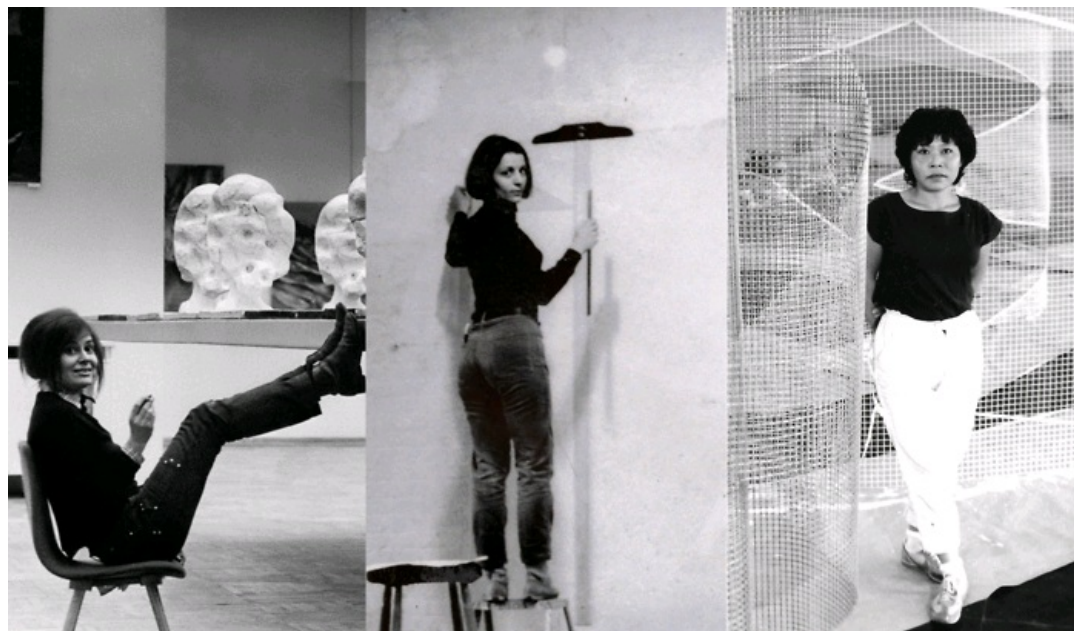

LAND OF LADS, LAND OF LASHES

ROSEMARIE CASTORO, WANDA CZELKOWSKA, LYDIA OKUMURA

LONDON ELY HOUSE

25 Jun 2018 - 10 Aug 2018



Landmark London Show for Three Pioneering Female Artists

LAND OF LADS

LAND OF LASHES

ROSEMARIE CASTORO · WANDA CZELKOWSKA · LYDIA OKUMURA

CURATED BY ANKE KEMPKE

Opening Monday 25 June, 6-8pm, on view until 11 August 2018

37 Dover Street, W1S 4NJ London

Land of Lads, Land of Lashes presents, for the first time in the UK, seminal sculptures and paintings of three female artists of 1960s and 1970s Minimal and Post-Minimal art who broke the artistic boundaries of the period: Rosemarie Castoro introduced surreal and sexual connotations to the cool, mathematical rigour of Minimalism; Lydia Okumura expanded the tradition of the Brazilian geometric avant-garde with her multi-dimensional abstract environments; and Wanda Czelkowska challenged artistic traditions by fusing anthropomorphic sculpture with brutalist, industrial structures. All three artists created an avant-garde inside the avant-garde, transcending the idea of one style in favour of radical experimentation. Guest curated by Anke Kempkes, a leading expert in the field of female avant-garde art, this landmark London exhibition spanning Ropac's entire gallery marks a further turning point at which female artists pioneered new art movements and subverted the avant-garde language of the time.

While their male contemporaries – including Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt – rose to international prominence, these revolutionary female artists were not afforded the same visibility and institutional support. Only now, in today's shifting political and cultural landscape, is their groundbreaking work receiving widespread critical acclaim and greater recognition. All three artists have received their first major retrospectives within the last two years. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, staged Rosemarie Castoro. Focus at Infinity in 2017, Okumura received her first touring US retrospective in 2016, starting at UB Art Galleries, Buffalo, and Czelkowska's first museum retrospective took place at the National Museum in Warsaw, also in 2016. Each of the three artists emerged from distinct cultural geographies: Castoro was one of the few female protagonists of the 1960s Minimal art scene in New York; Okumura, born to Japanese parents in São Paulo, challenged the 1960s Brazilian movement of Concretism; Czelkowska created her first sculptures as a student in 1950s Communist Poland during the last days of Stalinism. The exhibition focuses on works that break through geographic and stylistic boundaries, setting into motion a cultural dialogue between New York, São Paulo and Warsaw.

