

IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE!

POSTERS BY THE **GUERRILLA GIRLS**
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

EXHIBITION NO. 52
31 MARCH – 11 SEPTEMBER 2016

The **GUERRILLA GIRLS** are an anonymous collective of women artists and activists who were provoked into action in 1985 following the exhibition, *An International Survey of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Of the 169 artists in the show, all were white and only 13 women were included. Dubbing themselves the “conscience of the art world,” the Guerrilla Girls expose sexism, racism, war interests and social and income disparities in the art world and in society, producing posters to deliver their message with humour, sharpness and lucidity.

To make their point, they mimic strategies of guerrilla fighters, using stealth and unpredictability to surprise, disarm and publicly shame powerful forces in the art world. No one escapes: museums and galleries, art magazines, politicians and male artists are all among those ambushed by their poster campaigns. The Guerrilla Girls display their provocatively designed posters in public places, providing a steady barrage of statistics and asking impertinent questions.

Anonymity is central to the Guerrilla Girls because it protects them from the backlash of prominent members of the community and allows them to focus on issues and tactics rather than on personalities: “We could be anyone; we might be anywhere.” [9] The Guerrilla Girls’ mascot is the gorilla, a choice originating from a member’s fortuitous spelling error. Gorillas are often associated with the “masculine trait” of brute strength, which provided the group with an ideal mascot to fashion their own “maskulinity” cleverly in their battle against regressive forces. The Guerrilla Girls don rubber gorilla masks to disguise themselves and adopt the names of deceased (and often undervalued) female artists, for example, Georgia O’Keeffe, Lee Krasner, Frida Kahlo and Käthe Kollwitz.

This Library exhibition complements the Gallery’s 2016 summer exhibition *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun (1755–1842)*; society portraitist, survivor of the French Revolution and early feminist. [1] In a poster entitled *Horror on the National Mall* created for a special *Washington Post* section on feminism and art in 2007, the Guerrilla Girls pay homage to women artists of the past, who had to overcome powerful social and profession resistance. [11] The poster depicts work by woman artists in Washington, D.C. museum collections, most of which, including Vigée Lebrun’s work, had been relegated to storage.

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CHECKLIST

1. *The Guerrilla Girls’ Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art*. (Book) New York, N.Y.; Toronto: Penguin, 1998.
2. *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist*, 1988.
3. *When Racism & Sexism Are No Longer Fashionable, How Much Will Your Art Collection Be Worth?* 1989.
4. *What Do These Artists Have in Common?* 1985.
5. *Guerrilla Girls’ Hits List*, 1986.
6. *Which Art Mag Was Worst For Women Last Year?* 1986.
7. *ARTFORHIM*, 1994.
8. *You’re Seeing Less Than Half the Picture*, 1989.
9. *Guerrilla Girls’ Identities Exposed!* 1990.
10. *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?* 1989.
11. *Horror on the National Mall*, 2007.