



Issue 01

October 2018

GIRLFORUM
MONTHLY

WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF

GIRLFORUM

MONTHLY

Each month, this newsletter will externalise and expand on conversations that have been occurring both internally and across the networks we are working within. To begin this first issue, we will re-map the context in which this project was founded and the aims we have developed so far.

GIRLFORUM began as an Instagram feed in November 2017. The platform was set up in direct response to a series of revelations around sexual harassment in the art world, set in motion by Amanda Schmitt's significant decision to speak out about Knight Landesman, the erstwhile publisher of Artforum. Over the last 11 months, we have been using our open submission Instagram feed to attempt to build a network of those negotiating the breadth of issues opened up by these events. Meanwhile, we have been producing a base of knowledge via discussion, reading, and research from which we can deepen GIRLFORUM's engagement with the issues at hand.

GIRLFORUM was started with the understanding that specific instances of abuse have been propagated by a system that maintains privilege for those at the top, to the disadvantage of artists and art workers who are BAME/ disabled/ LGBTQIA + / women / working class. The term 'GIRL' in our name is used with irony to reappropriate and reclaim the pejorative sense of the word. We intend the 'GIRL' in GIRLFORUM to be a bracket under which anybody who has felt 'othered' by the current conditions of the art world can gather to listen to and learn from each other's experiences. We have been working with the imperative to produce a platform and network that could operate alongside the important work of We Are Not Surprised and other, longer-standing groups, but with a particular emphasis on examining the difficulties faced by young and emerging artists and art workers. This was motivated by an instinct that the potential for abuse of power is intensified by a heightened sense of economic instability for those at the beginning of their careers. That said, having discussed and developed this position, it is increasingly clear to us that this instability is an economic condition that persists throughout the lives of many artists and freelance arts professionals. With this in mind, we hope to further develop a horizontal, intergenerational network of mutual exchange and support that will allow us to address this scope.

By releasing GIRLFORUM Monthly alongside our Instagram feed, we want to enable more in-depth discuss-

ions that fully explore the politics we want to enact. A monthly editorial in which we hope to respond to the activities of other grass-roots groups, recent events, texts, and exhibitions will be accompanied by an anonymous interview with a young or emerging artist – a strategy that we explain in the third part of this newsletter, 'Artists Anonymised'. The content of these dispatches will (eventually, and dependent on funding) feed into a one-off, square journal published online and in print. As well as a documentation of the ideas and actions that proliferate under the heading of GIRLFORUM and alongside it, the journal will represent a visually and materially direct response to Artforum itself.

On the subject of anonymity, we have discussed at length how much should be revealed about the identity of the current administrators of GIRLFORUM. We have decided that, for now at least, a degree of anonymity is vital in ensuring that we can ask the more difficult questions of institutions and individuals while remaining relatively safe from the possible personal repercussions. It is also crucial that GIRLFORUM is not a personal project – by retaining a level of anonymity, we want to keep the platform nimble and ready to encompass the full breadth of artists and art workers who want to participate. That said, we feel it is important to situate the voices primarily responsible for developing the project so far.¹ The texts in this issue have been written collaboratively by two white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, young, London-based women artists (one of whom is also an art worker) from mixed working class and middle class backgrounds. We mention this to make clear all the points at which our identities overlap with accepted and institutionalised notions of who can be an artist. That is also to say, all the points that could naturalise us as part of the status quo and make us open to complicity in upholding it.

What follows is a tentative thinking around this potential for complicity in extant capitalist, racist, sexist, and otherwise discriminatory agendas, and how we – and the wider art world – might address it. Contextualised by writing from various sources, but arising primarily from discussion, this text aims to be discursive, instinctive, and open to critique and revision. All the texts referenced are given links in the footnotes, so you can trace and examine the sources that have helped to develop the thoughts laid out here.

GIRLFORUM, ART, CONTRADICTIONS

During our attempts to define and expand on GIRLFORUM's position over the last 11 months, we have noticed a pervasive reflection and performance of a Sheryl Sandberg-esque 'Lean In' feminism across the art world, at both the individual and institutional level. The fundamental problem with this brand of 'feminism', as bell hooks notes, is that it 'begins and ends with the notion that it's all about gender equality within the existing social system. From this perspective, the structures of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy need not be challenged.'² Too often, what passes for feminism in the art world seems to be limited to a temporary increase of (white) women on the surface of structures that remain fundamentally unchanged – maybe a few more women artists in the programme, a 'special' issue of a magazine, or a 'dedicated' section of an art fair.

