3. Histories of a Contested Terrain

Gender, Care, Art, and Curating

The unequal conditions around care, which are historically constructed and which remain evident across society today, are not softened in the art field but rather increased to an alarming degree. While women earn on average about 18 percent less than men in Germany, the gender pay gap within the arts and culture has, since 2014, ranged between an alarming 20 and 31 percent.[1] Not only are women artists paid less than male artists, but their works are also seen significantly less often in exhibitions. The initiative fair share! Mehr Sichtbarkeit für Künstlerinnen (Fair Share for Women Artists) points out:

> A museum like the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin, whose collection comprises about 1.5% women artists, is representative of comparable collections, but there is also an acute need to catch up in the contemporary field. The contemporary section of the Hamburger Kunsthalle currently includes only 19% works of art by women, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne 20%, and this despite the fact that the majority of art school graduates have been female for years (more than 60%).[2]

If a work by a woman artist does make it into an auction house despite the fatal gender gap for exhibiting ("gender show gap"), it fetches drastically lower profits. A comprehensive study, which examined 1.5 million auction transactions in 45 countries, found that, on average, women's works sell for around 47 percent less than men's. The study sums up: "Women's art appears to sell for less because it is made by women."[3]

1 Statistisches Bundesamt, "Gender Pay Gap nach Wirtschaftszweig," January 30, 2023, https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Arbeit/Verdienste/Verdienste-GenderPayGap/Tabellen/ugpg-03-wirtschaftszweige-ab-2014.html.

2 fair share! Mehr Sichtbarkeit für Künstlerinnen / Fair Share for Women Artists, accessed July 12, 2023, https://www.fairshareforwomenartists.de/. My translation.

3 Renée Adams, Roman Kräussl, Marco Navone, and Patrick Verwijmeren, "Is Gender in the Eye of the Beholder? Identifying Cultural Attitudes with Art Auction Prices," CFS Working Paper Series, no. 595 (2018).

The decades-old rhetorical question of the Guerrilla Girls thus remains pertinent: "Do women have to be naked to get into museums?"[4]

Since the late 1980s the activist artist collective Guerrilla Girls has taken over billboards in public spaces to address the lack of representation of women artists in established museums. In the case of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, in 1989 the group was able to spot less than 5 percent of works by women artists in the museum's modern art sections, while 85 percent of the nudes in that same section were female (Image 3). The Guerrilla Girls recounted in 2011 and found less than 4 percent of works by women artists in the MET's modern art sections, while 76 percent of the nudes continued to be female.[5]

Image 3: Guerrilla Girls, DO WOMEN STILL HAVE TO BE NAKED TO GET INTO THE MET. MUSEUM?, 1989, poster. © Guerrilla Girls. Courtesy guerrillagirls.com.

It thus becomes evident that the art world's conventions and sanctioning norms around who is considered an artist worthy of gallery representation, worthy of a solo show in a major museum, worthy of a prestigious grant, are still tied to the long-standing archetype of a White, male artist-as-genius.[6] This ideal artist, as an essentially patriarchal figure, seems to continue to inhabit the imaginary realm of the arts and appears as a figure who produces his work in the quiet absence of children, domestic chores, or any interruption at all. In 1971, the art critic Linda Nochlin famously asked: "Why have there been no great women artists?" Her essay foregrounds

4 I first sketched out this scenario in Sascia Bailer, "Wie es um Geschlechtergerechtigkeit in der Kunst steht," *Monopol*, 2023, https://www.monopol-magazin.de/gender-gap-kunst-zahlen-bitte. The artist-activist group the Guerrilla Girls asked this question in 1989.

5 For more about the Guerrilla Girl's project, see https://www.guerrillagirls.com/naked-through-the-ages.

6 For further contextualisation, see Dorothee Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?," OnCurating, no. 19 (June 2013).

the institutional rather than individual preconditions that have historically shaped the lack of visibility and success of women artists:

> By examining in some detail a single instance of deprivation or disadvantage – the unavailability of nude models to women art students – I have suggested that it was indeed institutionally made impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men, no matter what the potency of their so-called talent, or genius.[7]

Today, roughly fifty years later, we might have achieved some institutional changes to make it less difficult for women to partake in the art academy or overall art sector. Yet structural hurdles and deep-seated prejudice, particularly against artists with caring responsibilities, prevail.

3.1 Against All Odds: Mothers in the Arts

The historically conditioned situation, as laid out by feminist scholars and activists such as Nochlin, requires us to examine how gender and caring responsibilities – often invisibilised as feminised labour – intersect in the arts today to produce inequalities. Adopting this perspective first requires one to recognise that parenthood, as well as other caring responsibilities for family members and others, though little studied, is a basis for discrimination in the overall economy.[8] A study by Germany's Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency found that 42 percent of parents experience discrimination in a professional context.[9] However, the figure in the arts, according to a survey by the Initiative Kunst & Elternschaft (Initiative Art & Parenthood), is more than twice as high. In this sector, 92 percent of the interviewed parents shared that they have faced prejudice and that their needs are rarely taken into account

7 Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 176.

8 While there exists research on the experienced discrimination of caregivers of relatives and sick or disabled children within the wider economy, this area of research seems nonexistent for the cultural sector and therefore needs urgent address.

9 While the study by Germany's Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency also included the experienced discrimination of adults who are caregivers to their relatives, the art sector does not provide, as of yet, any surveys on this intersection – despite its importance. See Sören Mohr, Johanna Nicodemus, Evelyn Stoll, Ulrich Weuthen, and David Juncke, Diskriminierungserfahrungen von fürsorgenden Erwerbstätigen im Kontext von Schwangerschaft, Elternzeit und Pflege von Angehörigen, Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2022, 184, https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/Rechtsgutachten/schwanger_eltern_pflege.html?nn=305458.

in the funding and scholarship landscape.[10] In neighbouring Switzerland, a recent study by Visarte, the Swiss professional association of visual artists, concluded that only 7 percent of the artist residencies in that country are family friendly.[11]

PARENTAL STATUS OF TOP 10 MALE AND FEMALE ARTISTS			
Ranking	**Name**	**Gender**	**Children**
1	Gerhard Richter	M	4
2	Bruce Nauman	M	2
3	Georg Baselitz	M	2
4	Rosemarie Trockel	F	0
5	Cindy Sherman	F	0
6	Tony Cragg	M	4
7	Olafur Eliasson	M	2
8	Anselm Kiefer	M	5
9	William Kentridge	M	3
10	Imi Knoebel	M	2
		Total of Fathers:	8
		Total of Children:	24
		Total of Mothers:	0

Table 1: Parental Status of Top 10 Male And Female Artists. Ranking Data: Kunstkompass 2023, Capital. Parental Status Analysis and Graphic: Sascia Bailer.

While the research suggests that parenthood comes with considerable structural hurdles in the arts, it seems that "parenthood" is still not specific enough of an analytical category to understand how gendered exclusion in the arts operates. Research showcases how caring responsibilities specifically limit the success of artists who are women – and by extension, mothers – while fathers who are artists seem untouched by this dual role. This notion brings us closer to the deep-seated societal hang-ups

10 *Elternschaft & Kunst. Arbeitsrealitäten von Eltern in den Freien Künsten* (Dresden: Landesverband Soziokultur Sachsen e.V., 2022); Marcia Breuer, "Mehr Mütter für die Kunst," 2019, http://mehrmütterfürdiekunst.net.

11 Philippe Sablonier on behalf of Visarte Schweiz (Swiss professional association of visual artists), "Bericht zur Studie "Kunstberuf und Familie." Erkenntnisse und Handlungsanleitungen zur Vergabepraxis von Atelierstipendien," Visarte Schweiz, June 2023, https://visarte.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/0_Visarte_Studie-Kunstberuf-und-Familie_2023-07-04-def-D-mit-Illustration.pdf.

surrounding artists who are also mothers. Art critic Elke Buhr, in the art magazine *Monopol*, refers to the simultaneity of art and motherhood as "the art world's last taboo," arguing: "Sex, death, politics: art can show everything today. But children? They are not a theme. Especially for their mothers, they are considered killers of an artist's career."[12]

PARENTAL STATUS OF TOP 10 FEMALE ARTISTS		
Ranking	**Name**	**Children**
4	Rosemarie Trockel	0
5	Cindy Sherman	0
11	Pipilotti Rist	1
12	Jenny Holzer	1
13	Mona Hatoum	0
19	Isa Genzken	1
25	Marina Abramović	0
26	Monica Bonvicini	0
42	Shirin Neshat	1
43	Tacita Dean	1
	Total of Children:	**5**

Table 2: Parental Status of Top 10 Female Artists. Ranking Data: Kunstkompass 2023, Capital. Parental Status Analysis and Graphic: Sascia Bailer.

PARENTAL STATUS OF TOP 10 MALE ARTISTS		
Ranking	**Name**	**Children**
1	Gerhard Richter	4
2	Bruce Nauman	2
3	Georg Baselitz	2
6	Tony Cragg	4
7	Olafur Eliasson	2
8	Anselm Kiefer	5
9	William Kentridge	3
10	Imi Knoebel	2
14	Jeff Koons	8
15	Richard Serra	0
	Total of Children:	**32**

Table 3: Parental Status of Top 10 Male Artists. Ranking Data: Kunstkompass 2023, Capital. Parental Status Analysis and Graphic: Sascia Bailer.

