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Subliminal Projects Gallery's *Eve* is all about female creation

By Jasmine Elist, Special to the *Los Angeles Times*

Even in the Age of Gaga it's still necessary to remind the world that female artists face barriers. Yes, women are free to wear a meat dress or express themselves in any artistic way imaginable, which is an important, tectonic shift from the rigidity of decades past — but they are still struggling to pierce the armor plating of art's most sacred institutions.

According to feminist artist and educator Judy Chicago, only 3% to 5% of artwork on display in the permanent collections of most major museums is by a female artist. In the 1970s, only 1.7% of solo art publications focused on women artists; today that percentage has managed to climb to only 2.5%. While there has been change, there's still a lot of work to be done.

This is why Katherine B. Cone, director of Subliminal Projects Gallery, put together its newest exhibition, "Eve." From July 23 through Aug. 20, the gallery, created by renowned street artist Shepard Fairey in 1995, will show a diverse collection of works by nine revolutionary female artists, including pioneers of the feminist art movement such as Chicago and Mary Beth Edelson, and others expanding the legacy today, such as Alex Prager and Swoon.

"I wanted to make aware to the young, art-enthusiast public today where the feminist started," explains Cone. "Unfortunately, still today, it's a struggle being a female artist in a male-dominated art world. The women in this show have put their guards down to show the world how strong they are."

This strength is apparent not just in the emotional content of each individual piece, but also in the overall diversity of the exhibition. Cone made a point to represent many different aesthetics and mediums, making it clear to viewers that these are largely unrestricted "technically amazing pieces by technically strong women." The curator wants these works of art to shake, inspire and move viewers on an emotional level. "Art is supposed to make you stop, draw you in closer, and smack you in the head," Cone says. "And that's what these women have done — they've made you stop and think and that's revolutionary."

Featured artist Chicago started working in art in the mid-1960s, a time in which the culture didn't entirely embrace female artists. In the 1970s, Chicago decided to create art that did not deny nor hide her gender: "Eve" proudly displays works from Chicago's Birth Project collection that celebrate female fecundity and sexuality as the source of all human life.

Chicago, who founded the first feminist art study program in the country, has strived to ensure that women in history are not forgotten and that doors are wide open to young artists.

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"I've tried to open the way for myself and for other women artists to be able to freely express themselves. In so doing, I've tried to open a big path for younger female artists," says Chicago. "I've taken a lot of beatings along the way, but if my art has shown anything, it's that you don't die from bad reviews."

Also on display are the photographs by self-taught photographer Alex Prager, who has merged the worlds of fashion photography and movie stills — think noir thrillers in a bright tangerine-color skirt suit.