

Guler Ates / Helen Barff / Sutapa Biswas / Sonia Boyce  
Jemima Burrill / Helen Chadwick / Sarah Duffy / Rose English  
Rose Finn-Kelcey / Alison Gill / Helena Goldwater  
Joy Gregory / Margaret Harrison / Alexis Hunter  
Frances Kearney / EJ Major / Eleanor Moreton  
Hayley Newman / Freddie Robins / Monica Ross / Jo Spence  
Jessica Voorsanger / Alice May Williams / Carey Young

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EJ Major, Shoulder to Shoulder, Contact Sheet I, 2009 (detail)

Liberties  
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#libertiesexhibition

Liberties was first exhibited at Collyer Bristow Gallery  
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## NEWLYN ART GALLERY & THE EXCHANGE

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### An Exhibition Guide

AN EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY ART REFLECTING ON 40 YEARS SINCE THE SEX DISCRIMINATION ACT

# LIBERTIES

2015 marked 40 years since the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act in the UK, a law that aimed to change the landscape of our society. Curators Day+Gluckman have been exploring these themes for their project *A Woman's Place* which questions and addresses the contemporary position of women in our creative, historical and cultural landscape through contemporary art.

Works by 24 women artists reflect the changes in art practice, within the context of sexual and gender equality, since the introduction of the Act. Some artists confront issues that galvanised the change in law whilst others have carved their own place in a complex and male dominated art world. The exhibition presents a snapshot of the evolving conversations that continue to contribute to the mapping of a woman's place in British society. Body, femininity, sex, motherhood, economic and political status are explored through film, photography, sculpture, performance and painting.

Burrill's practice explores creativity within domestic and societal constraints with both humour and darkness. The 'New Model', a film made in 2014, sees the artist dressed as a housewife pass through a car wash, later scrubbed, dried and reinvented as a younger woman. Through different media she explores the characterisation of women in myths and storytelling and is an astute commentator on motherhood.

Sonia Boyce's 'Devotional Wallpaper' was part of a larger project and body of work called 'The Devotional Collection'. Boyce investigated the act of archiving as a very personalised and subjective act of memory. The wallpaper has the names of 200 black British women in the music industry gathered from the general public (see essay). Boyce's multi-disciplinary works look at modes of communication between people or groups.

Sutapa Biswas' personal narrative weaves themes of time and space particularly in relation to gender, identity and desire. Diverse in output, Biswas is known both for large-scale drawings (including works currently in the Tate Collection) and paintings, alongside more recent films. For *Liberties* 'Magnesium Bird', a small and powerful painting, shows the highly charged physicality of birth.