A look at the list of the world's 100 most successful living artists, according to *Kunstkompass 2023*, confirms the prevalence of Buhr's stance.[13] The list's "top 10" includes only two women (Rosemarie Trockel at 4, and Cindy Sherman at 5), both of whom do not have children (Table 1). The eight other artists ranked among the top 10

12 Elke Buhr, "Das Letzte Tabu: Kind und Kunst," *Monopol*, February 2019, 43.

13 Every year, the media company *Capital* releases a ranking of the 100 most successful artists around the globe, see "Kunstkompass 2023," *Capital*, accessed February 24, 2024, https://www.capital.de/leben/kunstkompass-2023--die-top-100-der-wichtigsten-gegenwartskuenstler-33923746.html?cc_bust=5136879. From the *Kunstkompass 2023* list I have looked at specifically the top 10 male and female artists and their respective parental statuses. As a source to determine parental status, I used the figures provided by the YouTube research channel STRG_F, "Warum sind Kunstwerke von Frauen weniger wert?" [Why are the artworks of women less valuable?], YouTube video, 18:30, posted June 16, 2020 by STRG_F. Since their research concluded in 2020, I researched the missing artists individually (i.e., who had climbed up the rank into the top 10 since 2020), using publicly available data from artists' biographies listed on their galleries' or the artists' own websites, as well as the artists' social media accounts. The date of research was March 1, 2024. The data was gathered with best intentions for completeness and correctness.

are all fathers. Looking at the top 10 female artists from the top 100, whose positions span from spot 4 to spot 43, we find that five have one child each (Table 2). The visual artist Pipilotti Rist, ranked at 11, can therefore be considered the most successful living artist who is also a mother.

If we, in turn, look at the top 10 male artists from the top 100, whose positions span spots 1 to 15, we will find that nine of them have children, amounting to thirty-two children in total (Table 3). Jeff Koons – listed at 14 by *Kunstkompass 23* – who has the highest auction sales of any living artist, and who recently sent 125 mini sculptures to the moon, has eight children.[14] To contrast the findings: the top performing male artists have 3.2 children on average, while the top ranking women artists have 0.5 children. These figures suggest that, today, it is common for successful male artists to be fathers but it is much rarer for successful female artists to be mothers. When successful female artists do have children, their number of children is limited to one.[15]

While I'm not primarily concerned with rankings and other metrics of success,[16] I *am* interested in understanding – and shifting – the dynamics surrounding gender and caring responsibilities within the arts. The above example showcases that, when addressing gender equity in the arts, we must also consider the artists' caring responsibilities. The already precarious position of women artists in the art sector becomes ever more fragile when set in concert with motherhood, whereas male artists' careers seem unaffected by their fatherhood. This discriminatory reality of

14 Meilan Solly, "Jeff Koons' 'Rabbit' Breaks the Auction Record for Most Expensive Work by Living Artist", *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 17, 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/jeff-koons-rabbit-breaks-auction-record-most-expensive-work-living-artist-180972219/.

15 The following criteria for success are considered by Capital, the company that authors the annual *Kunstkompass* list: solo exhibitions in over 300 renowned international museums and exhibition centres such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, participation in over 100 important group exhibitions each year, such as the Venice Biennale; reviews in leading art magazines, such as *Art in America*; acquisitions from leading exhibition venues, such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris; Awards such as the Praemium Imperiale in Tokyo; and public art: the positioning of sculptures and objects in public spaces. For further details, see Linde Rohr-Bongard,"Kunstkompass 2023: Die Top 100 der wichtigsten Gegenwartskünstler," *Capital*, October 22, 2023, https://www.capital.de/leben/kunstkompass-2023--die-top-100-der-wichtigsten-gegenwartskuenstler-33923746.html.

16 Capital considers the following criteria in measuring the level of success of each artist: solo exhibitions in over 300 renowned international museums and exhibition centres such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York; participation in over 100 important group exhibitions each year, such as the Venice Biennale; reviews in leading art magazines, such as *Art in America*; acquisitions from leading exhibition venues, such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris; awards such as the Praemium Imperiale in Tokyo; and public art commissions. For further details, see Linde Rohr-Bongard, "Kunstkompass 2023: Die Top 100 der wichtigsten Gegenwartskünstler," *Capital*, October 22, 2023, https://www.capital.de/leben/kunstkompass-2023--die-top-100-der-wichtigsten-gegenwartskuenstler-33923746.html.

mothers in the arts is mirrored in the research and writing by the art critic Hettie Judah, who asserts that "the old cliché that one cannot be both an artist and a mother has proven remarkably durable. [. . .] [T]he cliché still bedevils artists today."[17]

"Why?" one wonders. Judah, who conducted numerous interviews with artists who are also mothers, mainly within the UK art sector, identifies old-fashioned prejudice as one central reason why the cliché persists: "to those who consider women artists an inferior proposition, artist mothers seem beyond the pale."[18] She also cites mothers' apparent lack of "seductive potency of the artist as a countercultural figure" as a reason why they are often sidelined. Subsumed, within the cultural imaginary, under domesticity and conventional family life,[19] artists who are also mothers are regarded as the embodiment of "uncool" in an otherwise hip art field. But Judah also identifies quite tangible hurdles, conventions, and structural hindrances that make the arts inaccessible not only for artists who are mothers but also for other professionals in the field, such as curators.

Such prejudices and structural hurdles also formed the driving force behind the manifesto "Mehr Mütter für die Kunst" (More Mothers for/in the Arts) from 2019. Its initiator, the visual artist and photographer Marcia Breuer, describes the ways in which caring responsibilities within the arts are a central factor hindering the careers of mothers:

> If a working woman has children, this usually has relevant consequences for her further professional life in general and for her further professional career in particular, despite all protestations and according to all studies. If a woman artist has children, this leads her into a situation that makes the continuation of her artistic career almost completely impossible.[20]

A recent scandal around the awarding of the prestigious NEUSTART KULTUR grants by the Stiftung Kunstfonds in Germany, which occurred amid the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrated how central public funders prioritise commercial galleries, art fairs, and male artists, thereby further cementing gendered inequalities.[21] Even their special grant for artists with children under the age of seven was not awarded according to the criterion of gender-equal distribution. In an open letter, the initiative Kind & Kunst München (Child & Art Munich) criticised the fact that forty-

17 Hettie Judah, *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)* (London: Lund Humphries, 2022), 9.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Breuer, "Mehr Mütter für die Kunst."

21 Regular updates on the discourse around these public-funding instruments can be found BBK Berlin's website: BBK Berlin, "Neustart Kultur Programme: Aktueller Diskurs," 2023, https://www.bbk-berlin.de/kulturpolitik/neustart-kultur-aktueller-diskurs.

nine men and forty-two women, as well as three sets of partners, received the grant – even while mothers continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid care responsibilities, which, in turn, takes away important focused time from their artistic work.[22] It is precisely this "taking of time for art-making" – a pursuit which comes without fixed wages or a predictable career path – that contributes to the nagging guilt that parenting artists shared in their interviews with Judah:

> With childcare costly, how dare you spend money to work without guaranteed financial reward? How dare you take time for your work away from your children? How dare you bring children into the insecurity of an artist's lifestyle?[23]

Judah further elaborates that this guilt has a wider sanctioning cultural function: "With guilt, too, comes concern that the artist will be considered a selfish mother. [. . .] How can they demand time and space for their own work?"[24]

The unruly gesture of prioritising artistic creation over social reproduction has sparked a discourse in which women who dare to both create and care are viewed through the lens of monstrosity: "A woman had to be a monster to be an artist," contends the surrealist painter and sculptor Dorothea Tanning.[25] Art writer Lauren Elkin, in her book *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art*, embarks on a search for what this particular conjunction of femininity, monstrosity, and artistic creation could entail. Borrowing from the novelist Jenny Offill's work, she cites the narrator of *Dept. of Speculation*: "Art monsters only concern themselves with art, never mundane things."[26] Such statements clearly separate artistic creation from social reproduction. Elkin continues this line of thought:

> Mother or artist, not both. You shall know the art monster by her dirty house, empty of children. Mothers who became art monsters did it by leaving or harming her offspring, through abandonment or suicide or abuse: Doris Lessing, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton.[27]

Yet, for Elkin, the notion of the art monster goes beyond the supposed binary of "artistic creation/social reproduction" to include subtle notions of what an artist might want to say through their work but has been socially conditioned not to. She

22 Bündnis Kunst & Kind München, "Offener Brief an den Vorstand der Stiftung Kunstfonds," 2020, http://www.kundk.xyz/images/K&K_Kunstfonds_Web.pdf.

23 Hettie Judah, "Full, Messy and Beautiful," Unit London, 2023, https://unitlondon.com/2023-05-31/full-messy-and-beautiful/.

24 Ibid.

25 Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Dublin: Penguin Books, 2023), 6.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

explains: "So much of the discourse around the art monster thus far has focused on female artists' lives, but it seems just as crucial to look at their work: at what it was that they were so bent on doing that they ran the risk of being called a monster."[28]

From this perspective, artists who are mothers can be perceived as countercultural figures, as they operate outside the norms and roles that society has traditionally scripted for them.[29] Art historian Andrea Liss, in her book *Feminist Art and the Maternal*, argues:

> Motherhood, especially feminist motherhood, confuses the normalized order of gender and power. Feminist motherhood deranges the supposed natural and historical progression of culture. Feminist motherhood complicates the dominant institutionalized idea of motherhood.[30]

Those, who then challenge the institution of motherhood, particularly at the intersection with artistic production, run the risk of being cut out from the artistic field. "We who are addressing the taboos become the taboo," asserts the feminist artist Carolee Schneemann.[31] The discourse must therefore be appropriated, to reframe "art monster" as an emancipatory figure who actively deconstructs patriarchal norms and shifts the shape and boundaries of tabooed maternal topics and subjectivities.

