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- 1 The year 1975 will remain a major historical moment of what is now known as second-wave feminism throughout the world. This activity, though localized by country, was felt across the globe as women fomented politically, economically and socially motivated movements to encourage change. The United Nations supported this rise in feminist activity when it named 1975 as the first International Woman's Year and declared the center of its activities to be situated within Mexico City. Some scholars assert that, "Mexico '75 is seen as the beginning of global dialog on gender equality" (FORSYTH, 2005: p. 720).
- 2 The 1970s also marked a global merging of second wave feminist action and artistic practice, a defining point of feminism and art, and the beginnings of an international feminist art project. This connection between feminism and the arts is most notably documented in North America and Western Europe; however, artists around the world engaged with these new dialogues as well. Latin America, and Mexico in particular, had an extensive feminist artistic network that has yet to be fully acknowledged. Historically within Mexico, women artists who identified as feminists expressed a double exclusion from both the art world and the feminist movement. These artists teetered between an active local feminist movement that dismissed their art as bourgeois, and an art world that rejected their feminist politics as irrelevant – a problem that remains present to this day.

- 3 Recently, interest in both second-wave international feminist art practices and more general contemporary art practices across Latin America have seen a major resurgence in the exhibition circuit. These events mark important moments of global dialogues in fields that share a startling lack of critical engagement. These trends also reflect a growing need to define positionality through framing interventions of the recent past in contrast to contemporary problematics at the dawn of the 21st century.
- 4 These current trends in feminist, contemporary and Latin American exhibitions and art historical scholarship do not account for the unique position of these women artists working in Mexico. Why does not only the international art world, but also the international feminist arts movement, continue to marginalize these artistic histories? To interrogate this problematic, I look to three important recent exhibitions that highlight Mexican feminist aesthetic practice in their presentation: *La era de la discrepancia: arte y cultura visual en Mexico, 1968-1997*, *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000* and *WACK! Art & the Feminist Revolution*. It is my assertion that even in its visibility within these blockbuster shows, the resulting curatorial constructions of Mexican feminist aesthetic practices further solidify their exclusion from the international art world.
- 5 It is not the goal of this investigation to suggest that these exhibitions were failures. They exist as ambitious and necessary undertakings in fields of art history that have had little attention paid to them in the exhibition circuit. In order to improve curatorial representations and build new methodologies, however, it is imperative that we unpack the problematics of these endeavors. Rather than allowing for identities – always plural, performative and relational – to emerge through a conversation with their position across time and space, it seems static delineations embedded in the curatorial selection process activate art historical mythologies that further reproduce exclusionary narratives.
- 6 Rooted in millennial anxieties, these exhibitions are representative of a larger obstacle in contemporary art historical memory making, situated in limiting genealogical and generational formats that reinforce, rather than reduce, exclusions. In examining the effects these in/visibilities have on collective knowledge of Latin American feminist visual histories, I ultimately suggest possibilities for change rooted in critical and conceptual cartographies¹ that speak both *from* and *to* feminism's *folds*², activating intergenerational networks vital to maintaining feminism's unfolding historical and contemporary relevance.

Feminism(s) & Feminist Aesthetic Practices

- 7 There is not one single approach to Mexican feminism, feminist aesthetic practices, or global feminist aesthetics. There exists no one absolute politics that traverse time and space, or one fixed meaning to be located in a period or location. What exists are multiple feminism(s), as well as multiple feminist approaches to art, in conversation with one another locally, transnationally and cross-generationally.
- 8 We must avoid essentializing the common world event that is the feminist project into a singular movement that unites all women, or feminists, under a collective banner of struggle and shared history. Currently, the dominant mode of theorizing the history of feminism is structured around the “wave” metaphor. These feminist “waves” are

grouped along time periods as follows: First Wave, late 19th to early 20th century; Second Wave: 1960 to mid-1980s; Third Wave: 1990s to present day. Unfortunately, this statically defined timeline provides a universalized version of feminist politics across time, rather than an understanding of multiple trajectories. Misha Kavka notes:

Feminism is not... the object of a singular history but, rather, a term under which people have in different times and places invested in a more general struggle for social justice and in so doing have participated in and produced multiple histories. (KAVKA, 2001: p. xvii)

- 9 In resisting the generational divides imposed by feminist history's wave metaphor, we can better understand the overlapping affinities and divergences explored by feminist politics across time and space.
- 10 The allowance of multiple feminisms and approaches to art opens opportunities for art historical research as well. While some artists working during the 1970s in Mexico City may not have defined themselves as feminists, their work still points to an engagement with feminist aesthetic practices. Nelly Richard stresses this point when speaking about works by Chilean artists working at the same time as these women:

Each manages to set up strategies of significant organization and cultural intervention capable of empowering the feminine as dissidence. These works do not assume a relationship between woman and femininity that is guaranteed a priori by an absolute essentialism. Instead they empower the feminine (still disadvantaged amid other codes of social and sexual identity) as a changing symbol in search of the right strategy with which to place an alternative and counter-dominant subjectivity in an advantageous position. (RICHARD, 1995: p. 151)

- 11 Griselda Pollock affirms a similar notion by stating:
To be feminist at all work must be conceived within the framework of a structural, economic, political and ideological critique of the power relations of society and with a commitment to collective action for their radical transformation... It is feminist when it subverts the normal ways in which we view art and are usually seduced into a complicity with the meanings of the dominant and oppressive culture. (PARKER & POLLOCK, 1987: p. 93)
- 12 It is productive to an understanding of the feminist project to examine these works in relationship to local and global movements of women artists concerned with a feminist project. By placing them under an analytical feminist lens, we highlight their attempts to challenge and disrupt common perceptions and transform the way in which we understand art and society.

