

ARTSY

Judy Chicago: "Revisiting the Famed Feminist Exhibition 'Womanhouse' with an Intersectional Lens"

By Neyat Yohannes

March 24, 2022



Karen LeCocq, *WOMANHOUSE Doily Invitation*, 1972. Anat Ebgi. Contact for price

For six weeks in the winter of 1972, a dilapidated Victorian mansion in Hollywood was transformed into a phantasmagoria of womanhood that laid the groundwork for early feminist art. Titled "Womanhouse," the exhibition opened its doors on January 30th for approximately 10,000 people to experience a "bad-dream house," as *Time* magazine described in a 1972 review.

Visitors encountered Faith Wilding's *Womb Room* (1972), which consisted of crochet webs that draped the room from floor to ceiling. They stopped in the bright pink installation *Nurturant*

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Kitchen (1972)—created by Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch—that featured on its walls fake fried eggs that morphed into breasts. Meanwhile, Sandra Orgel built a female mannequin into a linen closet, her body oppressively interrupted at the neck, chest, and torso by shelves. And in Judy Chicago's installation *Menstruation Bathroom* (1972), a trash bin overflowed with bloody pads, drenched Kotex liners hung from a clothesline, and used tampons were strewn about, among other shock-inducing menstrual accouterments.



(Left): Judy Chicago, *Documentation image of Menstruation Bathroom*, from *Womanhouse*... Anat Ebgi.

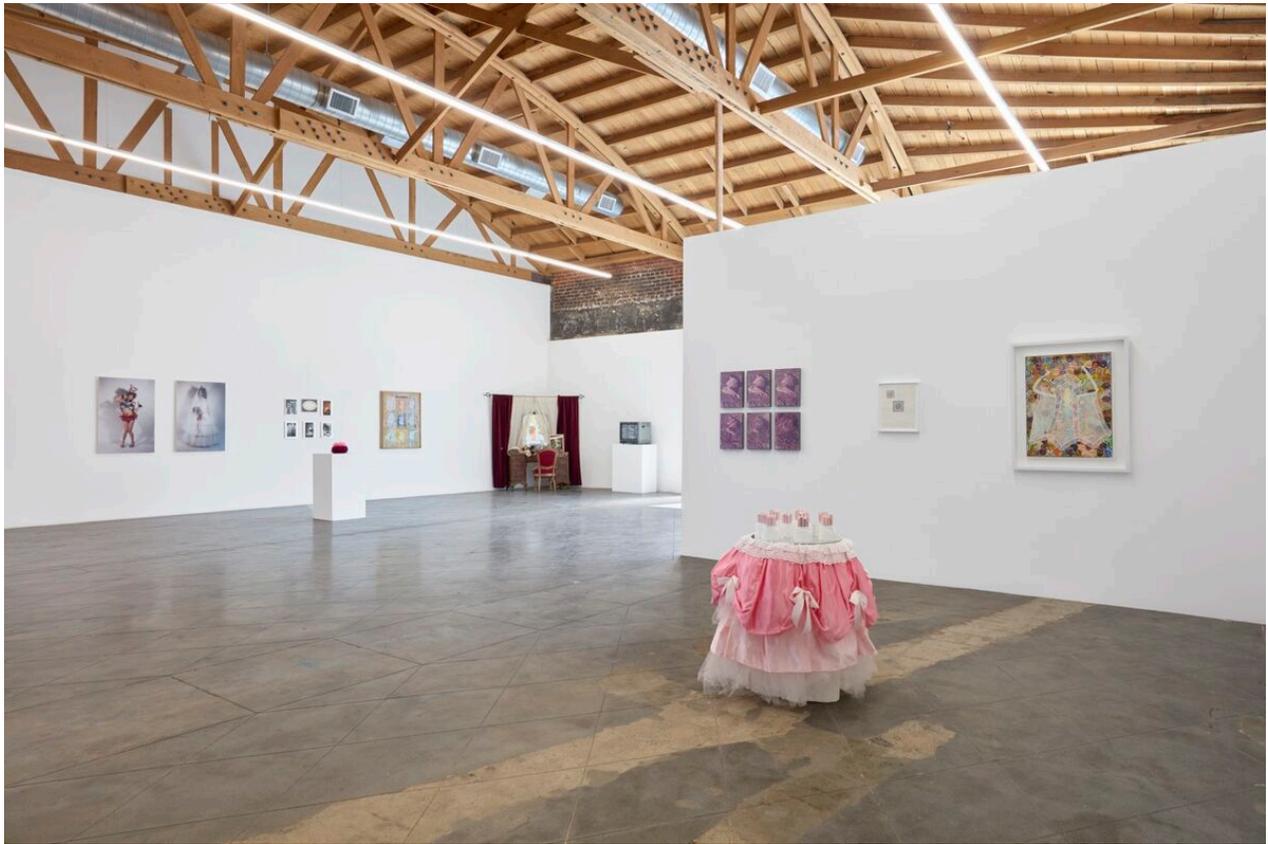
(Right): Dori Atlantis, *Housewife Series: Mopping*, 1971. Anat Ebgi. Contact for price.