When I first began my position as Artistic Director 2019–20 at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung in Hohenlockstedt, Germany, I was intrigued by the work of the feminist art collective MATERNAL FANTASIES (who had received one of the institution's two Artist Advancement Awards for that year, laying the ground for our multifaceted collaboration.)[32] The collective of seven women and their children departs from these very tensions: the proclaimed taboo, the supposed impossibility of combining caring responsibilities – motherhood, in particular – and artistic production. My experience collaborating with the collective over two years, both during and beyond my curatorial position at M.1, suggested to me that MATERNAL FANTASIES would gladly accept being called a "collective art monster" of sorts (Image 4). An aim to shatter the dusty and restraining fixtures that maintain both the

28 Ibid., 8.

29 In 2023, I was invited to be a curatorial advisor on the group exhibition *Myths of Mothers and Other Monsters* by the collective MARS – Maternal Artistic Research Studio, which took place at the art space L6 in Freiburg, Germany. See http://mars-space.net/#UpcomingExhibits.

30 Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minnesota University Press: Minneapolis, 2008).

31 Carolee Schneemann, quoted in Elkin, *Art Monsters*, 20.

32 As the collaboration with MATERNAL FANTASIES formed an essential part of my curatorial programming as artistic director 2019/20 at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, I return to their practice in more depth in chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges," particularly within the section 4.3.5.1.1 – "MATERNAL FANTASIES."

institution of motherhood(s) and the false dichotomy that artistic production and maternity are mutually exclusive seems to be the driving force behind the collective's work. Further, they aim to challenge the patriarchal notion of the White male artist-as-genius figure, who produces his work in the quiet absence of children. The artist figure that they put forth instead is one of multitudes – multitudes of people and voices, across generations, across spheres of quiet and spheres of constant interruption, across caring responsibilities and artistic explorations.

Image 4: MATERNAL FANTASIES, Wattenmeer, 2020, film still from Suspended Time, on Caring. © MATERNAL FANTASIES.

Albeit from a singular artistic position, the feminist artist Hannah Cooke also seeks to challenge the place of artists who are mothers within the arts. In the public conversation "Cut the 'or' between Art and Motherhood" (2021) between Cooke and myself, we discussed the generative component of anger evoked by such proclamations and by our own experiences as caregivers in the art world.[33] In Cooke's case, it had led her to produce the photography series *Ada vs. Emin* (2018; Image 5), where she breastfeeds her daughter Ada in an exhibition-like setting.[34] She sits on a bed that looks much like *My Bed* (1998) by Tracey Emin. An iconic feminist artist, Emin

33 Anna Akaltin, "(what it means to both) Care & Create," Burg Giebichenstein Kunsthochschule Halle, 2021, https://www.burg-halle.de/hochschule/einrichtungen/fempower/projekte/project/what-it-means-to-both-care-create-1/.

34 Hannah Cooke, "Ada vs. Emin," artist's website, 2018, https://hannahcooke.de/2020/01/17/ada-vs-emin/.

had claimed a few years earlier that being a mother and an artist at the same time means compromise: "There are good artists that have children. Of course there are. They are called men."[35] The earlier analysis of the parental status of the ten most successful living artists confirms Emin's underlying claim that fatherhood and being "a good artist" are compatible, where as a pairing with motherhood is not.

Image 5: Hannah Cooke, Ada vs. Emin, 2018, set photograph. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

Ada vs. Emin can thus be regarded as an artistic response to Emin's statement that a woman artist would have to choose between art and motherhood (Image 5). Another iconic female artist, Marina Abramović, also raised concerns that art and motherhood are mutually exclusive, prompting Cooke to counter with the video installation *Ada vs. Abramović* (2018) (Image 6).[36] She restaged Abramović's famous per-

35 Henri Neuendorf, "Tracey Emin Says Female Artists Can't Have Kids," Artnet, October 9, 2014, https://news.artnet.com/market/tracey-emin-says-female-artists-cant-have-kids-126940.

36 Hannah Cooke, "Ada vs. Abramovic," artist's website, 2018, https://hannahcooke.de/2020/01/18/ada-vs-abramovic/. Marina Abramović, in an interview about her approaching seventieth birthday, shared that she had had three abortions in order to be able to dedicate her time and energy to artistic production, not to motherhood: "In my opinion [children are] the reason why women aren't as successful as men in the art world. There's plenty of

formance *The Artist Is Present*, which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010, inserting herself into the performative setup while, again, breastfeeding her daughter Ada. Arguably, Cooke not only inserted herself into the works of iconic women artists, who stayed childfree for the sake of their artistic careers, but also inserted herself into an art sector that is structurally conditioned to exclude her as an artist and mother.

Image 6: Hannah Cooke, Ada vs. Abramović, 2018, set photograph. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024.

The photographer Katharina Bosse, like Cooke, had conveyed to her the rigid patriarchal narratives that her becoming-a-mother in the early 2000s would end her career as an aspiring young artist in New York. As collectors began to withdraw when her pregnancy became known, she chose to not artificially uphold the separation of her artistic self and her role as a single mother but rather radically fuse them.

talented women. Why do men take over the important positions? It's simple. Love, family, children – a woman doesn't want to sacrifice all of that." See Guelda Voien, "Marina Abramovic: I Had Three Abortions Because Children Hold Female Artists Back," *The Observer*, July 26, 2016, https://observer.com/2016/07/marina-abramovic-i-had-three-abortions-because-children-hold-female-artists-back/.

Bosse began the self-portrait series *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Mother*, which took shape between 2004 and 2009 – initially with her first child and then later with her second child as well.[37] The series playfully subverts the arrangements, lighting, and palettes of the Old Masters (an inevitably patriarchal construct in itself), creating scenes into which she inserts herself. The artist appears not in the demure manner of the Madonna-style mother and child but rather depicts herself with her infant(s) in an unpolished, raw, vulnerable and yet strong, unruly, and defiant fashion (Image 7).

Image 7: Katharina Bosse, Winter, 2005, photograph, from the series The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Mother (2004–09). © Katharina Bosse.

With her *Portrait* series, Bosse partakes in an artistic tradition of defiant self-portraits where not only gender, sexuality, motherhood, and societal norms are

37 For further background on the artist and the history of the series, see the catalogue Marie Darrieussecq and David Riedel, *Katharina Bosse: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Mother* (Paris: Filigranes Èdition, 2011).

renegotiated but also racial relations. In this sense, the photographer and multimedia artist Renee Cox, who was also a great source of inspiration for Bosse, is known for flipping stereotypical representations upside down. She uses photography to question and renegotiate racial relations, women's bodies and feminism, often subverting White-centric Christian depictions and narratives. In her series *Yo Mama* (1992–1996), she, as a Black woman, embodies a range of iconic and mythical figures, including the Madonna, or Virgin Mary, in powerful, oversize photographs.

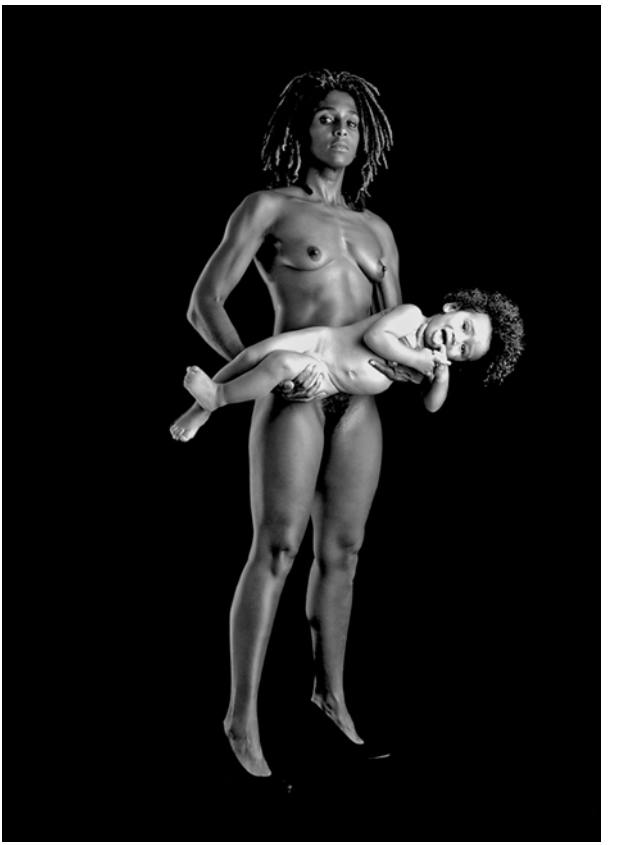

Image 8: Renee Cox, Yo Mama, 1993, gelatin silver photograph. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of the Carol and Arthur Goldberg Collection. © Renee Cox.

The black-and-white photograph *Yo Mama* (Image 8), which was featured in Marcia Tucker's 1994 show *Bad Girls* at the New Museum in New York, portrays the artist nude, only wearing heels. She embraces her toddler son, who is also nude, his body aligned horizontally to her upright position. Captured from a low angle, the artist exudes a determined authority through her gaze, challenging the typical humility associated with the Virgin Mary. Beyond the artist's aim to challenge racialised representation of Black and Brown subjectivities, the photograph confronts the prevailing perspectives in a White, sexist art world that continue to devalue motherhood – both as a subject and as a dual role for artist who are mothers.[38]

Yet, these ambivalent negotiations on care work, maintenance work, gender equity, and structural exclusion are not a contemporary phenomenon within the artistic field. Rather, these struggles must be seen as a continuation of the legacy of feminist artists since the 1960s who have radically challenged patriarchal norms through their work.