1975 – El Año Internacional de la Mujer ?

- 13 In Mexico in 1975 women were, with very few exceptions, invisible as independent artists. Mónica Mayer, a key feminist artist at the time, related her experience at the prestigious art school, the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Mexico City, stating:
It was there that I began to realize that women were invisible: women artists were not mentioned in history of art classes and nor were we, as women students, given the slightest consideration. Most of the lecturers saw us as women first and artists second. (MAYER, 2010: p. 5)
- 14 She and other artists were vocal agitators for similar social causes and artistic concerns as their fellow male students; however, there existed a profound institutional and social disconnect between the two. Mayer also stated:

- 15 Social life revolved around cantinas, which are our local pubs, from which we were banned by explicit signs that stated: “No men in uniforms, no children, no dogs, no women.” (MAYER, 2010: p. 5)
- 16 Although living during an age of global merging of feminist action and artistic practice, Mexican women found themselves, quite literally, last on the list as women artists.
- 17 Mayer has said of the collective experiences of women artists working during this time in Mexico, “it seems as though we were trying to define what ‘feminist art’ might mean” (MAYER, 1999: p. 50). While not all would label themselves as feminists, it was during this period that artists like Maris Bustamante, Magali Lara, Roweena Morales, Pola Weiss, in addition to Mayer and many others were interrogating the notion that art was “in fact an important mechanism for perpetuating patriarchal ideas” (MAYER, 2010: p. 5). How would these artists negotiate this territory to form a concept of feminism’s intersections with art – in particular aesthetic interventions distinctly *outside* of a Western understanding of feminism, which concentrates mainly on movements in Europe and the United States? How would these women come to define what feminist aesthetics looked like in Mexico City during the second wave?
- 18 Mayer’s work – activist and artistic – is integral to the development of this movement within Mexico. Mayer worked throughout her career to create art and curate exhibitions that spoke to a combined feminist consciousness and visual language. She organized numerous feminist exhibitions such as, *Lo Normal* (1978) and *Exposición colectiva de arte feminista* (1978), and worked to bring feminist artists from the United States to Mexico to engage in cultural exchanges at her conferences titled, *Translations: An International Dialogue of Women Artists* (1979). Mayer credited her time at the Feminist Arts Workshop run by Judy Chicago at the Women’s Building in Los Angeles³ with causing her to become “addicted to feminist art education” (MAYER, 2010: p. 5).
- 19 In 1978, Mayer created an installation entitled *El Tendedero* (*The Clothesline*) for an exhibition at el Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City entitled *Salon 77/78: nueva tendencias 77/78* (Figure 1). Here she asked 800 female city residents to fill in pink cards answering the phrase: *As a woman, the thing I most hate about my city is...* She then used clothespins to attach the responses to strings stretched along pink poles inside the gallery. An overwhelming majority of women wrote about the threat of violence and sexual harassment throughout the city. She installed a similar version in Los Angeles, as part of a group project entitled *Making it Safe* (1979) that focused on reducing violence towards women in the Ocean Park community near Los Angeles where the Women’s Building was located.

Figure 1. Mónica Mayer, *El Tendedero* (1978)

Courtesy of Victor Lerma

- 20 Mayer continued to work with and educate others about feminist aesthetic practices throughout her career. She formed the feminist art collective *Polvo de Gallina Negra* in 1983 with fellow artist Maris Bustamante. Bustamante, an extremely active member of the Mexico City collective *No Grupo*, also took her feminist practice to popular culture, staging actions focused on reaching a widespread audience and interrogation assumptions of femininity and identity through humor in works.
- 21 Collaboration was key for these artists, creating a network of aesthetic processes and actions throughout the city. The artist Magali Lara worked to create books and mail art projects with other artists such as Roweena Morales and Lourdes Grobet. Creating visually interesting and fragile works, Lara's work at the time invoked issues of voyeurism, language and women's embodied experiences. Pola Weiss also artistically interrogated female embodiment, in her case through explorations of dance and video. Often referred to as the pioneer of video-art in Mexico, Weiss created works that engaged visual representations of her own body and explored media as a new outlet for artistic practices.
- 22 These artists were beginning to explore alternate avenues of interactivity that opened up space for a feminine artistic language, disrupted the nature of the gallery space and revealed an interest in new dialogues between producer, object and viewer in the artistic process. Griselda Pollock speaks to the experimental quality of feminist aesthetic practices:

There has been... a necessary investigation of those areas and modes of practice – video, photo-text, scripto-visual work, performance, street theatre, postal art, etc, which offer maximum flexibility and potential for both a dislocation of existing and dominant regimes of power and knowledge, and a construction of a new

multiplicity of powers and knowledges for the diverse communities of the oppressed. (PARKER & POLLOCK, 1987: p. 81)

- 23 Certain modes of production deployed by the aforementioned artists in Mexico resist traditional artistic practices and are in line with this definition of an experimental feminist visual project. The finite present-day knowledge we have of these works is shaped, in part, through the limited number of exhibitions that deem feminist aesthetic practices as relevant to versions of shared local and international art history. Curator and art historian Florence Derieux has stated, the “latter half of the 20th century is no longer... a history of artworks, but... a history of exhibitions.”⁴ As the solidification of these histories retrospectively in our collective imagination increasingly hinges upon contemporary curatorial practices, it is essential that we consistently interrogate their presentations.