Expanding the traditional understanding of the history of Minimalist and Post-Minimalist art, their work shares a visionary engagement with scale and the experimental use of raw industrial materials, creating radical interventions in the gallery space. The show's title references two pivotal sculptures created by Rosemarie Castoro in the 1970s: Land of Lads and Land of Lashes - the latter presenting a parade of giant epoxy eyelashes. The exhibition also prominently includes Lydia Okumura's optical walk-in sculpture Labyrinth - a two-metre high installation of woven wire mesh - first realised at the Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo in 1984, and Wanda Czelkowska's drawing in a space Ellipse, comprising a five-metre-wide aluminium structure that arcs through the gallery.

Modern sculpture's use of industrial materials evokes a decidedly romantic notion of masculine middle class labor, one that artists like Jackson Pollock and Carl Andre used to posit themselves as the artistic "everyman." This is why, perhaps more so than any other artistic medium, sculpture is wrought with gendered nuances and contradictions.

Scotti Hill, 2017 *Between Force and Fragility: Lydia Okumura and the gendered nuances of Minimalist sculpture*

ROSEMARIE CASTORO (1939-2015)

A central figure of New York's 1960s Minimal and Conceptual Art scene, Castoro worked side-by-side with her then partner and fellow artist Carl Andre in her Soho studio. She became involved in dance while at the Pratt Institute and, although she subsequently turned to painting, her work exhibits a dancer's understanding of space. Her early paintings exploring colour and structure relationships later developed into freestanding, multi-panel monochromatic works that occupy the space between painting and sculpture. Her imposing Free-Standing Walls and Giant Brushstrokes was first exhibited at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York in the 1970s. With a broom she began to 'paint' the grey-scale surfaces of these sculptures with an impasto of graphite and gesso, creating intensely dynamic gestural paintings protruding from the walls. Among her wall reliefs are those based on short-hand symbols for the initials of artist friends and peers, including the diptych Guinness Martin, 1972, dedicated to Agnes Martin.

By the mid 1970s, Castoro had started to experiment with organically shaped epoxy sculptures that parallel the experimentation of Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois. Neither wholly Minimalist nor feminist, her work transgressed and metamorphosed into a libidinal language that introduced emotion as well as motion. Intriguing black creatures grew in her studio like Land of Lashes and also Land of Lads, an imposing formation of black ladders evoking monumental DNA structures.

LYDIA OKUMURA (b. 1948)

Born in São Paulo in 1948 to a Japanese family, Okumura's interest in art was awakened by her father, a calligrapher. In the 1970s, influenced by new movements in Japan and America, she initiated the first Conceptual Art show in Brazil with fellow students at the Museum of Contemporary Art, São Paulo. In 1973, she had an international break-through at the São Paulo Biennial with Points of View, the abstract environment created collectively with her artist peers from Equipe3. During the show, she met American art critic Gregory Battock, who later assisted with her immigration to the US, where she has lived and worked since 1974.

In New York, Okumura began developing her 'Situations', site-specific geometric installations composed from colour fields and string that project into space from the walls and floor, exploring the optical interplay between two and three-dimensional structures. Okumura collaborated with Sol LeWitt during her early years in New York, and her work can be seen as an intriguing parallel to that of the American Minimalist Fred Sandback.

With minimum intervention, I tested beyond the realms of physical limitation and discovered that geometric language was an intelligent way to express simple, clean, concise, truthful, harmonious, conceptual ideas. I understood it was okay to make art in a spontaneous way, using the minimum necessary in order to express an idea.

Lydia Okumura in "Geometric Language, an Interview with Lydia Okumura About Her Not-So-Straight-Line to Artistic Prominence", by Cynthia Garcia in Newcity Brazil, 2017

WANDA CZELKOWSKA (b. 1930)

Wanda Czelkowska created her first sculptures and industrial constructions in 1950s Communist Poland, as a student in Krakow during the last days of Stalinism. She began her career by collaborating with the renowned modernist sculptor Xawery Dunikowski on monumental Socialist sculpture commissions, but rebelled against the strictures of Socialist aesthetics. Her early sculptural 'Heads' show the influence of neo-primitivism and reappear throughout her oeuvre, sometimes abstracted, deconstructed, bisected or veiled. When asked if they are male or female, Czelkowska responded: "My Heads are a Third Gender."