3.1.1 Feminist Legacies: Histories of Renegotiating Art, Maintenance, and Sexuality

Not only is motherhood an overlooked subject in the male-dominated canons of art history, but artists and scholars also have had to fight for its spot within feminist discourses – as many feminist activists distanced themselves from domestic and maternal subjects in a bid to emancipate themselves from antiquated and potentially essentialising ideals of womanhood. Nonetheless, a range of pertinent historical examples of feminist artists boldly circumvented the imposed split between productive and reproductive labour in the late 1960s and 1970s, thereby breaking with the art world's taboo of the domestic, motherhood, and maintenance work.

One of the earlier works exemplifying this shift is the performance piece *Mon fils* by Lea Lublin, which took place at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris during the Salon de Mai in 1968. Amid bustling street protests in support of newfound freedoms, the artist cared for her seven-month-old son within the museum's premises. Through this act, she transformed motherhood and everyday life into a conceptual and political declaration, thereby challenging the conventions upheld by the very art institutions in which she placed her work.[39]

38 Jane Ursula Harris, "After the Master: The Copy as Origin and Renewal," *Flash Art*, February 17, 2020, https://flash---art.com/article/after-the-master-the-copy-as-origin-and-renewal/.

39 Hammer Museum, "Digital Archive: Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985: Lea Lublin, Artist, *Mon fils (My son)*,1968," accessed January 30, 2024, https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/art/art/mon-fils-my-son.

Another prominent example is Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who declared invisiblised care and maintenance work as art in and of itself.[40] Her work thereby collapsed the distinction between "art" and "mundane things" – a supposedly monstrous act that goes beyond scripted forms of femininity, as Elkin has put forth.[41] In the photo-conceptual piece *Dressing to Go Out/Undressing to Go In*, from 1973, the artist documents herself in black-and-white photos as she helps her young children dress and undress to go outside. When the work is displayed, a cleaning rag hangs next to the images, encouraging visitors to clean and maintain the work.[42] Ukeles's oeuvre – which at times involved her children, at others public maintenance workers, and sometimes only herself performing care work – formed part of a transformative moment in the artistic field that renegotiated and substantially shifted (and arguably dissolved) the boundaries between art and life. Spearheaded by international artist movements, such as Dada in the early twentieth century and Fluxus in the 1960s and 1970s, a dematerialisation of the artwork had been initiated, bringing forth rich performance art and socially engaged practices, which remain constitutive of the contemporary art field.[43] It was amid these shifts that Ukeles produced her "Manifesto for Maintenance Art" (1969), in which she famously declares:

> I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, (up to now separately) I "do" Art. Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art.[44]

Ukeles thus collapsed the distinctions between art, care and maintenance work, and labour as she, for example, washed the steps of museums (Image 9).

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40 Mierle Laderman Ukeles's contribution to feminist art on care and maintenance was acknowledged and celebrated in her retrospective Maintenance Art at the Queens Museum, New York, September 2018–February 2019. For more information, see Queens Museum, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art," 2016, https://queensmuseum.org/2016/04/mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art.

41 As previously introduced in the discussion around the notion of "art monster" in Elkin, *Art Monsters*, 6.

42 Stefanie Graf, "Mierle Laderman Ukeles' Maintenance Art in 4 Works," TheCollector, April 12, 2023, https://www.thecollector.com/mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art/.

43 For further analysis of the historical shifts within the arts, the processes of dematerialisation, and the dissolution of the boundaries between art and life, I recommend the following two publications: Nina Möntmann, *Kunst als sozialer Raum: Andrea Fraser, Martha Rosler, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Renée Green* (Cologne: Walther König, 2002); Dorothee Richter, *Fluxus: Kunst gleich Leben? Mythen um Autorschaft, Produktion, Geschlecht und Gemeinschaft* (Zurich: OnCurating, 2012).

44 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition 'CARE,'" *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4 (2018): 233–37.

Image 9: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Washing/ Tracks/Maintenance: Outside (July 23, 1973), 1973, performance documentation, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut. Part of the Maintenance Art Performances series. © Mierle Laderman Ukeles.

Her performances demonstrated that maintenance work made all other kinds of work possible, including waged labour, artistic practice, and even "the revolution," as the art theorist Marina Vishmidt points out. Ukeles's artistic politics aligned with the claim of the women's movement that care work is foundational to all other work and suspended the division between symbolic and physical labour by legitimising maintenance work as part of art work.[45] Vishmidt argues:

> If the daily uncompensated labor performed mainly by women in the household could migrate to the museum and seek legitimacy as art, then it was no

45 Marina Vishmidt, "The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor," OnCurating, no. 48 (September 2020): 71.

> longer self-evident that this labour was any less "creative" than the kinds of activity hitherto enshrined as art, and no less public than socially necessary wage-labor.[46]

The radicality of Ukeles's work was not only to label mundane activities as "art" but to position this work within art spaces that tend to focus on results rather than on the social processes of care and maintenance that sustain them, thereby de-romanticising this labour: "[I]t's a drag; it takes all the fucking time. [...] The culture confers lousy status on maintenance jobs = minimum wages, housewives = no pay."[47]

This process of (re)negotiating gender, care, sexuality, and the domestic realm also took place within the feminist exhibition *Womanhouse* (1972), initiated by artists Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro within the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, Santa Cruz. [48] This site-specific feminist installation and performance space, which took over an abandoned Victorian house located on campus, was produced by students and included twenty-one feminist installations. Chicago states that the works addressed "the two biggest issues" of the 1970s: "sex and housework."[49] The young, women-identifying artists began to deconstruct patriarchal societal patterns in the exhibition space and, along with it, to abandoned traditional canons of representation. They instead placed their lived experiences as women at the centre, reclaiming what were historically seen as women's crafts and materials as points of departure for emancipatory artistic works.[50] This is exemplified in the collaborative work *Nurturant Kitchen* by Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch, which consisted of a bright-pink kitchen with eggs applied to its walls and ceilings that seemed to morph into breasts (Image 10). In another room, Sandra Orgel presented a female mannequin in a linen closet, her body violently intersected at the neck, chest, and torso by shelves (Image 11).[51]

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46 Ibid.

47 Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!"

48 One critique of Womanhouse is that it primarily focused on White, heterosexual, cisgender, and middle-class experience of womanhood in the early 1970s. See Vladimir Bjelicic, "Inside Womanhouse, a Beacon of Feminist Art," Widewalls, June 2019, https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/judy-chicago-womanhouse.

49 Sarah Cascone, "Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's Epoch-Making Feminist Installation 'Womanhouse' Gets a Tribute in Washington, DC," Artnet, March 13, 2018, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/women-house-judy-chicago-national-museum-women-arts-1234649.

50 Ibid.

51 Neyat Yohannes, "Revisiting the Famed Feminist Exhibition 'Womanhouse' with an Intersectional Lens," Artsy, March 24, 2022, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-revisiting-famed-feminist-exhibition-womanhouse-intersectional-lens.

Image 10: Susan Frazier, Vicki Hodgetts, and Robin Weltsch, Nurturant Kitchen, installation view in Womanhouse, 1972. Through the Flower Archives, Penn State University Archives, State College, PA. © the artists.

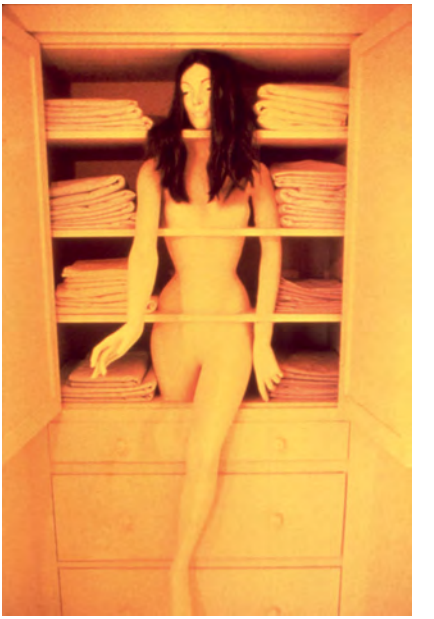

Image 11: Sandra Orgel, Linen Closet, installation view in Womanhouse, 1972. Through the Flower Archives, Penn State University Archives, State College, PA. © Sandra Orgel.

These various feminist art practices from the 1960s until today – whether singular or collective, whether within the public sphere or within the domestic realm – have contributed to a larger spirit of address and radical challenge to the status quo of women in society, the roles of mothers within the arts, and the patriarchal idea of the artist figure as a White male artist-as-genius.

These shifts within the artistic realm need to be read in the context of the activism of the 1970s,[52] a time when pointing to the blind spots and contradictions surrounding the relationship between women, care work, society, and the capitalist economy was central.[53] Wages for Housework, active in North America and Eu-

52 Angela Dimitrakaki, and Kirsten Lloyd, "Social Reproduction Struggles and Art History," Third Text 31, no. 1 (2017): 1–14.

53 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," Commoner 15 (1971) was a pioneering text that sparked the international feminist movement, focusing on a group of marital tasks such as housework and domestic work – a movement whose interests were much broader than merely advocating for salaries for such work. Feminist groups varied in size and addressed a range of urgencies, including invisible aspects of family work

rope in 1972–77, was an important movement that challenged the naturalisation of care work as unpaid feminised labour under capitalism (Image 12).[54] The movement particularly identified the "multi-faceted, invisible, and unrecognised labour, indispensable and wealth-producing" work as "the hidden face of the wage world, its unpaid flip side."[55]

Image 12: Bettye Lane, Bettye Lane Photographs, 1969–2000s. Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America. © Bettye Lane. Courtesy of Gary O'Neil.