2007/08 – International Year of the “Other”

- 24 Bridging the gap between 1975 and the 21st century, interest in second-wave international feminist art practices has seen a major resurgence. In particular, 2007/08 has been marked for a startling number of feminist centered exhibitions and events in the United States. In 2007, the Elizabeth Sackler Center for Feminist Art opened in Brooklyn, the massive symposium *The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts* took place at MOMA in New York, as well as numerous traveling feminist exhibitions such as: *Global Feminisms*, *After the Revolution: Feminism & its Impact on Contemporary Art*, *Women Artists at the Millennium*, and *WACK! Art & the Feminist Revolution*. Following this activity, the international art world picked up this feminist fever, seeing such “comprehensive” exhibitions as *rebelle: Art and Feminism 1969-2009* (Amsterdam, 2009), *Elles@Pompidou* (Paris, 2009–2011), *Doin’ It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman’s Building* (Los Angeles, 2011–2012), *elles: SAM* (Seattle, 2011–2012) amongst others. These events mark important moments in global dialogues regarding feminist interventions in art, clearly referencing a current global trend in art historical academic interest.
- 25 Additionally, the art world has seen resurgence in interest in retrospective understandings of contemporary art practices across Latin America. Exhibitions such as *Inverted Utopias* (Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2004), *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000* (Museo del Barrio, 2008–2011), *La era de la discrepancia: arte y cultura visual en Mexico, 1968-1997* (UNAM, 2007), *Cosmopolitan Routes: Houston Collects Latin American Art* (Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2010), *Between Theory and Practice: Rethinking Latin American Art in the 21st Century* (Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, 2011) and others.
- 26 What feminist and Latin American contemporary exhibitions and dialogues seem to have in common is a startling lack of critical engagement with the practices that make up these complex movements and interventions. What we are benefiting from now is a much needed investigation into these practices, spurred by an urgent need to create an archive around their histories as they are highly in danger of loss. Marked by a millennial shift, these surges in interest also reference a moment in Western intellectual thought to define our current place in the course of history. History teaches us that we determine our selves, and our place in the world, based on what we are not. In delineating a generational starting point, we set up the boundaries of what

is excluded from that particular change. It seems wholly appropriate that these exhibitions would come about in an effort to frame movements and interventions of the recent past in contrast to contemporary problematics at the dawning of the 21st century. The retrospective gesture of these exhibitions, the suggestion that these movements can and are “known” and categorizable, speaks to this generational divide.

La era de la discrepancia: arte y cultura visual en Mexico, 1968–1997

- 27 A mammoth undertaking by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), *La era de la discrepancia: arte y cultura visual en Mexico 1968–1997* (ERA) was self-defined as a “historical reconstruction” and assessment of artistic practices in Mexico from 1968–1997 (DEBROISE, 2007: p. 11). The exhibition provided a curatorial model and collection base for the sorely needed and now realized Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City. The subsequent catalogue exists as an accessible archive of this previously unexplored and undervalued work. Taking an explicit “genealogical” format, the exhibition flows through thematic engagements structured around historical periods, progressing from the Student Movement of 1968 and resulting in work realized during the late 1990s.
- 28 ERA devotes three small mentions to feminist aesthetic practices under their thematics *Conceptual Margins* and *Identity as Utopia*. Alongside the headline “The Female Artist as Hero,” the *Conceptual Margins* theme accounts for a listing of feminist artists from the late 1970s that “started to develop practices that fit within an ongoing feminist project” (DEBROISE, 2007: p. 183). While the writing references Mayer and Bustamante’s collaborative performance projects that “involved a direct criticism of locally established gender roles,” they pose these works “in contrast” with their highlighted artist, Magali Lara. In situating Lara’s work as more conceptual in its attempts to “create a feminine language about desires and feelings” as contrasted to Mayer and Bustamante’s work, the curators reinforce binaries between activists and artists. The curators address this historic problematic by stating, “their female comradeship was condemned to a certain marginality: critics at the time – even women – continued defining ‘politics’ in terms of ‘public art’ and illustrations of the struggle for power” (DEBROISE, 2007: p. 183). While this statement is not entirely incorrect, it unfortunately situates Lara in opposition to Mayer, rather than choosing to weave them together in conversation.
- 29 Mayer is mentioned again under *Identity as Utopia* in relation to the feminist workshop she created in 1984, *Tlacuilas y retrateras* (*Women Scribes and Portraitists*). Rather than engaging with the work done by *Tlacuilas y retrateras* as the title of the section states, the artworks shown in the catalogue are actions by *Polvo de Gallina Negra* (PGN) – Mayer and Bustamante’s feminist group. In the text, however, PGN is mentioned as one of “different feminist groups... which dealt with *quinceañera* parties and other themes” (DEBROISE, 2007: p. 308). What the exhibition fails to engage with is that PGN was the first and only explicitly feminist *grupo* to form in contrast to the longstanding tradition of male-dominated *grupos* of which Mayer and Bustamante were also part of. Additionally, rather than allowing the text to intellectually engage with PGN’s artworks displayed next to it, a confusing listing of the members of *Tlacuilas y retrateras* is given without any visual representation of their actions.

