galleries themselves. Another bears “Guerrilla Girls’ definition of a hypocrite: An art collector who buys white male art at benefits for liberal causes but never buys art by women or artists of color.” A sarcastic list of “The Advantage of being a woman artist” includes “working without the pressure of success” and “being included in revised versions of art history.” “It’s still not a meritocracy,” says Guerrilla Girls co-founder “Frida Kahlo” in a phone interview. “There’s still male privilege. It’s not getting better.”

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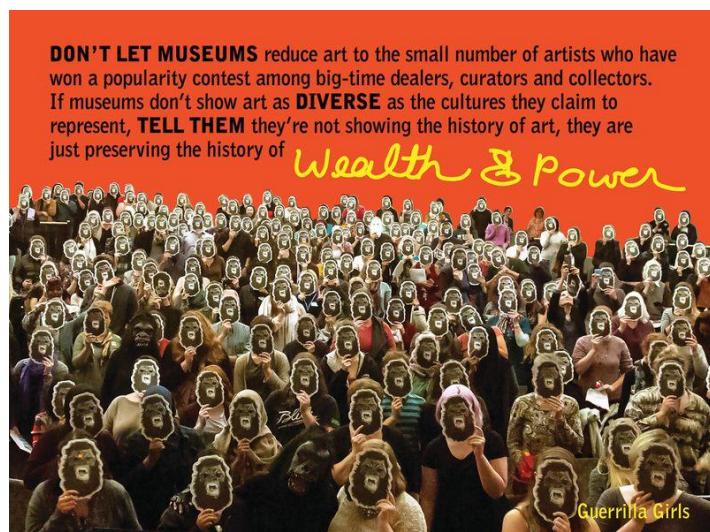
GUERRILLA GIRLS CO-FOUNDER “FRIDA KAHLO”

Evidence of how the Guerrilla Girls’ message is still needed fills a new coffee table book, “Guerrilla Girls: The Art of Behaving Badly,” released this month and chronicling the first three and a half decades of their advocacy for equal rights, diversity and other cultural concerns. The book even comes with a punch-out cardboard gorilla mask.

The Guerrilla Girls' work is not subtle. When Newt Gingrich was Speaker of the House, they issued a poster attacking his hypocrisies with a picture of a salamander, proclaiming "Who is this slimy creature? It's Newt!" Posters in the early '90s flipped a common perception of the L.A. riots, deeming the Reagan-Bush administration the true "looters" of urban neighborhoods. In another series, the obscure art term "Suprematism" is altered to read "White Supremacism."

The Guerrilla Girls have targeted bigotry, censorship, sexism, abuse of power and many other social ills, from the perspective of women who are savvy about the unsavory realities of the art world. In the early '00s, they started pointing out male domination in Hollywood.

Kahlo says "It can be a challenge to keep going this long. But it still feels great to see one of our billboards up. That's still a thrill."



Artworks by the feminist artist collective The Guerrilla Girls are part of the New Britain Museum of American Art's exhibit "SomeDay is Now: Women, Art & Social Change." (Copyright © Guerrilla Girls and courtesy of guerrillagirls.com)

She also appreciates how the group has made a name for itself outside of New York City. A current Guerrilla Girls project, commissioned by London's Somerset House, centers around famous male artists known to have abused women. "If an artist is a sexual predator," Kahlo asks, "should that be on the label next to their art in museums? There's ongoing evidence of women being ogled, seduced, abducted, raped and even murdered by famous male artists."

Kahlo says the group is excited to be a part of the NBMAA's permanent collection. This is the second Portfolio Compleat to be found at a Connecticut museum — the Yale Art Gallery has one, too — but those are the only two in New England, Kahlo says.

Guerrilla Girls, gorilla-masked as usual, will present an online lecture/performance for NBMAA on Nov. 19 at 6:30 p.m. with video and more than 100 slides "telling the story of our work," Kahlo says. Then the Guerrilla Girls will lead a workshop Nov. 20 at 12:30 p.m. Workshop attendance is capped at 30 participants. Details can be found at nbmaa.org or guerrillagirls.com.



Guerilla Girls on the wall of the New Britain Museum of American Art. (New Britain Museum of American Art)

The Guerrilla Girls are just one aspect of the wide-ranging “Some Day is Now” exhibit, which includes 19 other female artists/activists including Elizabeth Catlett, Betye Saar, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Cauleen Smith, Stephanie Syjuco and Yoko Ono, among others.

Lisa Williams adds that “we not only dedicated all our 2020 exhibitions to women artists but are focusing on acquisitions,” Williams says, adding that many of the artists in the various “2020/20+ Women” exhibitions are new to New Britain. “We try to identify really important work that can be acquired.” .

“2020/20+ Women” encompasses numerous separate exhibits. Williams wanted the Guerrilla Girls to be part of the one which has art directly related to suffrage and other activism. “These materials the Guerrilla Girls

created were distributed at and around the institutions they were criticizing."

Williams says the Guerrilla Girls posters may become a regular fixture in the museum. "When we reinstall the permanent collection, we can always have the Guerrilla Girls there."

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<https://www.courant.com/ctnow/arts-theater/hc-ctnow-guerilla-girls-new-britain-museum-20201106-4im22om6cbeadhjn5vt24o2avu-story.html>