Within the activist atmosphere of the 1970s to visibilise unpaid care work, the series *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79) of the feminist artist Mary Kelly stands as a

and salaried women's work, abortion, medical practices, sterilisation, childbirth conditions, women's health, sexuality, social assistance, family allowances, housing conditions, education, family violence, sex work, and more.

54 Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77* (London: Pluto, 2018).

55 Ibid., 1.

testament to the challenges that women face within an economic system that invisibilises and devalues their caring labour. Over six years, the artist meticulously documented her caring labour towards her son (K) in 135 small units.[56] In *Post-Partum Document* – contrary to the above-cited works of Lublin, Ukeles, Cox, Bosse, Cooke, and MATERNAL FANTASIES – Kelly *removes* herself and her son from the work as subjectivities; their relationship is rendered legible only through their everyday objects and the stains, marks, and scribbles that their relationship of care has left upon them. The work's metrics, diagrams, reflections, annotations, and timetables testify to the non-stop care work that does not allow for delays in attention but rather constantly insists on itself.

The labour of demystifying and challenging the status quo of domestic work through art is continued in the work of Patti Maciesz. The artist and mother, in a spirit similar to that of Kelly and Wages for Housework, tracks her unpaid labour and produces watercolour charts as tangible manifestations of this labour.[57] For the work *Fax the Patriarchy* (2017; Image 13), Maciesz faxed these invoices and timesheets to every local and state official in California as well as to the federal government. "So far I've sent over 1,000 faxes – every member of the lower and upper chambers of Congress with a fax number has received one," the artist states, "with a plea for universal child care."[58] Maciesz also produced on open-source online tool for tracking one's own unpaid labour.[59]

While this approach could be argued as taking the Wages for Housework's proclamations too literally – as suggested by the political theorist and writer Sophie Lewis in *Full Surrogacy Now* and the feminist activist and philosopher Silvia Federici in *Wages against Housework* – Maciesz's work sparks provocation and showcases the

56 Mary Kelly, "Postpartum Documents 1973–79," artist's website, accessed February 24, 2024, https://www.marykellyartist.com/post-partum-document-1973-79.

57 Another contemporary example of an artist who includes her children and their care relationship in her works is Lenka Clayton, with her pieces *Maternity Leave* (2011), *63 Objects Taken from my Son's Mouth* (2011–12), and *The Distance I Can Be from my Son (Supermarket)* (2013). See the artist's website at https://www.lenkaclayton.com. Further, Andrea Francke's *Invisible Spaces of Parenthood* (2012) serves as a contemporary example of an exhibition, publication, and discursive programme, in which the artist not only seeks representational visibility for the concerns of parents in the arts but envisions collective action towards alternative support structures. I return to this artistic project in chapter 4 – "Curating with Care: Contemporary Approaches and Challenges." For further reading, see Andrea Francke, *Invisible Spaces of Parenthood: A Collection of Pragmatic Propositions for a Better Future* (London: The Showroom, 2012).

58 Patti Maciesz, "Fax the Patriarchy," artist's website, 2017, https://www.artpatti.com/bill-the-patriarchy-1.

59 Patti Maciesz, "Bill the Patriarchy," accessed November 10, 2021, www.billthepatriarchy.com.

continued artistic and societal urgency to address the unresolved contradictions between capitalism and care.[60]

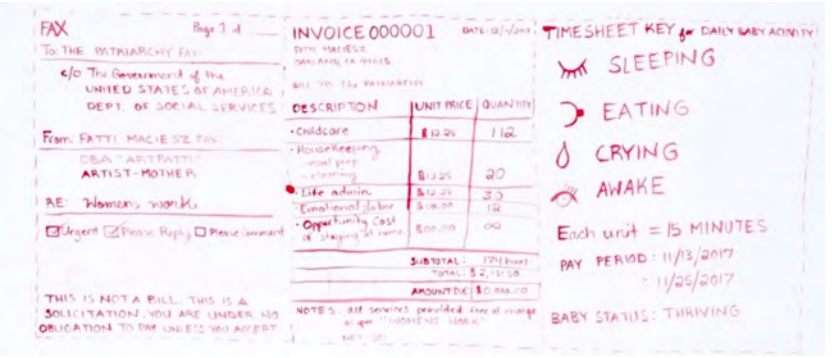

Image 13: Patti Maciesz, Bill the Patriarchy, 2017, performance. © Patti Maciesz.

The intertwined histories of artistic production and the gendered labour of care under capitalism, imposes particular burdens on artists who are mothers. While this research undertaking complicates the notion of care to go beyond the idea of mothering as the primary form of care, the example of mothers in the arts pertinently shows how care is still ascribed to women – seemingly by default. It also highlights how, in a similarly unquestioned manner, the arts and society at large construct mental, social, financial, and physical hurdles to mothers' participation in the paid work force, in cultural life, and in self-determining their representation in the arts.

3.2 Unsettling Curatorial Care: Histories, Theories, and Practices

Given the precarious (labour) conditions of caregivers, particularly those who work in the artistic realm, it is imperative for curators to assess the relationship between care and their professional field. The necessity of challenging one's relationship to care furthermore stems from the etymological origins of "curating" – a notion that offers a range of readings and dimensions: the Latin noun *cura* means "care," "attention," or "concern," hence the verb *curare* – from which "curating" originates – refers to "taking care," "attending to," "looking after," but also "to be concerned," "to worry." This dimension of care stems from the Germanic and Old English *caru*, meaning

60 For the debate on the literal understanding of Wages for Housework, see Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family* (London: Verso, 2021).

"trouble" or "grief," and in the Old Norse, *kör* stands for "bed of trouble."[61] In the present-day German verb *Sorge tragen* ("to take care"), this trouble-related reading of care is reflected, as it literally refers to "carrying worries or sorrow." This immanent tension between protective attention, affective care, worry, anxiety, and burdensome responsibility make not only *care as such* ambiguous, uneasy, and unsettling but also curatorial care, as feminist scholar and curator Helena Reckitt argues.[62]

These tensions around care are also inscribed into mythological accounts. According to some linguists, Cura is also the name of a mythological figure who appears in the *Fabulae* (Myths) by the first-century Roman author Gaius Julius Hyginus. This myth entails the creation of the first human. The goddess Cura creates the figure of a man from clay and asks Zeus to give the figure a soul and a spirit – and her name. While Zeus agrees to breathe soul and spirit into the figure, he claims the figure's name to be his own. When the goddess Earth arrives, she also insists that the figure be named after her – as it was formed from her soil. A fourth deity arrives, Cronus, who takes determined decisions among the gods and goddesses. He decides that Cura may own the figure throughout its lifetime, and after the figure's death, Zeus can stay with its spirit, and Earth with its body. Cronus also gives the figure a name: *homo* (human), due to its creation from *humus* (soil).

Curator and writer iLiana Fokianaki, who has carefully brought this myth into an arts and curatorial context, uses this story to carve out "the dual character of care. Cura forms and 'owns' humans but also carries their burden."[63] In my interpretation, Cura – already in her mythical manifestation – is an ambiguous, flexible, and invisiblised figure who forms the basis of (human) existence but is not granted public acknowledgement (e.g., through naming privileges), from whom modesty and restraint was demanded, and who loses (partial) agency over the fruits of her gestational labours. I thus rather want to foreground the agency to create, the struggle for power and control, and the anxiety of being invisiblised as defining characteristics of Cura. These lessons can be of relevance for conceptions of curating as an ambivalent professional practice.

Curatorial practice, due to its etymology and mythological references, is thus inherently tied to the politics of care, requiring curators to continuously renegotiate the relationship between their own practices and care, gendered norms, affect, hospitality, in/visibility, and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

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61 Helena Reckitt, "Support Acts: Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction," *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 5 (2016): 17.

62 Ibid.

63 iLiana Fokianaki, "The Bureau of Care: Introductory Notes on the Care-less and Care-full," *e-flux journal*, no. 133 (November 2020): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/113/359463/the-bureau-of-care-introductory-notes-on-the-care-less-and-care-full/.

This brief exploration of the different readings and tensions around "curating" and "care" highlights the evolving but also ambivalent character of the curatorial profession. It shows that the notion of care is more complex and troubled than its first association with affect and happy feelings belies. In an effort to "unsettle care," the feminist science and technology scholar Michelle Murphy cautions "against the conflation of care with affection, happiness, attachment, and positive feeling as political goods."[64] She observes an ongoing temptation within feminist scholarship to view "positive affect and care as a route to emancipated science and alternative knowledge-making without critically examining the ways positive feelings, sympathy, and other forms of attachment can work with and through the grain of hegemonic structures, rather than against them."[65] While Murphy speaks from a feminist technoscience studies perspective, her critical stance is of equal importance to scrutinising the non-innocent histories and present-day manifestations of curatorial care. In transferring her thinking from technoscience to curating, I slightly adapt the question from her article "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices" to the curatorial field by asking: "What is the caring work of [curatorial] criticism, of historicizing and situating, of tracking non-innocent genealogies, of making uneasy, of troubling, of unsettling?"[66] In following Murphy's line of questioning, I want to now begin to carve out the troublesome histories of curatorial care, as well as the past and contemporary situating of curatorial care within feminist ethics. Part of this process is a dedication to making transparent these non-innocent genealogies, but also stressing the importance of acknowledging the negative effects of radical care, which not only Murphy but also the Indigenous studies scholar Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and media scholar Tamara Kneese have articulated. The latter argue that radical care cannot be separated from "systemic inequality and power structures, it can be used to coerce subjects into new forms of surveillance and unpaid labor, to make up for institutional neglect, and even to position some groups against others, determining who is worthy of care and who is not."[67] These power struggles over who is deemed worthy of

64 Michelle Murphy, "Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices," *Social Studies of Science* 45 (2015): 719.