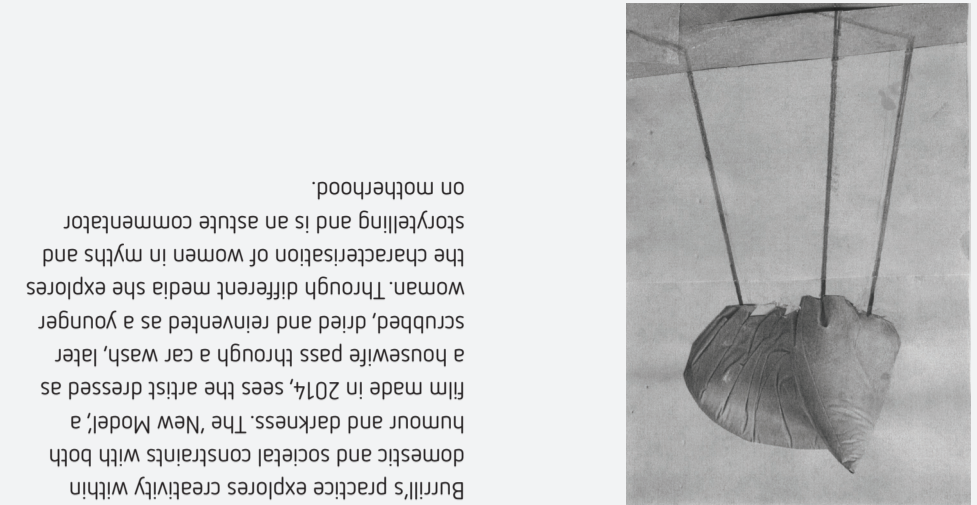
Sutapa BISWAS

Sonia BOYCE

Helen BARFF

Casting the inside of re-stitched clothes with plaster or concrete, Helen Barff is interested in the space between skin and cloth and the tactility of the object. Although determined that having a baby would not impact on her practice, when pregnant, and aware of her changing body and physically, she found that many elements crept in. New work for *Liberties* sees Barff casting the spaces where you might hold a child on your hip or a baby on your shoulder.

Jemima BURRILL



Helen Barff drawing for new work, 2015

Rose Finn-Kelcey is revered as an iconic, innovative feminist artist. Much of her work was ephemeral but some of her photographs and other works have been collected internationally, including by the Tate. The title of her work, 'The Restless Image - A Discrepancy Between the Felt Position and the Seen Position', is self-explanatory and characteristic of the ambivalent nature of art practice. The confident handstand (inspired by an old photograph of her mother as a young woman) belies the possibility that the potential for collapse remains ever present.

Rose FINN-KELCEY (1945–2014)

Rose English has been writing, directing and performing her own work internationally for more than 40 years. Her productions feature a diversity of co-performers including musicians, dancers, circus performers, magicians and horses. These collages from 1973 are amongst her earliest works. They represent her already consolidated interest in identifying, dismantling and reshaping oppressive, predominantly patriarchal, cultural systems. Like many other women artists in the 1970s and 80s she saw performance and its documentation as a new tool for critical activity.

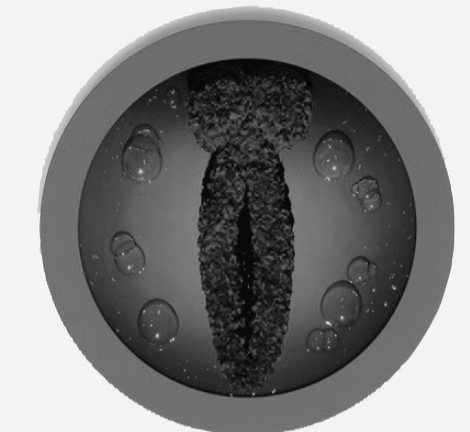
Rose ENGLISH

Helen Chadwick's highly influential work is synonymous with feminist art works from the 70s through to the 90s and continues to provoke and inspire subsequent generations. Vividly coloured flowers float on the surface of domestic fluid in 'Wreaths to Pleasure' (1992–94), part of the celebrated 13-piece series. 'Allegory of Misrule' (1986) a collaged work described by Chadwick as an 'apocalyptic allegory', was based on an 18th century painting and includes Chadwick's own photocopied image alongside projected slides.

Helen CHADWICK (1953–1996)

Sarah Duffy spent a year researching the practice of belly speaking in relation to historical female figures. The practice, now more commonly known as ventriloquism, goes back to ancient historical times and appears throughout various religious texts. Women who were associated with this ability, were often believed to have been possessed or penetrated by male gods and demons. Duffy

Helen Chadwick, Wreath to Pleasure No 8, 1992–1993. Copyright The Estate of Helen Chadwick. Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery



Helen CHADWICK (1953–1996)

Alison GILL

Alison Gill has re-made her piece ‘It’s All Over’ from 1993, which included the artist’s long plaits, sliced off and placed in a vitrine. A work inextricably linked to a moment in time or a rite of passage, the work was sold and subsequently ‘disappeared’. Twenty-two years later the artist is recreating the work, using bought hair, creating a multi-layered narrative on ageing, changing ideas of beauty, femininity and the values of production.

