

THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

ALICIA PAZ	+
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GAIL OLDING	+

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20 MARCH - 4 MAY 2019

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DELLASPOSA

The Future is Female has been a motto of female empowerment and feminist activism since the 1970s, when t-shirts printed with those four words were designed for Labyris Books, the first women's bookstore in New York City. Since then, it has been a powerful statement of the fight for women's rights and equality. In 2017, former American presidential candidate Hillary Clinton declared that, despite all the challenges, she "still believes the future is female."

The Future is Female seeks to celebrate the unique contributions of women in art today. This exhibition draws on the history of feminism and the fight for female empowerment. The work of artists Alicia Paz, Tahnee Lonsdale, Ehryn Torrell and Gail Olding examine the role of women in cultures across continents and draw inspiration from our visual world now.

For much of art history, female artists have been anonymous. There remains scant mention of artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi or Plautilla Nelli in the history books, whose masterful works of beauty contributed to the Renaissance. 'Just another nun with a paintbrush', critics have commented. These omissions from art history continue. The data from the past few decades confirm that there is a chasm of gender disparity in the art world.

Works by female artists comprise a fraction of the collection of museums across the UK, Europe, and North America. Artists who are women accounted for just 4% of the collection at the National Gallery of Scotland, and 35% of the collection at Tate Modern. While at auction, artworks by women are undervalued, if seen at all. A study conducted in 2017 by researchers at Maastricht University revealed there are no women in the top 0.03% of the auction market, where 40% of the profit is concentrated. Overall, 96% of works sold at auction are by male artists. At the Venice Biennale, only 33% of the artists representing the UK over the past decade have been women.

The impact this bias has on the art world is significant as galleries, museums, and auction houses are regarded as tastemakers in contemporary culture. Championing artists and introducing artwork to private and public collections enhance the cultural experience and heritage for all. Indeed, there is a social history of painting and sculpture that explains the origins of this inequality, since art was taught according to the guild system, and then through the academies that started to appear in 16th century Europe.



There are less clear reasons why inequality persists today. The proportion of curators, collectors, and decision-makers who are women; the cultural biases bound to art critical analysis; the imbalanced weight of parenthood; and general lack of assertiveness among female artists are all proposed as possible causes. These forces, among other mechanisms in the art market, give rise to the 'Matthew effect', where advantage and influence induce further advancement and privilege in the art world.

This exhibition traverses women's place in the world. Created by women in a variety of media - paintings, sculptures, textiles, and prints - the exhibition provides a rich and layered exploration of cultural references that examine what it means to be female, underscored by women's freedom of expression. Here, artists express various aspects of female identity, and what it means to be a woman in contemporary society.

The artworks gathered here show personal responses to life experiences. Several themes reappear among the artworks, each according to individual encounters and through the artist's aesthetic expression. These include responses to place - whether in a domestic setting or on a journey somewhere; to the mind and body; to time past and time present. Each artist calls into question a different aspect of feminine identity, from nature to motherhood, to the often conflicted relationship with one's body, and the representation of women in the media. They seek, collectively, to challenge the assumptions of women artists, and work for the increased and improved representation of female artists in the art world.

Women, particularly, have been 'painted out of art', and it is the role of galleries, museums, public institutions, and the auction houses to redress the gender imbalance. Women continue to be overlooked both at the beginning and the heights of their careers. *The Future is Female* works by giving a platform to some of the different voices in contemporary art. The artworks on display prove that not only is the future female, the present is also too.

In her large-scale paintings, international artist Alicia Paz draws attention to how female identity is experienced and presented as multiple, paradoxical and ever-changing. Inhabiting fantastical and exotic scene, Paz's female subjects become indistinguishable from organic life. She describes her subjects as "amphibian or plant-like... 'weeping' their pigment, their limbs, hair and various ornamental accoutrements mud-caked and dripping, as if extracted from a colourful, post-cognitive swamp." The tree, a recurring motif in the artist's work, symbolises immortality and eternity, knowledge and wisdom, strength and protection, abundance and growth, forgiveness and salvation. For Paz, femininity is bound to nature; one's familial identity and historical roots, and the power of cross-cultural pollination. In the artist's practice, trees are a recurring motif that has a transformative quality.