This recourse to a non-transformative brand of (white) feminism seems to be underpinned by an art world that appears well bonded to neoliberal modes of thinking. A recasting of the traditional 'artist-genius' along these lines has set up a landscape in which factors including race, gender, and class are positioned as individual hurdles to be overcome, or (where they can be made profitable) as 'USPs' rather than sites of imbalance to be addressed and redressed collectively. Meanwhile, the individualist mindsets demanded and cultivated by capitalist narratives of competition and success appear to have eroded the idea of refusal as a political tool from the collective consciousness. In light of this, the question we have begun to frame for ourselves is this: how can we instead collectively 'lean out' to help reignite a shared refusal to participate on these terms?

In an art world that presumes its politics to be innately progressive,³ it is crucial to take a rigorously structural view of the inequalities and abuses of power left unchecked by this assumption. An intersectional understanding provides a much-needed framework for this. Reviewing the term 'intersectionality' over twenty years after she coined it, Kimberlé Crenshaw summarises it as being 'a lens through which you can see where the power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.'⁴ Intersectionality understands the cumulative effects of discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and other factors to be bound up in the same systems of power. Since contemporary art sits, as Phoebe Cripps says, 'at the bleeding edge of capitalism' as 'a commodity both complicit and contestable',⁵ clearly money (i.e. the generation and protection of capital for those 'at the top') is a deep source of power and control. In this text, we will track how a resulting individualist, isolationist, and competitive logic maintains inequalities at all levels of the art world – and how these conditions can be resisted.

NEOLIBERALISM, THE ART WORLD, THE SPICE GIRLS (AND US)

While fleshing out our instincts about capitalist working practices and the art world, we came across an article in which Morgan Quaintance identifies a synchronicity between a series of events: the introduction (in 1992) of a Conservative policy that allowed private contractors to manage public infrastructure projects, an increasing interaction between art world structures and private finance (throughout the 1990s) and the first issue of that contemporary art world monolith, *Frieze* (1991).⁶ According to Quaintance, this coincidence marked a merging of the art world and the neoliberal values of the economic systems it had become reliant on. To this timeline we added: 1) ourselves (born 1992 and 1993) and 2) the formation of the Spice Girls and their popularisation of the term 'Girl Power' (1994). Through these *initially* slightly flippant additions we realised two things: 1) the extent of our own naturalisation into the (art) world under these conditions and 2) the clear and pervasive diffusion of neoliberal values as a phenomenon in culture as well as politics – specifically, one that represented a conservative appropriation of feminism.

To document a short history of 'Girl Power', the phrase was coopted by the Spice Girls from its origins in the feminist punk Riot Grrrl scene earlier in the 1990s. In its original iteration, it was part of a fight-back against an anti-feminist backlash in the late 80s and early 90s. By 1996, however, the cooption was thoroughly complete: in an interview with the *Spectator*, Ginger Spice stated 'We Spice Girls are true Thatcherites [...] Thatcher was the first Spice Girl, the pioneer of our ideology – Girl Power.'⁷ This was the same Margaret Thatcher who said 'I owe nothing to women's lib.' and called feminism 'poison'.⁸ If 'Girl Power' was Thatcherite, then it followed the conservative/neoliberal ideology of every success and failure being personal, not structural. 'Girl Power' and the political context to which it was coopted perfectly illustrates the potential for feminisms to be reconfigured as individualistic, motivational slogans that replace transformative action and disseminate regressive rather than progressive politics.

From here onwards, we will be assimilating Spice Girls song titles and lyrics into the rest of the subheadings in this text, re-routing the de-politicised language of 'Girl Power' to service our arguments instead



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AppleWormDesign Men's My Favourite Season is The Fall of The Patriarchy Feminist T-Shirt

£4.99

★★★★☆ * 2



Sanfran - The Future Is Female Funny Tumblr Feminist Feminism AF T-Shirt

£9.99 ✓prime



● ●

HotScamp Smash The Patriarchy - Womens Baseball Top

£13.99 ✓prime



● ●

Hippowarehouse My Marxist Feminist Dialectic Brings All TheTo The Yard Womens Fitted Short Sleeve t-Shirt (Specific Size Guide in Description)

£9.95 - £11.95 ✓prime

★★★★☆ * 4



● ●

Hippowarehouse Feminism is The Radical Notion That Women are People Unisex Short Sleeve t-Shirt (Specific Size Guide in...