Helena GOLDWATER

Helena Goldwater’s sustained performance practice is represented in the exhibition by images from the beginning of her career through to more recent work, wearing what has become her iconic red dress. Throughout her career this dress has remained a constant as the performances have evolved. The familiarity of the objects that she uses in the performances: hair, milk, ice for example, offer potent moments of exchange and transformation - both actual and psychological.



Helena Goldwater, from ‘Once in a while it’s important to clear out your glory hole’, 1st Venice International Performance Art Week, 2012. Photo Monika Sobczak

Joy GREGORY

One of the major artists to emerge from the Black British photography movement of the 1980s, Joy Gregory’s work engages with the discussions surrounding race, history, gender and aesthetics. Whilst social and political issues are integral to her practice, the work is rooted in the concepts of ‘truth and beauty. In *Liberties* we show two works ‘Kitten Heels’ from the series ‘Girl Thing’ 2002–10: a cyanotype in which the shoes are contorted to suggest pieces of meat, and ‘Hair Grip’ from ‘Objects of Beauty’ 1992–1995, an image recently used on the cover of a new edition of ‘The Second Sex’ by Simone de Beauvoir.

Margaret HARRISON

Founding the London Women’s Liberation Art Group in 1970, Margaret Harrison has been involved in art, action and feminism for four decades. ‘The Last Gaze’ (2013) is an installation of a painting reflected in a cluster of car rear view mirrors. The image, based on the painting ‘The Lady of Shalott,’ (Waterhouse,1894), itself inspired by the Tennyson poem, tells of a cursed woman who can only view the world via mirrored images. The work highlights the historical dominance of the male author and the objectification of women. This work was part of her award-winning presentation for the 2013 Northern Art Prize and was recently purchased by mima following her solo exhibition in 2016.

Alexis HUNTER (1948–2014)

Alexis Hunter was a celebrated feminist artist who reflected on sexism and the politics of body image through much of her photographic works. ‘Suffragette’, a hand-coloured Xerox mounted on paper by Hunter from 1968, is the earliest work on show in *Liberties* and depicts a group of contemporary women in bygone dress, marching with placards, echoing their suffragette predecessors. The concerns of these women of the 60s are writ large on their banners and highlight a women’s movement that focused predominantly on issues of female subjectivity.

Frances KEARNEY

Frances Kearney’s photographs are considered tableaux of complex relationships. Her series, ‘Like Mother Like Daughter’, explores the dynamics of the inter-dependence between mothers and daughters. For ‘Like Mother Like Daughter, III’, the mother, taking some ‘time out’, is sitting on the sofa linking drinking straws in a repetitive act. The elder daughter looks on holding the baby. Do we read this as neglect or as a moment of calm and a creative outlet from the all-consuming demands of childcare? Kearney is non-judgemental, and the spiralling straws, a nod to the famous 1970s land art work ‘Spiral Jetty’ by Robert Smithson, suggests a creative internal landscape that exists beyond the persona of ‘mother’.

EJ MAJOR

Major’s photographs deal with personal identity and the manipulation of image. Major’s series ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’, uses archival images from the suffrage movement and footage of contemporary protests. The artist re-stages key historical moments;

for example when suffragette Mary Richardson attacked Velazquez’s ‘The Toilet of Venus’ (also known as the ‘Rokeby Venus’) with a knife. By using her own portrait in the images Major continues the discussion, personally interrogating motive, and reflecting on the politics of today.

Eleanor MORETON

Eleanor Moreton is interested in the ‘mystery of depiction’ and how the viewer relates to the painted picture. Her subject matter dissects the cultures that produced the original source material from which she works, from genre paintings through to photographs and illustrations. The paintings on show come from her series ‘Absent Friends’, a personal homage to the women musicians and writers that the artist admires. Moreton says of the women in the series that: “They are all women defined by their creativity and for whom a public image was secondary, undesirable or troublesome.”

