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ARTISTS

WITH 'GALLERY TALLY PROJECT,' MICOL HEBRON EXAMINES GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE ART MARKET

BY **Catherine G. Wagley** POSTED 05/26/16 10:26 AM



Kate Hoffman's 2014 poster of Matthew Marks's roster for *Gallery Tally*. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALLERY TALLY PROJECT

Last month, the artist Micol Hebron played an April Fools' joke on her Facebook followers.

She posted that Larry Gagosian, bluest of the blue-chip dealers, had emailed her to admit he had a “woman problem,” acknowledging that 86 percent of his roster is male. “He wants to know what to do about it (uh, it’s no mystery),” wrote Hebron, before suggesting her followers flood the gallerist’s inbox with pointers. Those who saw the post responded at first with happy surprise—“Holy shit!” “You’re on a roll!” “Two snaps up for Larry Go-Go”—until Getty curator Glenn Phillips pointed out the day’s date (April 1). Still, Gagosian’s New York offices received a stream of “woman problem” emails that week.

This prank was only one recent step in a long-running effort by Hebron to draw attention to the underrepresentation of women artists. In the tradition of the Guerrilla Girls, she has been counting and surveying, visibly and vocally, women’s presence—or lack of presence—in galleries for the past few years. In 2013 she began her *(en)Gendered (in)Equity: Gallery Tally Project*, putting out a call for contributions via social media. Artists would make posters representing the gender ratio on a certain gallery’s roster, focusing first on galleries with L.A. homes: a cemetery 83 percent full of penis-shaped headstones for Matthew Marks; a sketch of Miley Cyrus bent over in front of Robin Thicke for Blum & Poe (their roster is 86 percent male); a sky-high pile of too many unruly chairs next to a small, neat set of folding chairs for Kordansky (77 percent male). Hebron [archives the posters on Tumblr](#).

By March 2014, Hebron had expanded the purview to New York galleries and exhibited a collection of over 300 posters at ForYourArt, the Los Angeles nonprofit run by Bettina Korek. Over 2,000 artists had contributed by the time Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions [hosted a larger follow-up exhibition](#) of about 400 posters this spring. A portion of the project will appear in a show at Kaufmann Repetto in Milan in early June, and it will be installed again en masse at Ohio State’s Hopkins Hall Gallery in Columbus this fall. *Gallery Tally’s* traction coincides with the growing conversation about gender bias in art and other arts-related industries. The hope is that conversation can lead to confrontation of the entrenched biases that keep these numbers skewed.



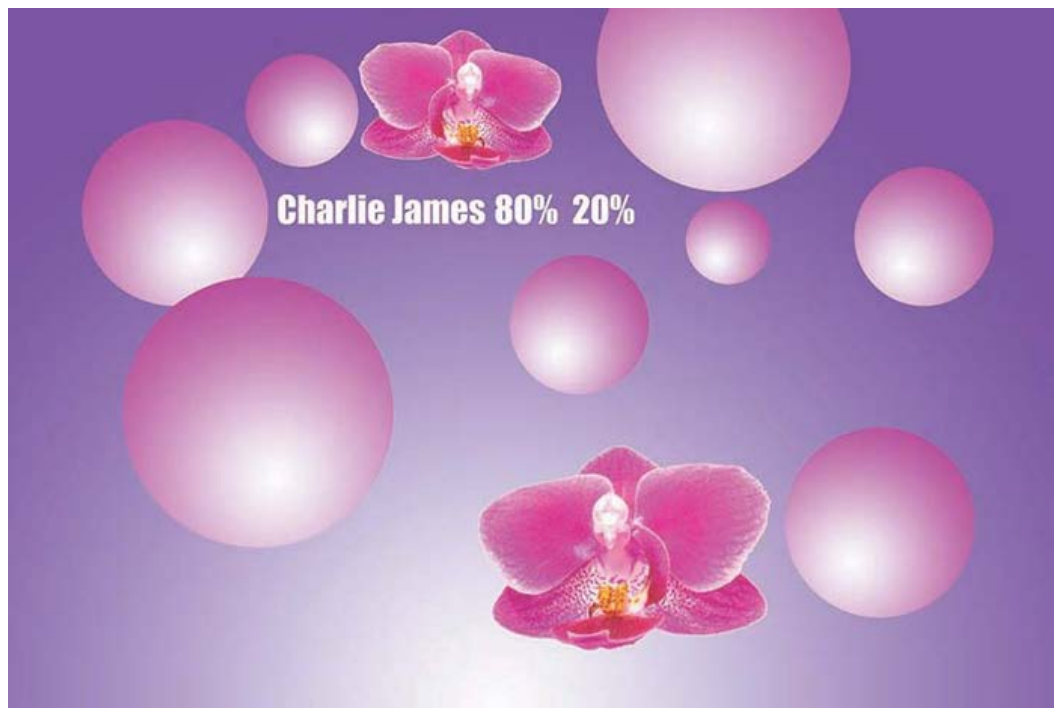
Denise Johnson's 2014 poster of Blum & Poe's roster for *Gallery Tally*.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALLERY TALLY PROJECT

For years, Hebron has been visiting art fairs at their tail end, when collectors have already swept through, to ask dealers and gallery directors about gender on their rosters. Once, at Art Basel, she asked a Swiss dealer why the bias against women persists. Collectors want to buy works that “reflect them and that are powerful,” he told her. “So women don’t make powerful work?” she asked. “Some do,” he replied, “well, you know, like Andrea Fraser.” He mentioned Fraser’s *Untitled* (2003), for which the artist filmed a sexual encounter between herself and a patron. “Of course he cited the one work where the collector gets to fuck the artist,” Hebron told me.

