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# Everyday Rebellions: A Brooklyn Museum Exhibition Asks You To Contemplate

Inspired by Gloria Steinem and Edward Glissant, Catherine Morris' new exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum's Sackler Center for Feminist Art poses complicated questions and asks you to sit with them.



Beverly Semmes. *Chorus*, 1992. Velvet, wood, and metal hangers.  
COURTESY OF THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Really the remit for the show was to highlight new acquisitions," Catherine J. Morris, Sackler Family Curator for the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, explained. "We've gotten several things in the last couple of years that are just great pieces and in thinking about how to show them, I think that's where the idea of the conversations come from. There's several things that we talk about, several things that are unique. Two unique things about the Brooklyn Museum for me, as the curator of the Feminist Center, is, first of all, that we have one. And second, I don't think that the purpose of the Center for Feminist Art is to, as I like to say it when I'm feeling snarky, is to get out the ladies. I don't think that's the goal. I think the goal of the Feminist Center is to think about methodologies that have been informed by feminism. I would contend that if you're looking at visual culture today, you've been informed by feminism. And at its most simple, what does that mean?"

Everyday Rebellions, Morris' latest exhibition opens today, and we met over Zoom earlier this week to discuss it.

"For me," Morris continued, "the opportunity to take advantage of all that the Brooklyn Museum has to offer, in terms of its historic collections, is always a kind of starting point. The Center does not exist as a separate place within the museum; it is very much part of the museum."

The title of the exhibition comes from Gloria Steinem's bestselling book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, and the iconic writer has long been a source of inspiration to Morris, who sees a lot of value in Steinem's words right now. I asked her why that particular book, for this moment in time.

"The title I just found inspiring," Morris told me. "I thought the idea of obviously outrageous acts is something that, for those of us grappling with the reality of the current political moment, doesn't feel possible. I was very taken with the idea of what it would mean, how everyday rebellions are things that we can do, or that do appear, or that are constants for some artists in their works. I have to admit, it was inspirational and it was kind of almost like a riff."

I was curious if there was an intentional connection between some of the curator's earlier work related to Steinem.

"More than anything," Morris continued with a laugh, "I'm always happy to acknowledge Gloria's prescience and precedent. The publication of her book of sort of personal political essays dates back quite some time now. Everyday rebellions for artists often sounds like an overused phrase these days, but this is kind of about the interest in transhistorical conversations. In some ways, for me, it's also this idea of Gloria's words circling cycling back to us in a way that feels pertinent in a contemporary moment. And that's also true of the comparisons we're making in this collections exhibition."

I asked how she got started, what the process was like at the beginning of a project like this. It seemed to this writer like the choices could feel impossible.

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The signature image for the exhibition, Alison Kuo's *You Pick the Moon*, 2024, is powerful, but with so many pieces to choose from, I was curious how this one was selected.

"I think it epitomizes the show in many ways," Morris said. "There's something very poignant about that work that speaks very directly to histories of family, histories of women in a lot of ways, histories of the ways that people in Chinese American cultures live with objects and collect objects and value things that relate to very valuable historical objects. There's something about the way that Alison makes such a gorgeous mashup of all of those components that just strikes me as particularly poignant in relationship to that idea of everyday conversations, but also in the context of Chinese Americans, the sort of everyday rebellion of pushing that value of the more quotidian."

Art can communicate effectively without language. When I write about costume as a system of communication, those thoughts are undeniably connected to the analysis and criticism of more traditional mediums that my early education articulated. When a piece of work is able to communicate without language, when it evokes an involuntary emotional response, we, the viewers, are invited to contemplate the murkier waters of our culture without committing to a position. And this is perhaps an idea at the heart of Morris' exhibition; that we do not always have to immediately respond. That there is value we are missing by not making some time to stand in quiet contemplation. The juxtaposition of past and present, the unexpected arrangements will make you consider things you would not if you saw each, excellent, piece of work on its own. I asked Morris about communication and this collection of pieces, what the group could tell us, or ask us to think about.

"Since last spring when I was working on the show, I became a little bit preoccupied with [Edouard Glissant's](#) strategies of opacity," Morris said. That's something that I was definitely thinking about, the

idea that there are times of social engagement that require big visibility. And then there are other times of social engagement that require you to be able to talk across signs to people who you know you're talking to. I mean, I think fashion is the ultimate example of that historically in a lot of ways, right? And I also think that's true, can be true of art. I think that the idea of strategies of opacity is something that a lot of people have talked about recently in relation to how to have difficult or dangerous conversations with the people that you want to have them with."

I asked the curator what she hoped this experience offers to museum visitors, knowing it is not exactly a fair question. I did want to know what she hoped for, because right now, I'm getting a lot of optimism and hope out of seeing women think and dream big. And that is one of the most powerful, and most important, things that the visual arts do: they remind us what could be possible. I believe that matters.

"Just looking closely at these comparisons and maybe taking the title as an opportunity to kind of think about what each of these comparisons mean," Morris told me. "I think really the goal of most exhibitions such as this is to get people to look a little longer than maybe they would have. And I think a lot of the works in this exhibition for a lot of audiences aren't necessarily transparent."

"I do, in fact, love the juxtaposition with our Dennis Oppenheim piece," Morris told me, "which to me does connect some links. You know, him carving literally through the ice on a lake, a national border between Canada and the United States. And the absurdity of that act and the humor of that act, but also the really pointed critique of what that means. As a conceptual artist, he's also really pointing out, maybe not intentionally, but at some point he's really pointing out the limits of a concept, national border. And I think that that does reflect back on what Sarah Sze, a very complex artist, is also doing with playing with the notion of landscape and what's reality in a period, you know, 50 years later.

I asked if I could clarify what I'd heard, I wanted to be sure, because what Morris was saying felt very vital, connected to a lot of amorphous ideas I've been trying to work out on my own. Was she saying that she'd like people to be okay for a second with an unanswerable question, just to sit with it.

"I think that's great, Morris told me, to my great relief. "And I think that that's often true. Double check. I think that that goes back to the beginning of the conversation with what you started with, with just the idea of when words don't work, when you have to be able to identify and depend sometimes on an intuitive kind of reaction to something. You know, there's a certain belief that you have to be able to have in yourself to make some conceptual leaps, and I think that that often scares people in museums, in the context of art, particularly contemporary art, particularly highly abstract and conceptual art. So, I also think it's really helpful to show people that these artists are also looking at history. This is not happening in a vacuum. And there are precedents that you can turn to and that artists turn to, to begin their own creative process or conversations that they're imagining they're happening in their studios with other artists across time."