- 30 The texts included that reference a feminist visual project within Mexico are peppered with Mayer's name, as she was integral to the movement; however, none of these texts or images included do justice to her importance. Mayer, a regular columnist for Mexico City's *El Universal*, reviewed the exhibition:

Many analysts do not understand they are not the judges of a finished project, but rather are those who shape it, while collectors and museums do not assume it is their job to reinforce history. Therefore, I invite you to visit *The Age of Discrepancies*, an exhibition that has received much criticism for what it lacks... and for what it legitimates, but it dares to raise an overview of recent art history in Mexico. Given the overwhelming silence in the past, now at least there is someone to disagree with and hopefully encourage the writing of other histories of Mexican art.⁵

- 31 Rather than dwelling on the blatant omissions and inconsistencies ERA so obviously perpetuates, Mayer remains positive in suggesting these problematics can serve as platforms to build from in the future.

Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000

- 32 Similarly to ERA, El Museo del Barrio's *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000* (ARTE) set out to address the lack of information available regarding Latin American performance artists within the international art world. The implementation of the exhibition was intended foremost as an archive, and the accompanying catalogue functions as a "comprehensive resource" for scholars of performance art, which due to its ephemeral nature is frequently lost (CULLEN, 2008: p. 9). Taking a genealogical format as well, ARTE follows a linear progression of time with regards to artistic practices. Rather than grouping movements, it highlights locational contexts within a larger panorama of the years highlighted. In doing so, it creates an overall historical narrative of Latin American performance art, punctuated with constellations of national clusters of activity.
- 33 ARTE provides international context for artistic practices within Latin America; however, there is no attempt to put these distinct practices in conversation with one another. By using the linear genealogical format, ARTE enforces national and temporal boundaries, rather than opening them up across time and space. What ARTE does well, however, and unlike most exhibitions, is it includes real voices of the artists it seeks to engage with. Maris Bustamante was asked to contribute an essay to the catalogue entitled, "Conditions, Roads, and Genealogies of Mexican Conceptualisms, 1921–1993." In it she briefly sketches out "the lineage of performance art from the Twentieth century that shaped the history of non-objectual art in Mexico" (BUSTAMANTE, 2008: p. 136). Bustamante's important position within the feminist arts movement in Mexico accounts for her more nuanced engagement with feminist aesthetic practices. She weaves in mentions of Mayer's individual performance pieces, before moving on to frame the formation and subsequent actions of PGN.
- 34 Bustamante's articulation of the "identity" of feminist practices within Mexico is more illuminating than other engagements we have seen; yet, her formatting of PGN in relation to the "evolution" of performance art in Mexico is a bit problematic. In her introduction she states that some of the work referenced may appear "naïve" from our historical perspective, but this fact reflects "previous paradigms have been surpassed"

(BUSTAMANTE, 2008: p. 136). While this statement is valid and appears an attempt by Bustamante to situate the importance of these practices, I worry it is still a risky statement to make of any feminist practice.

- 35 Current trends in what is being termed “post-feminist” theory seriously put into question the validity of feminism today. “Post-feminism” argues:

Women’s movements... are no longer relevant; the term suggests that the gains forged by previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those still “harping” about women’s victim status are embarrassingly out of touch. (SIEGEL, 1997: p. 75)

- 36 While Bustamante is speaking of practices from the second wave of feminism, the assumption that the battles those practices were fighting have been won, or “surpassed,” hits upon this notion that feminism is an event that *happened*, rather than is still *happening*.
- 37 The critical lens of history tends to render these practices as a product of their time, and thus of little importance other than to locate the work that follows after them. Situating the work this way tends to elevate the following artistic practices as, through lineage, more progressed, nuanced, “better.” While Bustamante expresses the narratives she cites are “alogical,” they are still representative of a narrative format linked through the concept of parentage. This model replicates normative art historical narrative structure, referencing ancestry and progression in the “line” of artistic production.

WACK! Art & the Feminist Revolution

- 38 A project ten years in the making, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (WACK) illuminates international feminist aesthetic practices from 1968–1980 under the assertion that “feminism’s impact on art of the 1970s constitutes the most influential international ‘movement’ of any postwar period” (BUTLER, 2007: p. 15). The first international survey of feminist art from this time period, curator Cornelia Butler brought together 119 artists from 21 different countries in order to propose a “dismantling of the received canon of feminist art in order to suggest a more complicated history of simultaneous feminisms” (BUTLER, 2007: p. 16).
- 39 The received canon of feminist art history Butler refers to – much like the normative canon of art history – is situated in Anglo-American centers. In inverting the master narrative, replacing “old masters” with “old mistresses,” this normative canon also forces a colonialist gesture onto art from outside of these centers as derivative and inconsequential. In order to resist this narrative, Butler structures the exhibition around themes reflected in the resulting catalogue. Instead of offering a chronology of practices, she offers a chronology of interventions through an attempt at a global history of feminist practice.
- 40 WACK does not single out an understanding of Mexican feminisms, or any other nationally aligned feminisms; but, rather groups artists together through aesthetics and intentions while offering personal biographies for each artist shown. Mayer’s work *El Tendedero* is included under the *Collective Impulse* theme, alongside feminist activism-influenced works such as the American black women artists collective, *Where We At*, and the Native American influenced group, *Spiderwoman Theater*. Mayer’s personal biography frames her actions as cultivating “a collective awareness of women’s

experiences” and helping “create a dialogue about the concerns among both men and women” (BUTLER, 2007: p 64).