Hayley NEWMAN

Hayley Newman’s work and activism are inextricably mixed. Her performances and crafted objects stem from her interest in the roles of the individual and the collective, most recently in relation to current economic, social and ecological crises. For *Liberties* Newman is showing a selection from her series ‘Domestique’, a series of used, donated tea towels, dusters and dishcloths, which she has embroidered at home with trimmings, threads, beads and sequins to become an anthropomorphised mass of faces conveying a range of emotions.

Freddie ROBINS



In 2011 Freddie Robins was commissioned by Day+Gluckman to create new work for *Fifties, Fashion and Emerging Feminism* at Collyer Bristow Gallery.

A drawing from the exhibition has now been realised as one of Robins’ trademark knitted works, ‘Mad Mother’. The work, which depicts a baby projecting from its parent’s head, is shown along with the wryly humorous ‘Bad Mother’, a burlesque voodoo object stabbed with knitting needles. Both works directly comment on the push-pull of creative practice with the demands of motherhood.

Monica ROSS (1950–2013)

Monica Ross continues to be celebrated for her powerful, political performance work. For *Liberties* we have worked with the artist’s archive, showing one image from ‘Monument to Working Women’, a co-performance by Shirley Cameron, Monica Ross and Evelyn Silver in Rochdale in 1985. Also on display is documentation of her celebrated final work ‘Acts of Memory’: solo, collective and multi-lingual recitations from memory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which reached its 60th and concluding performance at the 23rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland on the day she died, 14 June 2013. A collective recitation was held in 2015 at the British Library to coincide with the exhibition *Magna Carta: Law, Liberty, Legacy*.

Freddie Robins, Bad Mother, 2013



Monica Ross, ‘Monument to Working Women’ (Shirley Cameron/ Monica Ross/ Evelyn Silver), 1985 Photo: Patsy Mullan 1985/image restoration B.G. Mills 2005. Courtesy of the Artist’s estate and England & Co. Gallery

Jo SPENCE (1934 –1992)

Jo Spence documented herself, sometimes dressed as others, to process the actions and responses to her politics and personal circumstances. For *Liberties* we show an image from her series ‘Photo Therapy’, and ‘A Session on Powerlessness’. The works acted as visual notes as well as autonomous works and were taken in collaboration with other artists to become part of a larger conversation. Dressed as her mother, Spence dons a headscarf and lights a cigarette. As a woman from the feminist movement of the 1970s, Spence’s generational experiences and politics would have been markedly different from that of her mother. An on-going element of feminism is its different guises and meaning for each generation in turn.

Jessica VOORSANGER

Originally from the United States, Jessica Voorsanger’s work takes the form of interactive installations, objects, performances and events. Critiquing pop culture and the cult of celebrity, the work is entrenched with humour, the politics of identity and mass consumption. Having lost her hair as a result of chemotherapy, Voorsanger turned to images of famous bald men to continue the idea of the ‘imposter’, a theme that she regularly works with. Day+Gluckman selected images by Voorsanger dressed as two iconic male artists, ‘Monet’ and ‘Henry Moore’ from her ‘Bald Series’ to particularly explore the relationship between identity and art practice.

Carey YOUNG

‘Terms and Conditions’ features a besuited female presenter speaking to camera in a welcoming tone whilst standing in an idyllic agricultural landscape, replete with references to the painterly landscape tradition. Her speech appears to discuss the ‘site’ but the text is actually a composite of disclaimers from corporate websites. In the rural setting, the speech seems both absurd and curiously apt. The material for Young’s artistic practice, including the tools and mechanisms used across corporate and political disciplines, critiques the interconnection between economics, art, justice and politics.

Alice May WILLIAMS

Recent Goldsmiths graduate (2014), Alice May Williams tells stories through video, drawing, text, music and installation. Her MFA Degree show work ‘We Can Do It!’ resulted from the ‘googling’ of the words ‘Rosie the Riveter,’ the head-scarved American World War II icon, and the multitude of images that came alongside. She likes to “dip in and out of different social groups, finding the gaps and overlaps in their identifying gestures, genres, colours, codes and languages”, and to identify what it is that makes us part of a group.