£9.95 - £11.95 ✓prime

★★★★☆ * 5



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HotScamp Woman up - Womens T-Shirt

£12.95 ✓prime

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'2 BECOME 1': NEOLIBERAL AGENDAS AND ART WORLD FEMINISM⁹

The same scenario has played out more recently with the popularity of 'Lean In' feminism. As we suggested at the start of this text, there are clear similarities between its individualistic smash-your-own-glass-ceiling strategies and the representation-focussed feminism practiced in the art world. Our decision to begin the project of GIRLFORUM Monthly coincided with the release of two editions of e-flux exploring 'feminisms', both of which make useful reading. 'Feminism, Art, Contradictions' by Angela Dimitrakaki has been a particularly productive guide to the need for an uncompromising, revolutionary and active feminism that reconciles its actions in the 'art world' with 'real world' problems. Useful here is the idea that the slow and begrudging acceptance of (white) women into the art world's institutions was turned into the sly diffusion of an important political opportunity. Dimitrakaki asserts that, when demanding greater representation during the 1970s, 'feminists sought autonomy but opted for dependency: in fact, they perceived (creative and financial) autonomy as the outcome of (institutional) dependency.'¹⁰ Because this entry into the institution did not inherently transform it, an opportunity to force the art world to restructure around those it continues to marginalise was missed. Instead, the institution presented a very limited version of the feminist aim of increased representation as one of its own policies; allowing it to appear to be an agent of change while leaving its actual working practices (which upheld this lack in the first instance) unaltered.

In the open letter she wrote explaining why she was compelled to resign as artist-in-residence at the Tate after comments Maria Balshaw made on sexual harassment, Liv Wynter exposes the conflict of entering the institution on these terms with absolute clarity: 'As an activist who campaigns against the cuts to domestic violence services, but also an activist that campaigns explicitly about the erasure of women from the institution, it should be no surprise these words come as a huge slap in the face. I cannot describe to you the personal shame I feel as a survivor of domestic violence, to work for someone who could think so little of me whilst simultaneously profiting off of my 'survivorship' and the work I dare to make about it.'¹¹

Statistics demonstrating the stalled progression of the project of increased representation also speak for themselves. Take, for example, the 13% of the annual Tate acquisitions budget reportedly allocated to buying work by female artists in recent years,¹² or the 28% denoting the number of women artists represented by London's major commercial galleries in 2017.¹³ It should be noted here that the difficulty of finding intersectional statistics for these scenarios also speaks volumes.¹⁴ For art workers, although significant demographic gains have been made for white women working within art institutions, this has emphatically not led

to the same increase for museum and gallery workers of colour, who make up just 2.7% of the workforce compared with 64.8% women.¹⁵ Comparing the percentage of women artists represented by commercial galleries with the percentage of women working in museums and galleries also demonstrates a concrete difference in perception between the apparently singular role of the artist and administrative or supportive jobs within the arts. Between the neoliberal regimes of 'Girl Power' and 'Lean in' and its cooption by the institution, mainstream art world feminism appears to have been moulded into a narrow and toothless presence, rather than being the reactive and encompassing force it should be.

'SHOW ME HOW GOOD YOU ARE': ART WORLD INSTITUTIONS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF PROGRESSIVE POLITICS¹⁶

The performance of a de-politicised, rhetorical feminism in the art world is part of a wider picture of institutions paying lip-service to progression. Morgan Quaintance notices 'a passion for the vocabulary of change amongst those who populate the art world's upper echelons, and a conceptual belief in "rupture", "paradigm shift", and "the turn," but without actual 'radical alteration of the field and the concrete and cognitive institutions that comprise it [...].'¹⁷ We have noticed this affectation acted out in the institutional and commercial tendency towards temporary (and peripheral) programming around issues connected to race, gender, and queer politics amongst others. Rather than coming from within, these activities often only take place when they are outsourced to external groups, becoming a smokescreen that allows institutions to take on a flavour of social responsibility without the structural change to back it up. Outsourcing the work of addressing inequality means that it is often carried out by activists and freelancers rather than salaried employees. This kind of labour, therefore, takes place within a condition of economic precarity. The London-based feminist curatorial collective Electra have also noted a link between this kind of uninvested, surface-level interaction (where it occurs between curators and artists) and a perpetuation of the 'often-violent colonial histories' of museology as an 'ugly remnant at the heart of mainstream curating [...].'¹⁸

There is perhaps no clearer example of how institutions undermine the political contours of their programming than Tate Modern's exhibition 'Soul of a Nation' (2017) taking place alongside an extension funded by (and named after) Leonard Blavatnik, who donated \$1 million to Donald Trump's inauguration committee. As Quaintance points out, this is a 'president favoured by the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, and White Nationalists, who many feel has done so much to legitimize and embolden the far right [...].'¹⁹ In exchange for his money, the Tate conferred on Blavatnik the legitimacy offered

by his status as an apparent ‘benefactor’ of the arts. Against this kind of backdrop, efforts to address social inequalities can only ever appear as concessions, however well intended their inclusion by the individuals who programme them. Without genuine commitment, the marketing of progressive politics as a cultural product of museums and galleries is fundamentally neutralising. When they are afforded space at all, political groups are essentially forced to be complicit in attempts to obscure everything from dubious funding practices to an institutionalised lack of diversity.