- 41 This analysis of Mayer’s work goes much farther than previous engagements that focus only on the collective *nature* of women’s experiences, rather than the collective *awareness* of the affinities and differences amongst women *and men’s* experiences with one another. The exhibition was frequently criticized for its frustrating lack of explanatory labels, which hindered the viewer’s understanding of these complex and diverse works. The flaw regarding Mayer rests in the choice of this particular work, and perhaps even in Mayer’s inclusion over other Mexican women artists.
- 42 Though *El Tendedero* is important to Mayer’s oeuvre, it also falls in line with the Anglo-American hierarchies the exhibition has stated to fight against, as Mayer also installed a version of this piece in Los Angeles. Was Mayer chosen for her merit, or for her close connection to the Los Angeles feminist movement? It also is strange that such a forward thinking project would not seek to include the voices of the artists it proposes to highlight, most of which continue to work today.
- 43 The stated goal of *inclusion* rather than radical transformation is where I feel WACK ultimately undoes itself. Butler wished to mark a step towards, “revising and expanding” the canon of art history. This begs the question, whose canon are the curators speaking of? The inclusion of well-known, “big name,” Anglo-American feminist artists asserts an alternate feminist art historical canon, which exists as an inverted Anglo-American, male dominated version. In the curatorial selection process, Butler expressed “the only intended hierarchies are those that indicate levels of achievement and commitment in relationship to feminism and art” (BUTLER, 2007: p. 22). How is this “achievement” measured? Whose “feminism” is this in relation to? Asserting that decisions were made on an achievement basis suggests those not included, or less centrally noted, were less committed feminists. An assertion such as this that negates the existence of hierarchies also fails to interrogate accesses to power in relation to “achievement” and “commitment” to feminism. It also points towards key structures in third-wave feminist arguments that position, “the activist-feminist as the ‘real’ feminist,” as an exclusionary practice of neo-liberalism (GILLES et al., 2004: p. xxviii).

Dealing with Difference: Time, Space & Canons

- 44 What each of these exhibitions has in common is a curator who has framed the events around a temporal boundary, beginning with the 1960s and extending forwards in time. Rather than using this framework as a simple selective process, the curators chose to further a progressive genealogical format that reflects a “story of linear progress of generational shifts” (MEAGHER, 2011: p.303). For the viewer, this process is comforting. The artists are placed along an intelligible continuum that reflects known narratives, or what Marsha Meskimmon refers to as “temporal cartographies.” However comfortable, this curatorial selection process reveals itself as the main limiting factor causing the exhibitions to suffer with insufficient engagements.
- 45 The categories these selections create are reflective of the “unmarked normative mainstream” art historical format produced by Anglo-American dominant art history (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 326). ARTE’s inclusion of Maris Bustamante’s particular and knowledgeable voice is a commendable achievement; however, the exhibition’s overall

chronological format implements a commonly understood progressive structure. Similarly, while ERA offers an important reference of names, works and images, it does little to advance an understanding of feminist art from the ground, and instead advances fabricated meta-narratives of artistic practice. The consumption of both these catalogues by an external reader works towards further solidifying their constructed history of Mexican art.

- 46 Cornelia Butler's goals for WACK have a much more keen awareness of the trap of temporality; however, the exhibition is still haunted by these constructions. Michelle Meagher explains that Butler "attempts to change the terms (essentialist), but does not disrupt the generational narrative" (MEAGHER, 2011: p. 301). In the end, this serves to reproduce the dominant academic narrative the curatorial process sought to undo. While a much less neat classification than ERA or ARTE, WACK's temporal structures build upon an idea of generational specificity to the artists included.
- 47 The generationalist divide reveals itself as particularly problematic in the realm of feminist politics. The overarching wave metaphor has set into motion a compartmentalization of memory that diffuses the differences feminism(s) seek to highlight and move through. Stacy Gillis describes the generational impulse as, "the anxious displacement that blocks our appreciation of the past in the light of the new" (GILLES *et al.*, 2004: p. xxx). This impulse leads to a closing off of the transgressive potentialities of these artistic practices. According to Meagher, the generationalism engaged by the formatting of both the wave metaphor, and Butler's curatorial process, works to render "feminism easier to digest and incorporate into mainstream art histories" while also yielding "to fantasies and caricatures that flatten out and obscure voices and practices" (MEAGHER, 2011: p. 305).
- 48 Each exhibition's alternate canon fails to question the intersections and transnational affiliations of these artists with others around the world, and rather presents them in temporal sites of activity. This disengagement reinforces borders and affirms separations, ultimately resulting in a double exclusion. These previously marginalized – but now "included" – artists are still generalized as insignificant to the mainstream canon, while the canon structure itself keeps other excluded artists still hidden from our view. The periphery is allowed to come to the center, but only through the discourses of the center's systems of legitimization.
- 49 This normative construction of art historical time, and subsequent progressive greatness has led to the misrepresentation and marginalization of Mexican feminist aesthetic practices. This type of thinking, "enables an uncritical certitude concerning intellectual and political limits of the feminist project and its impact on art to emerge" (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 323). Inclusion based goals require static definitions that effectively set up boundaries, rather than allowing for fluidity to identity and meaning. All of these exhibitions, through their framing, have contributed to the production of identities *for* artists, rather than allowing them and their work to speak for itself and in dialogue with one another.
- 50 We need to disrupt linear thinking in a way that allows movement *from* and *between* 1975 and 2007/08. We should form strategic alliances between those who advocate for disruptions in art historical narratives that reveal the folds in its discourse – such as those interested in Latin American or feminist aesthetic practices – and collaborate their methods to move further in this direction. Activating a 21st century mentality of cooperation and collaboration in curating, these new methods of interrogating art