65 Ibid. The positively charged connotations around care can become oppressive as they do not allow for a more nuanced and troubled relationship to care to surface; for example, the regret of motherhood is still considered a societal taboo. For further reading on the subject, see Orna Donath, *Regretting Motherhood: A Study* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2017).

66 I inserted "curatorial." Murphy's original statement reads: "What is the caring work of criticism, of historicizing and situating, of tracking non-innocent genealogies, of making uneasy, of troubling, of *unsettling?*" Ibid., 721. Emphasis in the original.

67 Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, "Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times," *Social Text* 38 (2020), 2.

care also manifest themselves within the cultural sphere and its troublesome histories of exclusions. While curator and writer Yesomi Umolu recognises that museums were built as "repositories of knowledge and spaces of care," she emphasises that these spaces were built in service of civic society in the Western world and thus have been, since their inception, spheres of exclusion and privilege.[68] The envisioned betterment of the Western subject and society came at the expense of the other, as Umolu argues. Museums, and curatorial care, thus cannot be separated from the colonial history of collecting and amassing objects from around the world as an act of colonial violence against non-Western bodies, spaces, and societies.[69] Curating as a colonial enterprise took shape through installing museums outside Europe and the US, by introducing the role of the curator in non-Western contexts, and by appropriating – or rather, looting – cultural goods from colonised sites.[70] Here, the question of representation and power asymmetries becomes particularly vivid, as – in line with the academic fields of anthropology and ethnography – the exhibition represented a Western gaze onto "other" cultures and their artefacts.[71] The modern museum, and hence the genealogy of curatorial practice, needs to be regarded as closely linked to nation building, state ideologies, and the heteronormative values of a given society.[72] Yet, according to Umolu, museums have "obscured this violence in their missions of knowledge formation and caring for objects."[73] Rather, as Umolu continues, museums have positioned themselves, including their values and activities, as apolitical, as institutions of civic benevolence, without conscious recognition of their proximity to power.[74]

The history of the modern museum, which arose in the eighteenth century as a result of the French Revolution – the Louvre Museum in Paris being the paradigmatic example – excluded not only the people to whom the amassed colonial objects on display belonged but also women on the European continent.[75] The public museum as a site of celebration of the "free man" turned into "a challenging and un-

68 Yesomi Umolu, "On the Limits of Care and Knowledge: 15 Points Museums Must Understand to Dismantle Structural Injustice," Artnet, June 25, 2020, https://news.artnet.com/opinion/limits-of-care-and-knowledge-yesomi-umolu-op-ed-1889739.

69 Ibid.

70 For further reference on colonial history and the need to decolonise museums, see Shimrit Lee, *Decolonize Museums* (New York: OR books, 2022).

71 Ayos Purwoaji, "Uncharted Territory: The Roots of Curatorial Practices in Eastern Indonesia," *Curatography: The Study of Curatorial Culture,* no. 7, "The Heterogeneous South."

72 Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, Lena Fritsch, Brigit Bosold, and Vera Hofmann, introduction to *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating* (London: Sternberg, 2022), 15.

73 Umolu, "On the Limits of Care and Knowledge."

74 Ibid.

75 Elke Krasny, "Reunindo feministas resistentes: curadoria de salôes e de jantares," in *Histõrias Das Mulheres, Histõrias Feministas*, ed. Adriano Pedrosa, Amanda Carneiro, and André Mesquita (São Paulo: MASP, 2019), 424.

settling institution for women,"[76] as they were not recognised as citizens in France's 1793 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.[77] As cultural theorist and feminist curator Elke Krasny argues:

> Even though women were included in the public space of the museum, they were not included as free women, not as citizens. They were included as onlookers, as witnesses to the celebration of androcentric citizenship culture marked by the exclusion of women as citizen-subjects.[78]

Here it is important to note, that not only women were excluded from this notion of the "free man" in France but also slaves, children, and foreigners, rendering the modern museum a product of White male supremacy. This notion applied not only in the coloniser's countries but also in their respective colonies, where the format of museums was introduced as part of the colonial enterprise.[79]

3.2.1 The Curator-as-Carer

From the contested grounds out of which grew the museum also emerged the role of the curator, commonly framed as a "caretaker of objects." This curator-as-carer figure was traditionally responsible for the museum's collections, undertaking the direct maintenance, care, and repair of objects as well as the necessary research in

76 Ibid., 425.

77 The French playwright and activist Olympe de Gouges crafted the 1791 "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen" in response to the 1789 "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" in order to shed light on the neglect of women in the previous declaration, wanting to assert women's rights as well as men's. For her full declaration, see Olympe de Gouges, "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, 1789," in *Tolerance: The Beacon of the Enlightenment*, ed. Caroline Warman (Cambridge: JSTOR Open Book Classics, 2016). To provide further contextualisation: A new version of the "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen," penned in 1793, was a significant political document during the French Revolution. It was intended to establish the fundamental rights and principles of the French republic and was a precursor to the country's first republican constitution. One of the main differences between the 1793 declaration and the earlier "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" of 1789 is the former's emphasis on equality. In the 1793 version, equality is the prevailing right. Although the 1793 declaration did not have a lasting impact due to its suspension, it remains an important historical document that reflects the aspirations and principles of the French Revolution. For further reference with a special focus on gender, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

78 Krasny, "Reunindo feministas resistentes," 425.

79 Purwoaji, "Uncharted Territory."

order to best take care of them.[80] Well into the 1960s, curators were regarded as custodians whose main activity lay behind the scenes; the mediation and making public of art were secondary concerns.[81] The character of the curator's original tasks has been analysed to resemble caring, reproductive work with a focus on museum objects.[82] According to Krasny, "[t]his bears strong associations with the invisibilised and feminised domestic labour that takes care of reproduction behind the scenes in private, rather than with work performed in the public realm."[83]

Like Krasny, feminist art theorist Nanne Buurman also foregrounds the analogy between curatorial care for artworks and collections and domestic housekeeping, historically predominantly performed by women in a self-negating manner. Both function as "backstage agencies that had few public merits but adhered to a separation of spheres, in which the authority and autonomy of artists and men was secured by the invisible care labours performed by curators and women respectively."[84] From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the gendered connotations of curating were thus in alignment with the feminised and romanticised codes of conduct for care work, with a shared sense of "modesty, restraint, and the negation of authorship," as Buurman argues.[85] This conception needs to be understood in the context of the prolonged history of the Victorian ideal of women as selfless mothers, behind-the-scenes carers, and desexualised hostesses. As early as 1971, feminist art critic Lucy Lippard argued that it was easier for women to be successful critics, curators, and art historians than to be an artist, as these activities were considered secondary – housekeeping – activities while being an artist was a primary activity, and so considered less natural for women.[86]

Within a curatorial context, this division of spheres allowed for a foregrounding of the artist on the basis of "non-authorial curatorial agency"[87] that prepared centre stage for the (historically predominantly male, White) artist as protagonist. This arrangement demanded the curator "to absent the self," as curator Alanna Heiss elaborates.[88] Along similar lines, curator and scholar Maria Lind critiqued Jens Hoffmann's curatorial role at the 2011 Istanbul Film Festival, whereby, according to Lind,

80 Elke Krasny, "Caring Activism. Assembly, Collection, and the Museum," *Collecting in Time* (2017), 3, https://collecting-in-time.gfzk.de/en. Published in conjunction with the symposium of the same title, GfZK – Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig, March 30–31, 2017.

81 Nanne Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13)," *OnCurating*, no. 29 (May 2016): 146.

82 Krasny, "Caring Activism," 3.

83 Ibid.

84 Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube?," 146.

85 Ibid.

86 Julia Bryan-Wilson, quoted in Reckitt, "Support Acts."

87 Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube," 146.

88 Alanna Heiss, quoted in ibid.

his curatorial methodology overrode the art.[89] This notion is echoed in curator Hans Ulrich Obrist's self-proclamation as an *enabler* of artists' unrealised dream projects: "My role is to help them," he argues, and the artists' work should not have to subordinate itself to the curators vision.[90] His seemingly modest emphasis on being a "helper" appears almost ironic once it is cross-read with his alleged "star curator" status and his not-so-modest reputation as a global art world jet-setter.[91] This perspective makes clear that the voluntary *choice* to modestly position oneself in the backstage is a (White, male) privilege.

It is thus imperative to critically analyse and stress how curatorial care and affect operate in association with different gendered connotations. As Reckitt has demonstrated, the associations of care and affect have very different impacts depending on the social status and gender of the curator.[92] While women dominate the curatorial field, they are subjected to an asymmetrical pyramid of power in the operation of museums, according to the feminist scholar Katy Deepwell.[93] In this system, the positions at the top of the pyramid are predominantly held by (White) men, and the lower ranks are reserved for women, who are continuously rendered as the "keepers of culture" (rather than cultural producers).[94] Women's positions in the art sector are often those of the assistant, the "hostess," or the intern – positions that are most frequently invisible, temporary, or replaceable. As their (informal) job descriptions include affective abilities, their "love" of the arts forms the paradoxical basis for their un- or underpaid status. This status is further entrenched by an emphasis on modesty and reserve, which justifies the "sacrifice of wealth and fame," which, again, can be linked to the high proportion of women curators.[95] This reality is mirrored in em-

89 Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, "Conversation: To Show or Not to Show," Mousse Magazine, December 2011.