Paz's paintings in the exhibition draws on the tradition of Portuguese Azulejos tiles, the recognisable blue and white tiles that appear in so much of Portuguese architecture. The tiles, which originated in Portugal and Moorish Seville, have been transplanted and rerooted in Paz's native Mexico, and thus part of her cultural landscape and memories of her home. It is also a critique of colonialism, which brought Spanish and Portuguese art and architecture to Latin America. Paz has painted the tiles with a sense of decay and abandonment. Cracks appear while plants and leaves grow from the walls that support them, which serve, also, to heighten the realism of the tiles. The technical trompe l'oeil tiles are framed by gold curvilinear forms that evoke the drama, exuberance, and grandeur found in baroque architecture across Spain and Mexico. The motifs of ships passing across the seas allude to the cultural experience of migration.

Here, the figure is seen rising from the earth and the subject of women's experience gives rise to *Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere*, and *Tears of Laughter*. On the tiles are representations of women. Some depictions are inherited - such as a woman in traditional clothing playing the lyre - reminiscent of the Azulejos tradition. Other depictions, meanwhile, appear more modern than classical. There are portraits of real women, such as political activist Angela Davis, who emerged in the 1960s as a member of the Communist Party USA and was briefly involved with the Black Panthers and the Civil Rights Movement, and feminist poet and author Audre Lorde. Phillis Wheatley, the first published African-American poet who arrived in America as a slave, also appears. These women of influence are seen with speech bubbles - giving a voice to the voiceless - calling to courage, as the title suggests.

In *Tears of Laughter*, characters are cast as witches laughing, personifying the fear of assertive women. Paz brings to light the entrenched social misogyny that represses women. For a witch, historically, was seen to transgress the norms of female power; to call a woman a witch is to shame her into a socially prescribed behaviour. There are also illustrations of old shrews and other caricatures of women found in history.

Alicia Paz's paintings exemplify the allegorical nature of her work. The varied techniques and disparate styles are ways of developing a narrative. Trees have a transformative power, and the range of interpretations and meanings associated with trees is many and diverse across cultures, with allusions familial bonds, mother earth, the transformation of the seasons and the anchoring of time. It is an seductive paradigm to evaluate human values and symbolise social rules and moral judgments. Her paintings are as beautiful and abundant with magic as it is with strange fruits and challenging undertones that forces its way into the subject.



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British artist Tahnee Lonsdale's paintings represents the newest direction in semi-abstract art. She defines her art as about sex and gender narratives. She often begins her process by photographing discarded furniture, sofa, armchairs and mattresses, and using them as the starting point for her paintings. She attributes to them a human quality and almost the voyeuristic sense of disturbing an intimate moment. In this manner, she quotes the Surrealist artist Dorothea Tanning having a significant influence on her work. The furniture in her work mirrors the human form and becomes a reference to domestic life. Objects have an anthropomorphic quality in her work, with allusions to sexual tension, submission, the opposing forces of unison and disconnection in relationships.

Using photographs as a starting point, she works the subjects into her paintings, with gradual abstraction and distortion. Lonsdale's brilliance with colour is at play in *Cartel* and *Chase*, that appear with a palette of jewel tones. These paintings are reminiscent of flourishing landscapes, framed by architectural compositions and shapes transmuted to become scenes of an often sexual nature. Lonsdale's paintings deal with universally relevant topics, such a faith, feelings of loneliness, emotional instability and, most importantly, the female condition.

