

Fort Myers Art:

Guerrilla Girls: Rattling Cages At FSW Gallery



by Tom Hall

On view now through March 23 at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College is Guerrilla Girls: Rattling Cages Since 1985. The exhibition

is a site-specific survey and newly-commissioned, interactive installation.

The Guerrilla Girls is an internationally-renowned feminist advocacy and art collective which assiduously maintains its anonymity while confronting and addressing systemic problems of gender and racial parity in the art world.

Since their formation in 1985, the Guerrilla Girls have done more than 100 street projects, posters and stickers in cities ranging from New York, Los Angeles and Minneapolis to Mexico City, Istanbul, London, Bilbao, Rotterdam and Shanghai. They have also done outrageous projects and exhibitions at museums, attacking them for their bad behavior and discriminatory practices right on their own walls. Of these, their stealth project on the façade of the Rauschenberg Gallery

Whitney Museum in 2015 stands out as a very public and publicized excoriation of income inequality and the extent to which the super-rich have hijacked art.

In this latter vein, the Guerrilla Girls have designed a participatory chalkboard installation for visitor "complaints" and covered the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery floor-to-ceiling with an immersive selection of the group's most notable public art/protest poster campaigns.

According to a piece in *The Art Story*, the Guerrilla Girls' posters in particular were highly effective in getting their messages out. In the words of one



People viewing the Guerrilla Girls: Rattling Cages Since 1985 exhibition at the Bob

photo courtesy www.artswfl.com

critic, their posters "were rude; they named names and they printed statistics. They embarrassed people. In other words, they worked."

Today, the posters are highly valued works of art. But their oeuvre is far more expansive, consisting of billboards, performances, protests, lectures installations and limited edition prints.

But who are these intrepid women? "Our anonymity keeps the focus on the issues, and away from who we might be," the Guerrilla Girls pointed out. "We wear gorilla masks in public and use facts, humor and outrageous visuals to expose gender and ethnic bias as well as corruption in politics, art, film, and pop culture. We undermine the idea of a mainstream narrative by revealing the understory, the subtext, the overlooked and the downright unfair. We believe in an intersectional feminism that fights discrimination and supports human rights for all people and all genders."

Their decision to remain anonymous operates as a poignant metaphor for the experience of women in art. At the time of the group's formation, many art history courses taught at colleges and universities around the world failed to include a single female artist.

But wearing the mask is also liberating.

"Wearing this mask gives you a certain kind of freedom to say whatever

you want," added Guerrilla Girl Frida Kahlo, who adopted the late, great Mexican artist's name as a *nom de guerre* in her honor. "[If] you're a little afraid to speak, put a mask on... You won't believe what comes out of your mouth!"

The subject of recent retrospectives in Europe and a traveling United States museum exhibition (*Guerrilla Girls: Not Ready To Make Nice*) and as guests on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, the Guerrilla Girls have been speaking up and speaking out to demand change for more than three decades. And they show no signs of letting up any time soon.

This exhibition and an adjunct billboard project have been made possible by the generous support of the Diamond District and The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. For more information, call 489-9313 or visit www.rauschenberggallery.com.

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