Czelkowska did not see any contradiction in shifting from expressionist figuration to the use of raw industrial material in her large-scale installations. Since the late 1970s Czelkowska has focused her work on monumental Minimalist sculptures developed in reaction to a given space. Today Czelkowska lives and works surrounded by her life's work in her 1970s factory studio in Warsaw, continually revisiting different aspects of her remarkable production of the last 50 years.

EXHIBITIONS REFERENCED

Rosemarie Castoro

2017 *Rosemarie Castoro. Focus at Infinity*, Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona (MACBA), Spain (cur. Tanya Barson)

From Los Angeles to New York: The Dwan Gallery 1959 – 1971, LACMA, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2016 *From Los Angeles to New York: The Dwan Gallery 1959 – 1971*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA

2015 *Rosemarie Castoro: Loft Show*, Rosemarie Castoro Studio, Soho, New York, NY, USA (cur. Anke Kempkes)

2014 *artevida*, Museu de Arte Moderna Rio de Janeiro, Casa França Brasil, Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (cur. Adriano Pedrosa and Rodrigo Moura)

2012 *Wish You Were Here: The Buffalo Avant-garde in the 1970s*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, USA

2005 *Configurations*, MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland

2003 *Site and Insight: an Assemblage of Artists*, MoMA PS1, New York, NY, USA (cur. Agnes Gund)

1985 *Side by Side: New Acquisitions*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA

1971 *Rosemarie Castoro: Freestanding Works*, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, NY, USA

Andre, Castoro, Strider, 112 Greene Street Gallery, New York, NY, USA

1970 *995,000*, Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada (cur. Lucy R. Lippard)

1969 *Number 7*, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, NY, USA 555,087, Seattle Art Museum, WA, USA (cur. Lucy R. Lippard)

Streetworks, 13th & 14th Streets, New York, NY, USA

1968 *Language III*, Dwan Gallery, New York, NY, USA

1966 *Distillation*, Tibor de Nagy Gallery and Stable Gallery, New York, NY, USA

Wanda Czelkowska

2016 *Retrospection*, Xawery Dunikowski Museum of Sculpture, National Museum Warsaw, Poland (cur. Ewa Opalka)

1972 *Atelier '72*, Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh Festival, UK

1963 *Wanda Czelkowska*, Krzysztofory Gallery, Krakow, Poland

Young Artists' Biennial, Paris, France

Lydia Okumura

2018 *Lydia Okumura: Situation I & II*, Tchorek Studio, Warsaw and Signum Foundation, Lodz, Poland (cur. Anke Kempkes)

Lydia Okumura: Situations, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, AZ, USA

2016 *Lydia Okumura: Situations*, UB Art Galleries, Buffalo, NY, USA (cur. Rachel Adams)

2014 *UL TRAPASSADO I & II*, Broadway 1602, New York, NY, USA

1985 *Today's Art of Brazil*, The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan

1984 *Lydia Okumura*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil

1981 *Contemporary Art of Latin America*, The National Museum of Osaka, Japan

The International Biennial of Medellin, Colombia

PS1, New York, NY, USA

1980 *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, A.i.r. Gallery, New York, USA (cur. Ana Mendieta)

1976 *Decade of 70s*, CAyC, Buenos Aires, Argentina and Museum of Contemporary Art, São Paulo, Brazil

1973 | 1975 | 1977 | 1979 | 1984 International Biennial of São Paulo, Brazil

IMAGE

Left: Wanda Czelkowska next to her installation *The Table*, 4th Krakow Meeting, Exhibition Pavilion BWA, Krakow, 1971. © Wanda Czelkowska. Courtesy of Introspection Foundation for the Research and Presentation of Wanda Czelkowska's Oeuvre. Middle: Rosemarie Castoro working in her Soho Studio in 1967. © The Estate of Rosemarie Castoro. Right: Lydia Okumura in front of her sculpture *Labyrinth*, Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, 1984. © Lydia Okumura.