90 The full quote reads: "But for me, it was important to be close to artists and not subordinate their work to the curator's vision. I've realised that the curator's role is more that of enabler. The Italian conceptual artist Boetti told me to pay attention to artists' unrealised projects. Many artists have not been able to realise their fondest projects. My role is to help them." Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Hans Ulrich Obrist: The Art of Curation," interview by Stuart Jeffries and Nancy Groves, *Guardian*, March 23, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-art-curator.

91 Heiko Prigge, "Sagen Sie jetzt nichts, Hans Ulrich Obrist," *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, February 2, 2017, https://sz-magazin.sueddeutsche.de/ein-interview-ohne-worte/sagen-sie-jetzt-nichts-hans-ulrich-obrist-83346.

92 Reckitt, "Support Acts," 10.

93 Katy Deepwell, "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," in *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, ed. Janet Marstine (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 65.

94 Ibid.

95 Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube?."

pirical studies that also show that women in the arts perform a higher level of unpaid labour than men, and when they do receive pay, it is lower than men's.[96]

Here, we can see a clear parallel between the dominant gendered societal narratives that uphold unpaid care work, which operates similarly within the arts. That is to say, the curator's "labour of love" for the art is considered their reward. The artist and theorist Hito Steyerl draws these parallels:

> I'd guess that – apart from domestic and care work – art is the industry with the most unpaid labor around. It sustains itself on the time and energy of unpaid interns and self-exploiting actors on pretty much every level and in almost every function. Free labor and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going.[97]

The result is neoliberal self-exploitation, which in itself relies on social privilege, as, paradoxically, only those from wealthy family backgrounds can *afford* to work for free or low pay.[98] This scenario disproportionally affects women, who are historically and socially conditioned to self-exploit in the name of love and passion for their work. This feminised brigade of precarious-yet-privileged art workers contributes to the cultural sphere of "dark matter," by entertaining the hope for future payouts in the form of recommendations, contacts, and networks that will eventually lead to secure employment at prestigious art institutions. In the meantime, they rely on affective renumeration as a substitute for financial reward.[99] Capitalism's tendency for speculation does not leave the arts out of the equation, as the art theorist Marina Vishmidt makes clear:

> Besides artistic work – whether it is recognized as "labor" or not – unpaid labor in the cultural sector (typically internships, as well as the more humdrum self-exploitation characteristic of this work) is paradigmatic of speculation as a mode

96 BBK Berlin in its 2018 study identified that women artists in Berlin on average earn 28 percent less than men artists (notice how familiar "women artists" sounds compared to "men artists"). For the city of London, the survey *Create London 2015* identified that 32 percent of women were likely to have done unpaid internships compared to 23 percent of men. Create London, *Survey: Create London*, 2015, http://www.createlondon.org/panic/survey/; BBK Berlin, "Gender Pay Gap / Gender Show Gap in der Bildenden Kunst," *3. Fördersummit des BBK Berlin*, 2018, https://www.bbk-berlin.de/sites/default/files/2020-01/bbk%20berlin%20Fact-Sheet%20Gender%20Gap.pdf.

97 Hito Steyerl, "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy," *e-flux Journal*, no. 21 (December 2010): https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/.

98 Reckitt, "Support Acts," 9.

99 Emma Dowling, "Valorised but Not Valued? Affective Remuneration, Social Reproduction and Feminist Politics beyond the Crisis," *British Politics* 11 (2016): 452–68.

> of production since this kind of labour is presented as a speculative investment in one's human capital, with its hallmarks of affective excess, self-management, and submissive auto-valorization.[100]

In the art world, the (often female-identified) young artist's and curator's desire "to make it" seems to provide the art scene with easy access to free emotional and affective labour that is necessary to sustain the social relations between the artists, private donors, prestigious audience members, and art organisations. For Reckitt, "deploying affective labour in order to maintain social relations is a key curatorial skill."[101] As a result, the curator's personal charm becomes their "distinctly affective power."[102] However, being associated with care can both increase and decrease artists' and curators' status, depending on their gendered, racialised, and classed backgrounds. For curators, emphasising their care and closeness to art may lead to an increase of affective power, whereas for artists and educators enacting a caring engagement with the general public can lead to a decrease in status. The fragile and precarious status of art educators became grotesquely visible during the pandemic, when their freelancer status precluded them any financial security during the Covid-19 lockdowns or when museums and galleries around the world began to first layoff educators.[103] A spokeswoman for the Museum of Modern Art in New York said, for example: "With the open-ended closure of the museum, there will be no new contract assignments to offer to a group of excellent freelance educators who work on [an] as-needed basis to give paid tours and lectures across New York City, including at MoMA."[104] Such a statement makes clear that, in the case of art-educators-as-carers, an association with reproduction over production becomes oppressive.[105]

Care within the arts, and the curatorial profession in particular, thus has a dual character: it can be both an enabler and a hinderer of status. Hence, the association or rejection of care, hospitality, modesty, or "curatorial innocence" – as Buurman proposes in respect to the figure of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, curator of dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012 in Kassel – is a situation of ambivalence, where intentionality cannot always be located:

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100 Vishmidt, "The Aesthetic Subject and the Politics of Speculative Labor," OnCurating, no. 48 (September 2020): 71.

101 Reckitt, "Support Acts," 8.

102 Ibid.

103 Gareth Harris, "Wave of Museum Educator Redundancies Worldwide Sparks Open Letter," *Art Newspaper*, April 23, 2020, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/04/23/wave-of-museum-educator-redundancies-worldwide-sparks-open-letter.

104 Ibid.

105 Nora Sternfeld, quoted in Reckitt, "Support Acts," 8.

> As a hostess, she [Christov-Bakargiev] was – on the one hand – able to blend into the background like the Angel in the House, while – on the other hand – presenting herself as the main subject of d(13). This oscillation between foreground and background, opacity and hyper-visibility makes it difficult to determine whether this "coy ploy" was a masquerade or mimicry, an affirmation of clichés or their subversion.[106]

This example brings forth the changing and indeterminate notions of the curator-as-carer, and highlights how this historical trajectory of the curatorial profession is revived and complicated in contemporary curatorial figures.[107]

3.2.2 Independent Curating: The Curator-as-Author

While the curator was framed as a backstage caretaker within museums until the 1920s, this notion shifted over the course of the twentieth century, particularly after the 1960s, into an idea of the curator-as-author.[108] As part of this shift, Krasny argues that the association of curating with its literal core – care – was actively suppressed, as the belief prevailed that "care as invisibilised and feminised labour does not yield aesthetic and intellectually relevant production."[109]

According to Buurman and the feminist curator and scholar Dorothee Richter, this shift gave birth to the curator as an independent exhibition-maker – now aligning with the traditional conception of the (male) sole artist-as-genius – and marked a trend towards the "masculinization of curating."[110] In this light, the hierarchical and discriminatory connotations connected to curating's etymological root are hard to negate. The curator Kate Fowle notes that, in the English language, "curator" refers to "guardian" or "overseer," implying that "a curator is someone who presides over something – suggesting an inherent relationship between care and control."[111] Curator Joanna Warsza seems to depart from this shared understanding when she asks: "How do we overcome, dismantle and change the patterns of the power of selection disguised as care, the authority of judgement, the asymmetry of many relations in the art world and the extractive curatorial attitudes to many artists"? Warsza recalls

106 Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube?," 156.

107 For those interested in understanding the discourses around Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, I also recommend Nanne Buurman, "CCB With. Displaying Curatorial Relationality in dOCUMENTA (13)'s The Logbook," *OnCurating*, no. 33 (June 2017).

108 Krasny, "Caring Activism," 3.

109 Ibid.

110 Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube?," 147.

111 Kate Fowle, "Who Cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today," in Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating, ed. Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York: apexart, 2007), 10.

that, in French, a curator is "la/le commissaire," awakening associations of the police (as in a "commissaire de police"). She argues that instead of guarding general law and order, the curator controls the borders of what is "good art."[112]

This dual tension between care and control is further exemplified in the problematic working relationship between the artist Robert Smithson and the curator Harald Szeemann during documenta 5 in 1972. In this instance, Smithson's critique of Szeemann's curatorial style was co-opted by the curator himself, who published the artist's statement in the exhibition catalogue:[113]

> Cultural confinement occurs when a curator thematically limits an art exhibition instead of asking the artists to set their own limits. One expects them to fit into fraudulent categories. Some artists imagine that they have this mechanism under control, while in reality it controls them. Thus, they support a cultural prisonhouse that escapes their control. The artists themselves are not restricted, but their production most certainly is. Like asylums and prisons, museums also have inpatient departments and cells, namely neutral spaces that are called "galleries." In the gallery space a work of art loses its explosiveness and becomes a portable object cut off from the outside world. […] Could it be that certain art exhibitions have become metaphysical scrapyards? […] The curators as wardens still depend upon the debris of metaphysical principles and structures because they know no better.[114]

In drawing analogies between prisons and museums, between curators and wardens, the ambiguous relationship between curatorial care and control becomes tangible in this excerpt by Smithson. Thus, the curator's emphasis on independence and authorship can come at the expense of care.[115] In the case of Szeemann during documenta 5, his "view focused entirely on himself as author, and he considered the exhibition to be an image of one single worldview," as Richter concludes in her analysis of his self-understanding and self-positioning as a curator vis-à-vis the invited artists.[116] In such instances, the supposedly *cared for* – the artworks and artists – run the risk of losing their voice to the curator-as-author. The ambiguous association of curating with care therefore oscillates between the promise of protection, support,

112 Joanna Warsza, "The Elephant Is Bigger than the Room: Documenta Trouble and Curatorial Responsibility," *Paletten*, July–August 2022, https://paletten.net/artiklar/the-elephant-is-bigger-than-the-room.