In *Cartel* and *Chase* windows and doorways appear in the jagged, fragmented forms that construct the composition. In *Cartel*, two human figures take shape in the foreground, a mother and child, which ties to themes of motherhood and escapism. Lonsdale says that she "referenced the idea of a 'journey' a lot" during the time she made these paintings. *Chase*, similarly, has two figures that recall a mother and child. The windows and doorways, when paired with the subject, reflect the claustrophobia and conflict of motherhood; the sense of love and loss of identity; the push and pull of emotions. There is a simultaneous sense of entrapment and freedom. Lonsdale's work bears a resemblance to that of Francis Bacon's, particularly in its use of lines to create a clearly defined internal space and psychological intensity which serves to reinforce a raw sense of emotion.

With the unveiling of her most recent series in this exhibition, Ehryn Torrell's textile paintings are fascinating pieces that blend painting, collage, found imagery, and tapestry into one total work of art. Each work derives from on an individual collage work that has is scanned, enlarged and printed onto linen, where the linen surfaces are manipulated further through cutting, layering, embroidery and quilting techniques by the artist's hand. To start a textile painting, Torrell makes a collage on canvas with paint and imagery torn from British Vogue. The torn bits of imagery are assembled into a composition using an improvised technique, where fragmented images of female bodies, textiles and luxury goods correlate in a series of formal relationships - the line of a lip, for example, meeting the fold of a sleeve. The fragmented imagery forms a shallow space. In between the

collage parts, there are sections painted in tonal greys and siennas. The collage is then scanned and printed onto linen, where enlargement emphasises content like paint on canvas, bits of lingerie, various limbs and tear marks.

In *How to Read the New Fashion*, the quality of enlargement also reveals the half-tone used to produce the imagery it references, which refers to the pages of the September 1977 issue of British Vogue. The title of the artwork is lifted from the cover of the magazine, and the colours also reflect the colours of the season. For every textile painting in the series refers to a single issue of the magazine. Vogue is one publication among many that have shaped ideas of female representation, carrying with it a long history of homogenous portrayals of race, gender, class and sexuality. Torrell is interested in the history of racialised representation in women's fashion magazines, and she uses collage to deconstruct image archives.

For the artist, there is an autobiographical element to the series. By appropriating imagery found from the annals of Vogue magazine, she conceptually acknowledges her viewpoint. Notably, the archival material of 1977 signifies the artist's year of birth. Here, Torrell records her experience of being born in the late 1970s that hangs in the balance between a pre and post-internet age. The past informs her artistic practice in the way she employs techniques by hand, while she also embraces the future through her use of digital mediums. Torrell considers the personal is political.

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Collage and textile production are artistic methods that put touch, labour and material negotiation at the forefront, using a process-driven practice to communicate meaning as much as any resulting artwork. She is interested in employing collage as a social-political practice that engages the matter of everyday life, informed and enriched by artists like Hannah Hoch, Kurt Schwitters, Romare Bearden, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Ringgold, Gordon Matta-Clarke, Martha Rosler, Linder, Deborah Roberts and Mark Bradford.

The artist's textile paintings explore the act of making and looking at images today, with the seemingly endless contextual variations that online search engines, filters and hashtags provide. Her new series of works are an extension of her established painting practice and features the densely layered and explicitly visual compositions that are characteristic of Torrell's previous work.

Gail Olding's sculptures are visual critiques layered with puns and literary references. Her multidisciplinary work exemplifies personal experiences with a universal relatability, applying the experiences of the individual to the many. Her



works have a strong physical presence, often directly referencing the human body in strange, amorphous forms that resemble the female figure.

Olding examines how we define the human body. At times, the body is regarded as a biological suit, a place that one looks out onto the world. It is also “a war zone, a political issue; it’s a place of cultural control,” she says, probing what she feels are the greatest challenges to one’s body. The body is a sight for pleasure and of pain. The body is constantly under scrutiny in society. As medical science evolves, so too does our hope to heal the human body as it ages. Distress is also caused to the body in the pursuit of perfection. Pressure for perfection is mediated through the media, and increasingly social media, that affects eating disorders, hatred and manipulation of the figure.