could make it so that a few well-known women artists do not come to stand for all women, just as a few Latin American artists should not stand for all of Latin America.

Cartographies: Subverting a Colonial Narrative

- 51 In order to critically challenge the “certitude of progress narratives,” we need to begin thinking *spatially* rather than temporally (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 331). In doing so, we account for the coexistence of distinct narratives across time and locations. Art historian Marsha Meskimmon asserts, “spatial realignment of our intellectual frames of reference... is vital to remap our engagement with the world” (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 325). These interrogations are what produce Meskimmon’s method of “critical and conceptual cartographies.” These cartographies link geopolitical networks of exchange in a “process of conceptual decolonization” to explore affinities, expand parameters and interrogate concepts (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 325).
- 52 During the 1990s, the metaphor of curatorial cartography came under intense scrutiny, especially in the Latin American exhibition circuit. Numerous challenges to this paradigm were launched by some of Latin American art’s most influential critics.⁶ Monica Amor argues the term cartography, when utilized as a curatorial methodology, intrinsically links the exhibition process to the rationalist, European project of map-making. Falling into the trap of the colonial “master narrative,” she suggests that cartographies operate under a “disguised essentialism” that furthers the “reiterative use of ‘Latin America’ as a comprehensive term that pretends to encompass a multiplicity of stories within the singularity of the name” (AMOR, 1996: p. 249). So-called multicultural minded projects tended to perceive Latin America as a “melting pot” of cultural practices, which did not work to highlight difference, but rather subsumed it into a homogenous whole – a caricature of its practices, morphed to fit into Western curatorial paradigms.
- 53 Curator Mari Carmen Ramirez was equally critical of these practices, citing curators’ supposedly “neutral” role at the crux of the problem. As the internationally recognized experts and intermediaries in a restricted environment, curators have become responsible for establishing meaning and status to artwork and artists. According to Ramirez, curators now act as “cultural brokers,” uncovering and explicating artistic practices of traditionally subordinate, peripheral and emerging communities to the public (RAMIREZ, 1996: p. 22). These uncritical excavations, and eventual conglomerations through their reframing in the exhibition, of artists and their practices, results in an often confused and fetishized version of Latin American artistic identities. Ramirez felt the boom in Latin American exhibitions during the 1990s represented not an alternative to the “transnational flow of identities,” but an expression of the same demand for easily marketable and consumable cultural symbols – what she calls the mainstreaming of identities under fallacious constructs (RAMIREZ, 1996: p. 25).
- 54 Advances have been made, however we have not yet located lasting solutions to these problems that plagued the late years of the 20th century in curatorial constructions today. As evidenced by the exhibitions under discussion, curators have yet to discover a way to deal with difference productively on the “blockbuster” circuit. These mega-exhibitions continue to repeat the colonial, or patriarchal, meta-narratives set up in the recent past that work to further exclude the revolutionary practices they seek to

highlight. Borrowing the weapons of the adversary, or using the master's tools to destroy the master's house, is a decidedly self-defeating methodology; however, there may be a way to successfully subvert this terminology to incite positive changes in curatorial paradigms, particularly when dealing with work by Latin American artists who are women.

- 55 While we may never be able to shake the colonial memory invoked by cartographies, we can work towards a rethinking of the term that resists and undoes its limitations. Monica Amor stated in her same critical argument of the cartographic paradigm:

It is not a manner of dismissing issues related to cultural identity, but of ceasing to treat them in general terms, as abstractions, and of moving towards a closer reading of the images, objects and performative aspects of our cultures and of establishing interesting dialogical relationships not only among Latin American peoples but also with other countries and communities that will enrich our understanding of contemporary cultural phenomena. (AMOR, 1996: p. 248)

- 56 If we can look to the cartographic as a method of mapping a web of affinities and differences that traverse not simply geographical sites historically defined by Western colonialism, we can productively subvert and expand these fixed terms and categories. In a collaborative strategy that blends feminist and Latin American critical art historical theory, we can reconceptualize a cartographic network whose boundaries are elliptical, constantly renegotiated and destabilized between and across locations and generations.