113 Dorothee Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers?," *OnCurating*, no. 19 (June 2013), 46.

114 Robert Smithson, quoted in ibid.

115 Krasny, "Caring Activism," 3.

116 Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors," 46.

and affection and this risk of lost voice and agency for the artists and artefacts taken care of.[117]

While artists attempted to overcome this hierarchy by becoming their own curators, it was a mission hard won. Already in the 1960s – roughly ten years before Szeemann's exemplary position of "curator-as-warden" – newly arising artist groups were challenging the existing norms of artistic production, audience engagement, market relations, and social forms.[118] The Fluxus movement, for one, was a dematerialised, social artistic practice that put existing hierarchies in the arts into question.[119] The multiple activities and roles that the artist George Maciunas – the main organiser and chief ideologue of Fluxus – performed, such as organising, naming, presenting, budgeting, and managing public relations, have multiple overlaps with the role of an independent curator, as Richter notes: "his attempts to subsume as a meta-artist the works of other artists under a single label ('Fluxus') recall the role of a contemporary curator."[120] In this regard, artistic figures paved the way for the position of the independent curator, a figure that would emerge only in the 1970s onwards.[121]

3.2.3 Feminist Artists-as-Curators

This period of the 1970s and 1980s was a crucial moment not only for the formation of artist-led curatorial practices but also for the feminist movement within Europe and the US, along with the emergence of dedicated feminist curatorial practices. The latter were initially also put forth by feminist artists, reacting to the lack of representation of women within the exhibitionary complex. Deepwell, in her essay "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," asserts that up until the late 1960s, women artists formed less than 10 to 20 percent of major art collections at large museums and their representation was slowly increasing in the gallery and temporary exhibition sector.[122] It comes as no surprise that much of the early feminist art historical research and efforts to revise canons and put forth feminist exhibition-making was practised outside traditional art institutions, such as galleries and museums.[123] Many of these profound changes within the arts were driven by

117 This passage originally appears in Sascia Bailer, "Care for Caregivers: Curating against the Care Crisis," in Curating with Care, ed. Elke Krasny, and Lara Perry (London: Routledge, 2023).

118 Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors."

119 For more on Fluxus, see Dorothee Richter, Fluxus: Kunst gleich Leben? Mythen um Autorschaft, Produktion, Geschlecht und Gemeinschaft (Zurich: OnCurating, 2012).

120 Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors," 53.

121 Ibid.

122 Deepwell, "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," 67.

123 Sigrid Schade and Silke Wenk, "Strategien des 'Zu-Sehen-Gebens': Geschlechterpositionen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte," in *Genus: Geschlechterforschung/gender Studies in Den Kultur-*

feminists active as artists, art historians, activists, thinkers, and public intellectuals,[124] who were largely left to fend for themselves, without institutional support. Particularly women artists fostered initiatives that the traditional art sector failed to provide:

> The women's art movement emerged through group exhibitions and actions by women artists organized thematically and polemically around feminist issues, often self-organized and not "curated" by others. Women artists coming together collectively questioned the effect of the solo show in the culture industry and instead chose to develop through a politics of collaboration. The artists became their own curators.[125]

Catherine Elwes, an artist-cum-curator, shares how the non-hierarchical, collaborative curatorial methodologies developed by artists in the 1970s, in parallel to the emergence of the feminist movement, aided them throughout the ensuing decades.[126] Their goal was to counter the celebrity status of curators – which would upsurge in the 1980s and 1990s – as a way to maintain focus on the artistic works themselves. Ultimately, they wanted to provide visibility for their marginalised voices within an exclusionary art system. However, the aforementioned proclaimed "modesty" of curators as backstage agents appears in a different light when artists become curators, as they take up curating with their own agendas in mind: "And then of course, because I am not absolutely altruistic in my curating activities,

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Und Sozialwissenschaften: Ein Handbuch, ed. Hadumod Bussmann and Renate Hof (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 2005), 158; Deepwell, "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," 75.

124 Elke Krasny, "Curatorial Materialism. On Independent and Co-Dependent Curating," *OnCurating*, no. 29 (May 2016): 96. In the 1980s in Italy, a relational practice of *affidamento* (entrustment) emerged within feminist collective groups. Research by Helena Reckitt finds that "[a]ffidamento diverges from the second wave feminist focus on horizontality and equality to recognize differing levels of competence among women, which form the basis for female relationships of trust. The adoption of affidamento represented a move away from mass campaigns for institutional reform and political equality in the early 1980s, towards the creation of autonomous feminist culture and interpersonal relationships. It responded to an impasse within feminist collectivity, where the denial of difference led to the dominance of certain voices, the passivity of other group members, and the suppression of desire." See Helena Reckitt, "The Feminist Practice of Affidamento (Entrustment)," lecture, *Affidamento – Creating Feminist Solidarity in Art and Curating*, Migros Museum, Zurich, 2015, video, 38:35. https://migrosmuseum.ch/en/videos/symposium-affidamento-creating-feminist-solidarity-in-art-and-curating-helena-reckitt-the-feminist-practice-of-affidamento.

125 Deepwell, "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," 75.

126 Catherine Elwes, "A Parallel Universe: The 'Women's' Exhibitions at the ICA, 1980, and the UK/Canadian Film and Video Exchange, 199—2004," in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007).

I often use the shows I help to create as an opportunity to make visible my own practice," Elwes admits.[127]

Many of the techniques, procedures, roles, and tasks associated with self-organised artists-as-curators in the 1960s and 1970s overlapped with what curators adapted as independent practitioners at a later stage. While the roles of artists and curators aren't always clearly distinguishable, Richter argues that curators have taken these self-organised artistic procedures and turned them into hierarchical constructions.[128]

In a next step, I therefore want to shift the focus onto the relationship between women artists, exhibition-making, and certain feminist *curatorial* strategies: how they aimed – and continue to aim – to unsettle canonical, hegemonic formations within the arts and what controversies come from these aspirations.

3.2.4 Countering the Canon: Historical Feminist Curatorial Strategies

The activism of feminist artists and art historians in the 1960s and 1970s brought forth a series of exhibitions at large museums centring on women artists. These shows – some of which, in retrospect, have entered the canon of early feminist exhibition-making – include Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris's *Women Artists, 1550–1950* (1976, Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and *Künstlerinnen International, 1877–1977: Frauen in der Kunst* (Women Artists International, 1877–1977: Women in Art, 1977, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin). Both exhibitions shared the radical goal of inserting women into the canon of art history.[129] This same effort manifested itself in the 1980s in the form of promoting "great women artists," presented as a revisionist supplement to the masculine art historical canon. More liberal arts curricula began to incorporate study of the life and works of Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keeffe in parallel to celebrated male artists. However, this intention also fuelled a selective hyper-marketisation in the cultural industry – if not a fetishisation – of these individual women artists, whose images now adorned calendars, mugs, bookmarks, and greeting cards.[130] These feminist shifts within exhibition-making and art history are therefore not without contradictions.

That is to say, the celebratory emphasis on a handful of women artist was another way of cementing the binary conception of gender and its hierarchy, as art historian Sigrid Schade argues: "Thus, women could then assert themselves *because* of their difference, if (or as long as) it did not contradict the respective formulation

127 Ibid.

128 Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors."

129 Deepwell, "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s," 69.

130 Ibid., 70.

of artistry, which remained unquestioned as 'masculine.'"[131] Ultimately, feminist research had uncovered that the stereotypes of the "feminine" formed the binary background that the ideal of the "male creator" needed in order to oppositionally construct itself.[132]

The much practised feminist curatorial strategy of revision falls into a similar trap of cementing masculinist power hierarchies, despite its attempt to crack them. As the art theorist Griselda Pollock argues, "such revision does not grapple with the terms that created that neglect."[133] Or, in the words of art theorist Susan Hardy Aiken, "One might, by attacking, reify the power one opposes."[134] Revisionist curatorial missions thus assume a Western, White, masculine canon as their central point of reference and accept its hierarchies and mechanisms of exclusions as a natural given.[135] Curator and writer Maura Reilly asks:

> Which counter-hegemonic strategies can we employ to ensure that more voices are included, rather than the chosen, elite few? What can we do as arts professionals to offer a more just and fair representation of global artistic production? Should we be working towards a global art history, an art without borders? Should we aim to abolish canons altogether, arguing that all cultural artifacts have significance – in other words, should our goal be a totalizing critique of canonicity itself? Should we be creating new, alternative canons?[136]

These pending questions lead me to scrutinise further the relationship between feminist curatorial practice and counter-hegemonic endeavours. As such, the next chapter shifts from a more historical analysis towards contemporary practices and theoretical approaches, with an aim to contextualise the practice-based curatorial case study at M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung in rural Northern Germany. I then further negotiate these ambivalent histories within the situated context of my curatorial case study, while keeping up the dialogue with wider discourses of the field.

131 Wenk, "Strategien des 'Zu-Sehen-Gebens,'" 159. My translation and emphasis.

132 Ibid., 155.

133 Griselda Pollock, quoted in Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 25.

134 Susan Hardy Aiken, quoted in ibid.

135 Reilly sketches out a range of curatorial "strategies of resistance," which alongside revisionism, include the creation of area studies and relational studies, which aim to install intersectional approaches. For more, see ibid., 24.

136 Ibid., 23.