The mansion would eventually be demolished, but for a short window of time, these women converted its 17 rooms into a showcase for their installations, sculptures, textiles, and performances. But it was also a place where they could engage in probing group sessions about femininity, domesticity, patriarchy, oppression, and more. "Womanhouse" was revolutionary in that it was the first widely experienced survey of feminist art during a time when women were largely disregarded by museums and mainstream arts institutions.

Fifty years later, "Womanhouse" is back. Anat Ebgi is celebrating the West Coast's defining blueprint for feminist art while reflecting and expanding upon it. What was once subversive can seem quaint against our current cultural landscape, but this show extols the 1972 exhibition for its triumphs as it coaxes it into the present context. While the original mostly represented the experiences of white, heterosexual, cisgender, and middle-class women, "WOMANHOUSE" at Anat Ebgi, on view through April 16th, includes more intersectional perspectives—like that of trans artists and artists of color.

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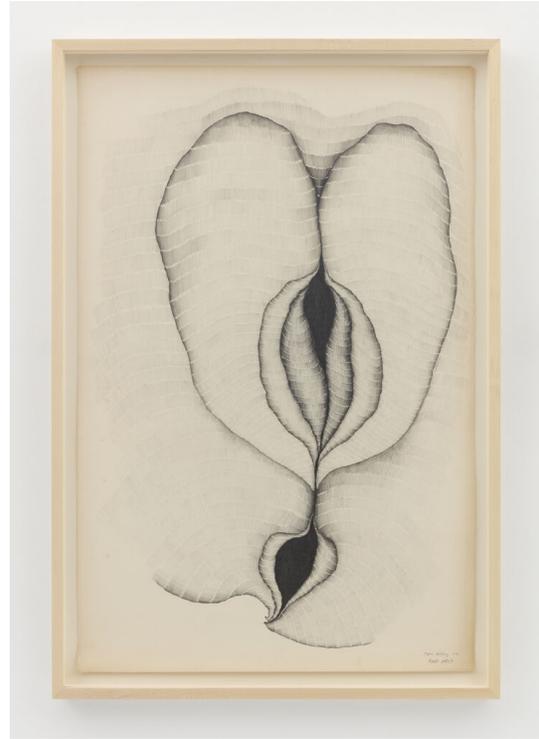
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Installation view of "WOMANHOUSE" at Anat Ebgi, 2022. Photo by Matthew Kroening. Courtesy of Anat Ebgi.

Anat Ebgi partner and senior director Stefano Di Paola, who organized the latest exhibition, uses the original 1972 iteration as a vehicle to discuss the broader feminist movement that took place in Los Angeles from 1970 to 1976. "I wanted this show, in many senses, to be a provocation," Di Paola said in a recent interview. "The conversation about intersectionality needs to be further explored, all these stories have not been told, the oral histories have not been done, the challenging of the art historical canon is not being done well enough yet, and the clock is ticking—the door is closing."

Serving as a cultural partner for "WOMANHOUSE," Los Angeles Nomadic Division (LAND) organized a spirited series of programs that includes restagings of historic performances, consciousness-raising sessions, and film screenings that recall the original exhibition. In what Di Paola referred to as an urgent "call to action," participants from the 1972 presentation work alongside emerging artists to impress upon the current moment.



(Left): Betye Saar, *A Seige of Sirens*, 1966. Anat Ebgi, Contact for price.
(Right): Faith Wilding, *Flesh Petals*, 1971. Anat Ebgi. Contact for price.

"A lot of curatorial attention revolved around looking at 'Womanhouse' as a prompt to flesh out and repurpose or reexamine in 2022," said LAND associate curator Hugo Cervantes, who organized the programming alongside executive director Laura Hyatt. Cervantes immediately thought about the history of criticism surrounding "Womanhouse" and saw this occasion as an opportunity to "build a bridge towards other communities and different ideas that the original 'Womanhouse' didn't have the foresight to include or welcome," as Cervantes explained.

When artists Holly Harrell and Kayla Tange were tapped to perform renditions of Wilding's *Waiting* (1972) and *Waiting With* (2008), respectively, they hopped on a Zoom call with Cervantes and Wilding to workshop the performances. "It was really fun to see how open and generous this titan was in welcoming other people to take on her original performances," Cervantes said of Wilding. "*Waiting With* was more pensive and reached towards a collective, whereas Wilding felt that *Waiting* was driven by her own needs." The evolution from *Waiting*'s focus on the individual to *Waiting With*'s emphasis on community encapsulates the essence of what the latest "WOMANHOUSE" aims to do—to celebrate these singular women while bringing other overlooked artists into the fold.

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Nancy Youdelman, *Leaves, A Self Portrait*, 1973. Anat Ebgi. Contact for price.

Di Paola urges visitors and members of the art community to run with this momentum and to continue turning over stones. The archival deep dive Di Paola underwent for the exhibition was a labor of love, but the experience only further emphasized for him that there are still so many feminist artists who've been "underhistoricized, underexplored, and underexposed," as he described. Before another 50 years go by, we must take greater care in seeking out and preserving the legacies of the women artists who've been disregarded by the canon. "WOMANHOUSE" is a convincing gesture towards mobilization.

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