- 57 Marsha Meskimmon's suggestion for a new cartographic framework provides a link between Amor's call and present day problematics. Amor suggests that enacting a dialectic approach of critical theory, combined with formal analysis, could 'allow us to theorize specificity and difference' (AMOR, 1996: p. 252). Meskimmon equally asserts that her cartographic methods are not ahistorical, but an effort to contextualize without enforcing strict boundaries. These "rigorous explorations of the interstices between sociopolitical, cultural and linguistic histories" explore locational affinities and differences on a transnational and non-linear temporal scale (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 326). What interpretations of art that engages with feminism, and art created by Latin American artists, fight against is an opposition between local specificity and notions of shared experience. This resistance either subsumes their work into a larger struggle or locates it too rigidly within an essentializing particularity. This renders these practices unimportant to an understanding of a larger picture of art history – transforming them into a caricature of the periphery, easily replaceable and lacking serious investigation.

- 58 We see the consequences of this method of thought play out within the context of these three exhibitions. ERA separates feminist aesthetics away from any engagement with other aesthetic moments within Mexico, and does not suggest it had any influence beyond its particular moment in time and space. Thus, it remains relatively unimportant to an understanding of a larger picture of Mexican art and is merely noted as an interesting footnote. ARTE goes further than ERA in actually speaking with a feminist artist; however, in their aforementioned progressive format they essentialize the view of these practices as having already been dealt with. WACK, while supporting an engagement with the ongoing project of feminist art, subsumes peripheral artists like Mayer into a larger whole, rather than representing differences alongside affinities. Mayer becomes a caricature of activist feminists of the 1970s, easily replaceable, lacking serious exploration into her local context.

- 59 Reimagining the cartographic paradigm productively allows us to better seize this current moment of curatorial and art historical reinvestigation to produce imaginative and innovative engagements with these histories. Amor states:

We should deploy a web between particular artists from different cultures and countries, and offer our circumstantial perspective deriving from specific 'sites of enunciation' in relation to communities that cross borders and artists who travel worlds. (AMOR, 1996: p. 250)

- 60 Art's histories cannot be accurately traced on a map conceived of solely by the West, but they do exist in a network of transnational affinities and confrontations – a tapestry of interlocking and divergent truths attributed to innumerable makers. If we continually work towards uncovering the folds in this matrix of visual memory, we thus reveal the holes in our discourses represented by artists who do not fit with or participate in Western-centric construction of space and time. In allowing the artists that inhabit these folds to speak from their particular border spaces, we enact the perpetual unfolding of history's many truths.
- 61 A cartographic understanding of Mónica Mayer's seminal work, *El Tendedero*, represents an interactive engagement with affinities and differences. Here Mayer reappropriates the symbol of the clothesline – so intrinsically linked with women's everyday experience, and also the unpaid economic structure of the patriarchal family – in order to provide a platform for women's individual voices. Considered internationally, the women in Mexico City and Los Angeles who were able to participate in this project expressed similar concerns regarding safety and violence in their communities; yet, Mayer does not allow the activism of the work to be rooted solely in collectivity.
- 62 As a whole, the piece visually demonstrates a collective cry for change, but the specificity of each singular card, representing a unique individual, written in their own hand, speaks to an understanding of women's experience as both collective and personal (Fig. 2). Mayer allows the viewer to consider the overall impact of many voices raised in unison, while simultaneously inviting closer inspection of each individual card. These singular voices make little sound in their everyday lives; however, in this work, they have an impact – they assert themselves as read and heard.

Figure 2. Mónica Mayer, *El Tendedero* (1978)

Courtesy of Victor Lerma

- 63 The juxtaposition of Los Angeles and Mexico City hits upon the conceptual duality of the collective and individual. Women in both cities share affinities in the struggle against violence; yet, those conclusions are not drawn by Mayer, but rather by our reading of the history of this work of art. It is an essentializing, rather than cartographic, gaze that attempts to bridge the suffering of women as the same for all spaces and places, and forgets Mayer's specificity in neighborhood choice and highlighting of silenced voices.
- 64 Mayer's interest in working towards building a community between feminists in the United States and feminists in Mexico is central to her work; however, that impulse did not come from a place seeking to subsume differences. Her work is indicative of a transnational, bilingual, and interactive effort to create relational networks of dialogue between women, and women and men. Her art is as interactive, performative and always relational. Her engagement with identity politics asserts, "identities are processual, rather than fixed – formed and reformed through our participation in larger transindividual wholes" (MESKIMMON, 2007: p. 334).
- 65 In this process of cartographic interpretation, *El Tendedero* takes on a layered "intergenerational" meaning. The work has the potential to expand outwards beyond its temporal boundaries, as it remains both centered in its own historical moment and reactivated in contemporary analysis. In a recent article, Monica Amor argues for the exploration of yet to be deployed methodologies that dare to break generational and cultural gaps. Speaking of such modes of comparative analysis, she states:
- This is an enterprise that does not rely on an empirical model dependent on evidence and accumulated information, but that instead operates on the basis of nuanced historical intersections, malleable subjective configurations, and dispersed and sometimes misunderstood legacies. (AMOR, 2009: p. 84)
- 66 In this way, we can imagine *conversations* with other artistic practices, neither as generational nor regional comparisons, but rather cross-generational moments where

affinities, overlaps, differences and multiplicities of meanings become activated through a conceptual dialogue.