In *Formate no.1* and *Formate no. 2*, Olding touches upon the fetishisation of the body, and how the female body is frequently displayed for the pleasure of the male gaze. In the creation of the sculptures, she used condoms as a cast for plaster. As the condom fills, the sculptural forms take on a male, phallic shape at one end, but a female, breast-like shape at the other. The shapes transform into their binary opposites. She then sands them into perfect forms which hold a seductive, fetish quality. These works explore how fluid and changeable perceptions of the body can be.

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In Olding’s interpretation of what it means to be female, the body plays a central and crucial role. “We are taught to double-think in our contemporary culture,” she says, “we live in a world where women’s image sells to the highest bidder.” Here, the amorphous body has no mind, no voice, no power. “The female under the male gaze is seen as flesh”, Olding comments, “Lacan says that the interior and the exterior is the same surface.”

Olding prefers to work with her body and her hands to feel the materials and find their strengths and weaknesses through a tactile exploration of them. Her body itself plays a central role in her artistic process, often using her own body as a scale to ensure the proportions are right. She cites Louise Bourgeois as her most significant influence, describing the work of Bourgeois as both brutal and profoundly moving, visceral and also tender, with a strong relation to the female body.

Some may question a gender-based focus today, when we profess the value of art puts female artists on equal footing with men. However, the current art market still undervalues artworks by female artists in comparison to male contemporaries. This exhibition supports our ambition to readdress the gender

THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

disparity, and provide an essential correction to what is by any measure an unequal accounting of women's contributions to the art of the past, present, and future.

The Future is Female reveals the compelling points of view by individual artists who are individuals in every sense. The exhibition champions women's participation in the rich tapestry of contemporary art today. While gender is not the only theme found in the exhibiting artist's work, there is a common thread of women's freedom of expression that weaves together the narrative of the exhibition. Through these artist's unique perspective and vision, we can see that the future is female.



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Alicia Paz

Courage Calls to Courage Everywhere, 2019
Mixed media and oil on linen
162 x 130 cm

Alicia Paz

Untitled [I], 2019

Silkscreen and digitally printed archival cut-outs, collaged
80 x 60 cm (framed 88.5 x 66.5 cm)





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Alicia Paz

Untitled [II], 2019

Silkscreen and digitally printed archival cut-outs, collaged
80 x 60 cm (framed 88.5 x 66.5 cm)

Alicia Paz

Untitled [III], 2019

Silkscreen and digitally printed archival cut-outs, collaged
80 x 60 cm (framed 88.5 x 66.5 cm)





