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"Radical Women" of Latin American Art Get the Museum Show They Deserve

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The Guerrilla Girls have been saying it [since the 1980s](#): The art world favors men. In 2014, only 14 percent of the Guggenheim's solo shows were [dedicated to female artists](#). Even the Tate Modern in London features predominantly male artists, with only 25 percent of its solo exhibitions from the years 2007 to 2014 dedicated to women artists.



Paz Errázuriz (Chilean, b. 1944), *La Palmera*, from the series *La manzana de Adán (Adam's Apple)*, 1987. Digital archival pigment print on Canson platinum paper.

Plenty of literature on the topic exists, so it might seem that museums and galleries would be taking note. With such a stubborn system in place, it's up to dedicated curators

(willing to swim upstream) to bring together thoughtful and provoking shows on artists who might not usually enter the museum spotlight.

Co-curated by Dr. Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Dr. Andrea Giunta, “Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985” at the [Hammer Museum](#) will ask visitors to reconsider the heavily male art history they know and recognize the importance of female artists often working under the radar or “relegated to obscurity,” as Fajardo-Hill puts it.

As part of the Getty’s [Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA](#) initiative, which features numerous shows in Southern California focusing on the ties between Latin America and Los Angeles, “Radical Women” showcases the work of more than 100 artists from 15 countries. While some names might seem familiar to art lovers, others have largely gone under-recognized and have rarely been displayed in an institutional setting.

“The reason for this is not a question of talent,” Fajardo-Hill tells *L.A. Weekly* via email, “but of a patriarchal matrix placed on the history of Latin American and Latina art. In other words, the system was even more biased than we knew it to be.”

“Radical Women” was so radical (to outside eyes) that it almost didn’t happen. After much discussion and research, the curators found themselves with one big obstacle: convincing everyone else that the show should even happen.

The argument was that there was no need for it,” Fajardo-Hill says. “The persisting argument we kept hearing, usually from male colleagues, was that there wasn’t anyone to study besides the usual names. So, from the start, our desire to research was stifled by sexist opinions that, whether purposefully or not, were further obscuring the works of hundreds of women artists from Latin America.”

The beginnings of the show date back to 2010. Between then and now, Fajardo-Hill and Giunta continually researched, lectured and wrote about the topic.

The list of artists initially started out much bigger: covering the period from 1945 to 1980, it featured 300 artists. For curatorial reasons — and to create a closer focus on a time period that's often overlooked — the show now features more than 100 artists who produced work from 1960 to 1985. Even deciding on that artist list proved difficult for Fajardo-Hill, but “Radical Women” found its center once the curators settled on work that tackles “the political body.” The curatorial team searched for pieces that contained a

“high level of experimentation in technical as well as conceptual terms” and a reckoning with the body – even if that meant discussing its absence.

The result: work from artists with roots in Guatemala, Peru, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Argentina and more (including the United States, in keeping with the PST theme). Recognizable names include Judy Baca and Ana Mendieta, but also plenty of other artists (living and dead) who would rarely be displayed outside their respective countries.

“Radical Women” proves important not only to give more visibility to Latina and Chicana artists but to trace an important time in contemporary art history. It was important to Fajardo-Hill that the show demonstrate “[the artists’] contribution to the creation of the experimental languages of contemporary art such as performance, photography and video art” in relation to body art. It’s a close look at how “their particular approach to the body – political-poetic-conceptual — constituted the creation of new iconographies for the body in art.”

The work makes the personal political in the purest sense. In a 1974 video piece called *Marca Registrada*, Leticia Parente carefully threads a needle before piercing the flesh on the bottom of her foot. She slowly sews the words “Made in Brazil” onto her skin — a reference to the idea of registered trademarks and international goods, thus the title “Registered Trademark.”

In her 1981 performance *11 de marzo — Ritual a la menstruación, digno de toda mujer como antecedente del origen de la vida* (*March 11 — Ritual in honor of menstruation, worthy of every woman as a precursor to the origin of life*), María Evelia Marmolejo walked around a gallery completely nude save for a few pads taped to her body. On her period, she walked through the gallery and left blood stains on its white walls. The performance pushed back against menstrual stigma but also referenced a violent time in Colombia.

In researching these works and artists, Fajardo-Hill found more than just the material for a show — she found important stories that needed to be shared, to be retold.

“Personally, I have met some of the most brilliant, inspiring and resilient women in my life,” Fajardo-Hill says.