

ARTNEWS

COCO FUSCO RESPONDS

The following is a response to Maura Reilly's article "Taking the Measure of Sexism: Facts, Figures, and Fixes" about the current statistics of Women in the Art World. Our coverage begins with our Editor's Letter.
June 2015

Born in 1960, lives in New York City



Courtesy the artist, Gene Pittman, and Walker Art Center

It is important to pay attention to statistics when evaluating women's representation in exhibitions, museum collections, and gallery rosters. Those figures tell us a great deal about the depth of institutional commitments beyond the rhetoric spewed out to the media and to funders. As for my own experience, I don't know if I am viewed primarily as a woman artist. I think I am viewed first and foremost as an outspoken person of color, and then as a person who is something of an interloper in the world of art, since I did not go to art school, and I write criticism and have an academic background.

There are times when I feel that males in positions of authority view me as a threat because I am female and not complicit in their sexist bullshit—these are the guys who fear mature female success, screw their female art students whenever they can, and treat female colleagues as subservient to themselves. They refuse to acknowledge and respect female talent, and they employ mafia-style tactics to undermine female advancement. Their methods range from damning with faint praise to refusing to accept women as their bosses, or secretly organizing the “demise” of female peers through the circulation of negative rumor. I have seen all of that happen, and it has taught me never to believe that feminism is accepted by men. Men in the art world are no more progressive than the rest of society—they just pay lip service to whatever is politically correct when they need to.

Taking all of that into account, as an artist, I am not sure that my being a woman has been more of a determinant in my career than have the other aspects of my identity.

Unfortunately, the nature of the art business is exclusionary. Works are deemed valuable not by popular choice but by virtue of the decisions of a tiny elite, and I don't see that changing anytime soon. This is what distinguishes the art economy from that of film or literature, where popular demand is extremely important to determining one's success. However, I do think that there is much to be done in art education. In the United States, decent art education is for the most part a luxury afforded to very few. Art schools are among the most expensive institutions in higher learning. That alone creates a very unlevel playing field.

And, finally, it's important to remember that women in power use the same sexist tactics as men against other women. In other words, men are not the only adherents to patriarchal principles.