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A Parallel Presence: National Association of Women Artists, 1889-2009

Voorhees Special Exhibition Galleries
Jan 17, 2009 - Apr 26, 2009



Founded in 1889 as the Woman's Art Club, the National Association of Women Artists (N.A.W.A.) celebrates its 120th anniversary this year. N.A.W.A. is the oldest American women's art organization in continuing existence, with thousands of artists having been members throughout its long history. This exhibition will illustrate the ongoing engagement of N.A.W.A. members – and, by extension, women artists in general – with the many stylistic innovations and variations that have occurred within American art since the establishment of N.A.W.A. in 1889.

One of many women's cultural organizations formed in the nineteenth century, N.A.W.A.'s purpose was to help women artists counter the difficulties they faced in gaining recognition and equity with men in professional training, exhibition opportunities, and the marketplace.

Significantly, the founding statement of the Woman's Art Club insisted that art by women was equal in creative achievement to the work of men and that this would be understood only when women proved themselves in the public sphere. One of the motives behind the founding of the group was the wish to benefit all women artists (even those who did not join this group) by showing work by women in sufficient quantity to disprove the idea that women's art was somehow inferior in quality to that of men.

The exhibition includes work by approximately 80 artists, ranging historically from the last decade of the 19th century to the contemporary. Among the artists included in the exhibition are Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Theresa Bernstein, Bessie Potter Vonnoh, Blanche Lazzell, Dorothy Dehner, Louise Nevelson, June Wayne, Pat Adams, Faith Ringgold, Idelle Weber, and Martha Walker. Another component of the exhibition comprises documentary materials from the N.A.W.A. archives which are indicative of the organization's activities over the years, and will include photographs, correspondence, exhibition catalogues and brochures, and related materials.

The exhibition includes significant works drawn from various public and private collections, with a major component derived from the National Association of Women Artists Collection at Rutgers. In 1992, the Zimmerli Art Museum became the recipient of this collection, which has steadily grown through donations from artists, collectors, and estates to a group of over 200 objects.

This exhibition will be on view at the UBS Art Gallery in New York from May 14 to July 31, 2009.

Virginia Snedeker

Self-portrait, 1933

Oil on board

Collection of Robert B. Taylor and Richard S. Snedeker

Photo: Morven Museum and Garden, Princeton, New Jersey

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