“The market plainly feels more secure investing in the cultural production of men,” *Los Angeles Times* critic Christopher Knight wrote in April, [in his review](#) of LACE’s *Gallery Tally* show. The “market” has long been the ambiguous scapegoat. In the late 1960s, Lee Lozano began boycotting other women as a backward survival strategy. Femaleness didn’t sell, so best to shun it. When the Guerrilla Girls, who started working and wearing their gorilla masks in the 1980s, assembled their 1987 “Gallery Report Card,” Mary Boone had no women on her roster. Marian Goodman had one, and Pace Gallery had two.

At the time, the Guerrilla Girls provoked responses. Los Angeles dealer Patricia Hamilton observed that “you can’t not show women” anymore without looking like “a jerk.” SoHo dealer Holly Solomon tried to be helpful, suggesting women use their “natural attributes to get ahead” and that cleavage helped. But the conversation lost momentum in the 1990s. Guerrilla Girl Chansonetta Stanley Emmons (a nom de guerre) told the artist Lynn Hershman Leeson that things “got very complicated...because there were all these gender issues and identity politics.” Rather than engage the thorny concerns of identity politics, many dealers opted to avoid the issue altogether.

Since Hebron started *Gallery Tally*, people have asked her, “Aren’t you worried galleries will be upset with you?” Certain gallerists have been (one threatened to sue the week before the LACE show opened). “I’m reporting the numbers,” she tells them. “I’m not making them.” Frequently, Hebron compares the psychology around art-world discrimination to abusive relationships. The abused person avoids speaking out, fearing she’ll be blamed for her situation.



Debra Bianculli's 2014 poster of Charlie James Gallery's roster for *Gallery Tally*. James has since improved its numbers to 64 percent men, 36 percent women.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALLERY TALLY PROJECT

"I think it has to do with the idea that all our presumptions are formed by power," said Charlie James, who helms Charlie James Gallery in L.A.'s Chinatown. He's been supportive of Hebron's project from the start, and his *Gallery Tally* poster was among the first made. It has eight pink orbs standing in for men and two flowers for women, all against a purple background. It looks like clip art. "I can only guess that with my shitty 20:80 ratio, the artist thought, 'This guy's not trying hard enough, so I'm not going to try,'" James said. "Happily that ratio's inaccurate now." Now he has 64 percent men, 36 percent women.

"I question my motives and impulses all the time," he said, "and I show a lot of women. But you represent people that stick. By sticking, I mean remunerative success and expectation of more success. For whatever reason, more men have stuck than women. Why is that?"

James continued, "Artists who make objects that can be fetishized, desired—there are markets for them. Does it net out that women make work more evasive of being owned or mastered?"

Perhaps what he suggests is the case, or perhaps women make work perceived as evasive, because it suggests a worldview different than the one associated with most canonized art objects.

"I usually don't talk about these things," said Susanne Vielmetter, who opened Susanne Vielmetter Projects in 2000. She'd moved to Los Angeles from Berlin, and she found the contrast between the city's cultural diversity and the gallery scene's homogeneity particularly pronounced in L.A. Currently, her roster is 52 percent female and racially diverse, unusual for a gallery as large as hers. "My staff and I work double," she said, because it's impossible to make diversity profitable otherwise.

"The discussion always stops at the market, because no one wants to dictate [to] the

collector,” she said. “People ask, Would you go so far as to imply that your gender and race affects your market?” Vielmetter continued, “Would you imply the opposite? That is not what human beings do. Why do they relate to things? Because there is something familiar there.” The people who helm art fairs still tend to be men, as do individuals with the financial resources to collect at a serious level.



Dani Dodge's 2016 poster of James Cohan's roster for *Gallery Tally*.

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Occasionally Vielmetter encourages collectors to think about not just their own affinities but their social impact. “If you are a collector, of course, you can do this as a very personal endeavor,” she said. “But you could also think about how you’re influencing the culture of our time.”

“I’m not vilifying the market at all,” she added. “[But] the problem can only be addressed when we talk about it.” She’s willing to talk now, in part because she’s not alone in the conversation.

“There’s still not enough conversation,” said Chiara Repetto, the cofounder of Milan-based Kaufmann Repetto, which also has a space in New York. She and her partner, Francesca Kaufmann, decided about six years ago to focus more intentionally on supporting female artists. They now have a 79 percent female roster. “There’s a discrepancy in price [between male and female artists],” Repetto said. “But most of our profit comes from women.”

When “[Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions](#)” opens at Kaufmann Repetto in June, it will probe domesticity and feminism with work by the Guerrilla Girls, Valie Export, and Judith Bernstein, and a few *Gallery Tally* posters. “A project like Micol [Hebron’s] makes me happy,” said Repetto, adding that it makes her feel part of something bigger.

Hebron imagines *Gallery Tally* becoming more fluid and democratic as it progresses. “We could track numbers over time and galleries could self report,” she said. Already gallerists

come to her to tell her their roster has changed. Mostly these gallerists have small or mid-size programs, but maybe, ideally, *Gallery Tally* could have something of a leveling effect. “The project itself is modeling an alternative, horizontal approach,” said Hebron.

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