



International Women's Day

fair share! Action on March 8th 2022, Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin

Speech by Rachel Kohn & Ines Doleschal

"Thank you very much for coming!

My name is Rachel Kohn and I am, together with Ines Doleschal, the founder of the fair share! action alliance, which has invited you here today for International Women's Day.

International Women's Day was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1975 as the "Day for Women's Rights and World Peace."

World Peace Day: what could be more topical? We are horrified by the war in Ukraine, which casts its shadow over Europe and will mean suffering, violence and displacement for a vast number of people for many weeks, months, years - and especially for thousands of women who are on the run at the moment - often with children, and full of fear, also for their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons whom they had to leave behind. Our sympathy goes to them all.

Claudia Roth, the new Federal Minister for Culture and the Media, called the war in Ukraine an "attack on the culture of democracy." Democracy is a civilizational and thus a cultural achievement that must be preserved at all costs. Free media and independent art and culture are the "elixir of life" as she said.

Today is also **Women's Rights Day:** Women artists raise their voices and demand gender equality for a more egalitarian tomorrow.

So we stand here today because there is still a very big imbalance in museums and state institutions.

In the Neue Nationalgalerie, which last summer reassembled its exhibition collection, there are only 14% of works by women on display, although there were enough women artists in the period in question that could have been collected and purchased then and now, and above all, they could have been shown. However, the museum directors of the last decades, indeed, of the last century, have failed to include works by women artists.

Amongst others, it is thanks to the persistence of an initiative such as the Verborgenes Museum that we can now admire Lotte Laserstein's painting "Evening over Potsdam" as one of the key works in the Neue Nationalgalerie. Five years ago hardly anyone knew Laserstein's name. It is only since the exhibitions at the Berlinische Galerie and Frankfurt's Städel in 2019 that she has joined the ranks of her male colleagues and is now one of the most sought-after modern artists, her works hardly affordable. This clearly shows how the male-dominated canon, cultivated and mediated by the collection curators both male and female, has excluded an important woman artist.

Indeed there are many Lasersteins!

Let's fight together to get them out of the depots!

Why is art history so male-dominated?

Why are gender relations only changing so slowly?

Are exhibitions like "Nothingstoseeness" at the Akademie der Künste in 2021 with 75 internationally renowned artists relevant if only 16 of them are female?

Another example: Last year was the 300th birthday of Anna Dorothea Therbusch, a highly decorated and well-known Berlin painter in her time. How important she was is proved by the fact that even the National Museum in Warsaw and the Hermitage in Petersburg own paintings by her. The Gemäldegalerie, however, is showing just 12 works from its own collection in a side cabinet and calls the exhibition a "focused" anniversary show.

For the opening weekend in December 2021, fair share! had written 250 titles of her paintings on the granite slabs outside the Gemäldegalerie to show that her oeuvre is very extensive. Many of these works could have been borrowed from the Berlin Stadtmuseum, from Neue Kammern in Potsdam, from Schwerin, Rheinsberg, Dessau and other museums and private collections not far from Berlin. The current exhibition in no way does justice to the greatness and art-historical relevance of this Rococo painter. By the way, you will not find a catalogue, a leaflet, or even a postcard of her in the museum store!

We stand here today to demand more visibility for women artists:

With our performance we draw attention to the fact that there are hundreds of outstanding women artists of Modernism who, although they have created an independent body of work, are unknown and unexplored.

All participants in the action have each studied one female artist. Who knows Ida Kerkovius, a painter and textile artist who held a professorship in Stuttgart in her later years? Her male companions Willi Baumeister, Oskar Schlemmer and Johannes Itten, with whom she exhibited, are known to most museum visitors. Who has heard the name Hanna Nagel, whose socio-critical drawings are still touching today? You will also find the name of Dutch painter Charley Toorop amongst the activists. A work by her father has just been purchased by the Alte Nationalgalerie. Why not one of hers?

The participants in our campaign are artists and cultural workers themselves. They are experiencing a time that demands a lot from them. The pandemic has hit particularly hard those who also have to provide care work. Exhibitions, commission and art fairs have been cancelled. The gender pay gap - the difference in income - is increasing and currently stands at 33% in Berlin. The gender show gap – the difference in solo shows - too, accounts for a maximum of one third all over the country and thus also affects the income from artistic work.

Art promotion has many facets. It is not only a matter of supporting women artists selectively. It is about sustainable and structural measures that must be imposed on museums financed by tax money. If more works by female artists from all centuries were purchased and exhibited, if the hitherto male-dominated art canon were finally reset and all curators – both male and female – more courageous and committed, we would have fairer conditions in the art business and not only that - we would have diversity and lots of exciting new discoveries.

Be curious - take the opportunity to ask the 110 activists in pink shirts about the life and work of the "their" artists. Each of them is a specialist and all of them a living encyclopedia of women artists. Let yourself be inspired by the treasure that urgently needs to be lifted!

And let me bring it to the point once again:

WE DEMAND from all political bodies and from the decision-makers in management functions.

*the recognition of the achievements of women artists of all centuries until today

*the gender-responsive budgeting of acquisitions and exhibition activities in publicly funded institutions

*increasing the presence of women in collections and exhibitions, in the contemporary field up to 50%!

*the promotion of research projects and publications on female artists

*the reappraisal and rewriting of art historical publications and textbooks of the past.

We demanded this in 2020 in front of the Alte Nationalgalerie, repeated it a year ago in front of the Gemäldegalerie and stand here today with still the same demands. We need the will to change! It is important! Act: NOW!"