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Alicia Paz

Tears of Laughter, 2019
Mixed media and oil on canvas
210 x 170 cm

Tahnee Lonsdale

Cartel, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 170 cm





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Tahnee Lonsdale

Outside Over There, 2017

Acrylic on canvas

152.4 x 195.5 cm

Tahnee Lonsdale

Cartel, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
160 x 170 cm





Ehryn Torrell

How to Read the New Fashion, 2018

Collage printed on linen with machine and digital embroidery
200 x 150 cm

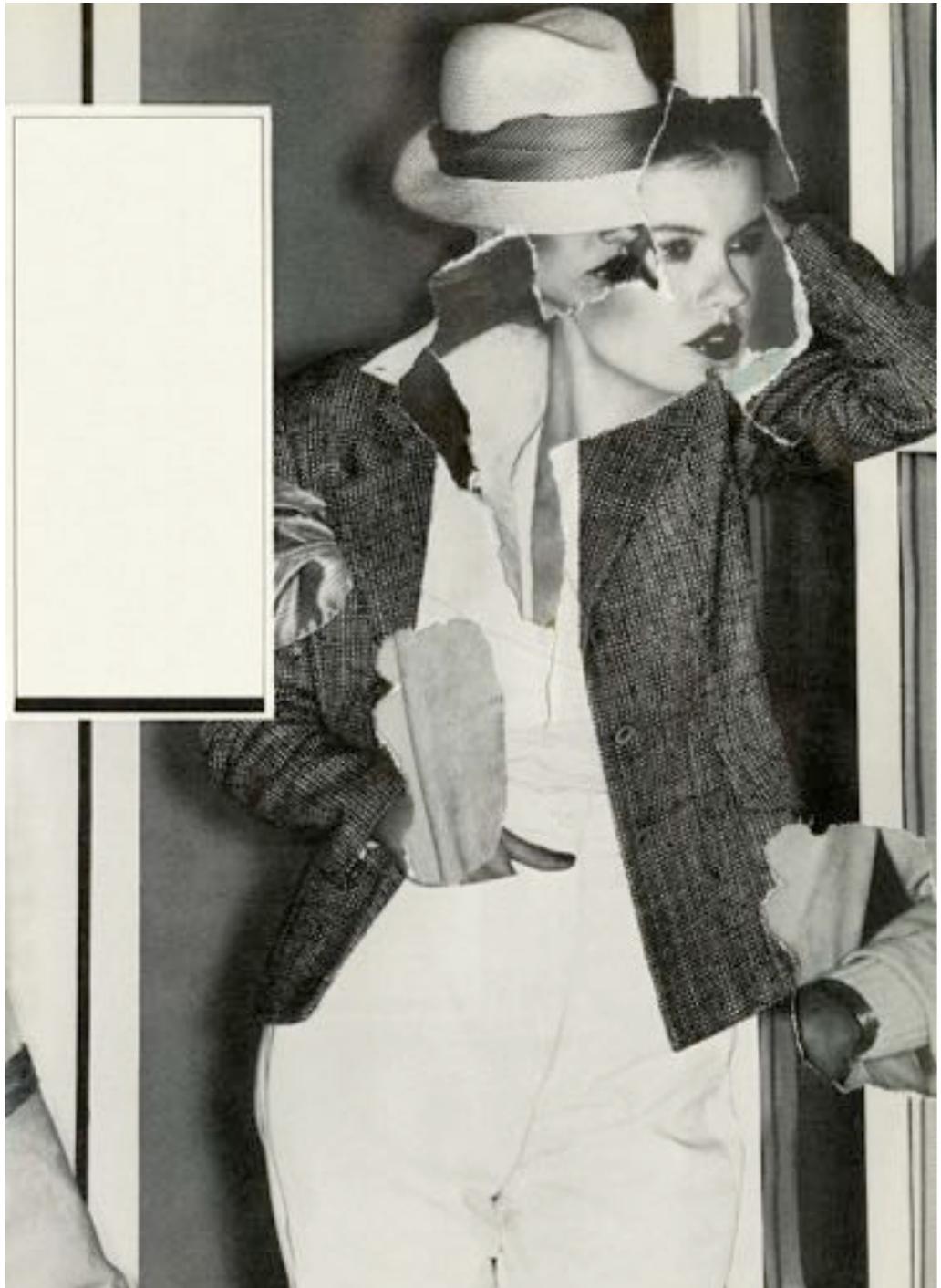
Ehryn Torrell

Variations on Cut-Out Chic, 2018

Collage printed on linen with machine and digital embroidery

83 x 61 cm





21
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Ehryn Torrell

Secondary Collage [00], 2017
Inkjet print on paper
Edition of 3
29 x 42 cm

Ehryn Torrell

Secondary Collage [01], 2017

Inkjet print on paper

Edition of 3

29 x 42 cm





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Ehryn Torrell

Secondary Collage [02], 2017
Inkjet print on paper
Edition of 3
29 x 42 cm

Gail Olding

Long Way Down
Wood sculpture
200 x 150 x 100 cm





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Gail Olding

Formate no. 2, 2014
Plaster and acrylic paint lacquer
40 x 40 x 25 cm



Gail Olding

Formate no. 1, 2014
Plaster sculpture
40 x 45 x 25 cm

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If you are interested in a special viewing by appointment, please do get in touch and we can arrange a most suitable time for you.

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First published in Great Britain in 2019 by

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Edited by Jessica Corbet McBride

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28
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THE FUTURE IS FEMALE

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