- 67 It is within this framework that I suggest a rehabilitation of the term cartography, one that emphasizes its nomadic connotations as a methodology for imagining networks of art's histories that exist beyond the predetermined boundaries current art historical metanarratives offer. Under this method, we experience how meaning is acquired through its travels across time and space, and find a means to study the traces these travels leave behind on the work that, in turn, enrich a more relevant and contextually accurate interpretation (AMOR, 1996: p. 251). This new approach, what art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh would call a "third context,"⁷ opens the space of possibility for interpretation and juxtapositions that would be inconceivable within normative patterns of writing and exhibiting art's histories. Monica Amor elaborates:
- 68 To adopt contingency... is to revisit and resist the indisputable positions of art history: its traditions, its texts, its objects, its institutions, and its canons. It is to opt for a methodology of displacement, and to think of one's space as a permanent redefinition of boundaries. (AMOR, 2009: p. 95)
- 69 Reconstructing boundaries as constantly dissolving, evolving and revolving positionalities provides a method of productively dismantling hierarchies and of working towards producing more complicated and meaningful interpretations.
- 70 It is urgent that we continue to disrupt the normative narratives that solidify collective memories of art's histories, in order to engage with the complexities of conversations brought up by feminist and Latin American aesthetics transnationally and intergenerationally. Opting to speak from open and self-reflexive positions, we generate a discursive space that allows for the appearance and perpetual becoming of multiple truths in a vast network of art historical memory. Moving away from neo-colonialist examinations, a reimagined conceptual cartographic methodology engenders the unbounded spaces of metaphysical territories inhabited by artists throughout history. It is not an alternate method towards canonization, but rather an elected format of disorderly organization; a way of seeing that reveals the complex web of positions so intrinsic to aesthetic experience within Latin America, feminist practice and beyond. This is a methodology of an unfolding and unfolded borderspace – one that seeks collaboration and contingency, and that views truth and history not as definable, but as in perpetual motion.

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NOTES

1. These terms are initially engaged with by Marsha Meskimmon in "Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally" included in the catalogue for Cornelia Butler's exhibition, *WACK! Art & the Feminist Revolution* (2007).
2. Latin American theorist Nelly Richard invokes the term "folds" throughout her critical work *Masculine/Feminine: practices of difference(s)* (RICHARD, 2004: p. 57).
3. The Women's Building was founded by artist Judy Chicago in 1973 in as a response to a growing interest in feminist art practice in the US and the need for a space to express these new ideas and educate fellow artists. Hundreds of women attended over the years in a range of activities including protests of major art museums' exclusion of women artists, exhibitions in gallery spaces dedicated to art by women, the first feminist art education programs focusing on technical skills and the development of a feminist art practice. Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (London: Women's Press, 1982).
4. Florence Derieux quoted in Paul O'Neil's *The Culture of Curating/The Curating of Culture(s)* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012) p. 91.

5. My translation of an article written by Mónica Mayer entitled “La era de la discrepancia” for *El Universal* (8 June 2007, Mexico City).
6. Critical reaction against the term “cartography” found in scholarship is in response to a general curatorial problematic, but often cites and is in response to the 1994 exhibition curated by Ivo Mesquita, *Cartographies: 14 Latin American artists* at the Winnipeg Museum of Art.
7. Regarding finding new methodologies of comparison, Monica Amor quotes Benjamin H. D. Buchloh: “‘we might have to propose a third context, a more narrowly focused, more dehistoricized one’ in order to attempt, in a historicostructural way, to flesh out morphologies, histories, and parameters shared by the two artists. Buchloh’s response to the comparative conundrum... is indicative of the difficulties the art historian faces when confronting the historical asymmetries and structural/formal parallels that cannot be accommodated by institutions, such as the museum, and disciplines, such as art history... A different methodology ‘would yet have to be elaborated,’ writes Buchloh, ‘[one] in which the structure of the historical experience and the structure of aesthetic production could be recognized within sets of complex analogies that are neither mechanistically determined nor conceived of as arbitrarily autonomous, but that require the specificity of understanding the multiple mediations taking place within each artistic proposition and its historical context’” (AMOR, 2009: p. 86–88)

ABSTRACTS

Recent gestures in feminist and Latin American exhibitions do not sufficiently account for the unique position of Latin American artists engaging with feminist aesthetic practices. Looking to the space given Mexican artists in three recent blockbuster exhibitions, I demonstrate that the resulting curatorial constructions activate art historical mythologies that work to further solidify exclusion from the international art world. In examining the effects these in/visibilities have on collective knowledge of Latin American feminist art histories, I ultimately suggest possibilities for change rooted in critical and conceptual cartographies that speak both *from* and *to* feminism’s *folds*, activating intergenerational networks vital to maintaining feminism’s unfolding historical and contemporary relevance.

Les récentes mesures proposées dans les expositions féministes en Amérique latine n’expliquent pas la position unique des artistes latino-américaines engagées dans les pratiques esthétiques féministes. Après avoir observé la place donnée aux artistes mexicaines dans les trois plus importantes expositions et les plus récentes, nous sommes en mesure d’avancer que les choix des conservateurs ne font que renforcer ce mythe qui veut exclure les femmes artistes du monde artistique international. En examinant les effets que ces non-dits ont sur la connaissance collective de l’histoire des arts féministes latino-américains, nous proposons des changements de perception fondés sur des cartographies conceptuelles et critiques développées par et pour les féministes, permettant une approche vitale intergénérationnelle pour maintenir l’intérêt historique et contemporain du féminisme.

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