**‘TAKING IS TOO EASY’
(BUT THAT SHOULDN’T BE THE WAY IT IS):
INDIVIDUALISM, COMPETITION,
AND THE PREVENTION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION**²⁰

Since leaving art school, we have become increasingly frustrated by the divisive logics of individualism and competition that appear hard-wired into operations within our field. It seems to us to be no accident that a neoliberal emphasis on the individual coincides perfectly with the traditional construction of the artist-genius.²¹ In fact, mythologised configurations of ‘the artist’ appear to have only been rejuvenated by contemporary analogies with entrepreneurship. The artist’s lifestyle, meanwhile, is presented as an aspirational ‘glamourised epitome of self realisation’²² – a fallacy of social mobility which we would like to term ‘The Artistic Dream’. The reality is that this ‘entrepreneurship’ is a euphemism for a disempowering economic precarity.

Framing artists and their actions within this language of individualism directly diffuses opportunities for acting collectively. Angela Dimitrakaki illustrates this with the following example: ‘As a political stance, refusal can only be practiced collectively and with a loud bang. If not, it becomes a *Drop Out Piece* (begun c.1970) by an individual artist – Lee Lozano – more likely to be recuperated and neutralized as an “original artistic vision” by the institution rather than having an impact on the latter’s function [...]’²³ The idea of individual ‘vision’ or ‘genius’ can be used to aestheticise political decisions and empty out their intent.

Individualism also creates the opportunity for exceptionalism to be mobilised as a barrier to the progression of minorities. In the editorial of the September issue of *e-flux*, Julieta Aranda and Kaye Cain-Nielsen note that ‘thinking about how the label of exceptionalism is applied also makes one think that defining someone’s path as an exception is a quick and easy way to make sure their accomplishments are not easily replicable, and that they don’t get absorbed into the culture.’²⁴

The result of this twin logic of individualism and exceptionalism is a constant sense of competition. The charter ‘Code of Practice’, put together after a 2017 seminar in Prague, surmised that ‘the art world is based on a system of competition, in which only those who demonstrate the requisite endurance, ambition, strength,

and assertiveness succeed.’²⁵ We have both found ourselves, 2 years after leaving art school, feeling ‘proud’ to have remained ‘in the art world’ and to still be making work. It is disturbing to us that this feeling is connected to these hostile circumstances and, inevitably, the fact that we have peers who haven’t been allowed to do the same. The ability to ‘endure’ rests far less on determination than on material privilege and your ‘acceptability’ to the systems that sustain you.

Another effect of this model of individualism, competition, and economic precarity is that it complicates the act of refusal. Where actions like Lee Lozano’s are removed from their structural context and deployed in the service of myth-making around the figure of the artist, dubious or compromising opportunities for exposure are also redefined as individual moral choices. Rather than having their presence in the art world (or any world) questioned on the deepest level, they are either seen as tests of moral fibre against which to define your position as an artist, or opportunities that it would be ridiculous to turn down. Whilst plenty of people would choose, ideally, not to participate in these problematic contexts, the generalised instability of being an artist often makes it difficult to do so.

**‘SHAKE IT TO THE RIGHT
IF YOU KNOW THAT YOU FEEL FINE’:
ON ART WORLD CONSERVATISM AS A
RESPONSE TO COMFORT**²⁶

At the time of writing, it’s Frieze Week in London: Art and Capital have moved into their closest alignment, and their conjunction is more visible to the naked eye than usual. In a competitive landscape organised around the themes of profit, risk, and reward that inevitably accompany large sums of money, artworks start to look like stocks and shares being traded.

Artists: if your ‘shares’ aren’t highly valued, or at least being invested in occasionally, your position in the ‘market’ probably feels constantly precarious. And since the market tells you *are* your brand, you probably feel dislocated and undervalued too. If you look like a ‘risky’ investment (that is, you don’t fit the standardised idea of what an artist looks like and what they do) your interaction with the market is particularly unstable. Either the risk doesn’t look like it will pay off well enough for anyone to seriously invest in you, or the prospect of the reward is so exciting they take a gamble – you’re exceptional! If the risk *does* pay off, startups and little companies that look similar to yours or operate in similar ways might also see their share prices rise for a bit. But this is usually a temporary capitalist (ad)venture away from the market’s preferred, low-risk types of company. If you’re lucky enough to be one of these low-risk investments, or you were a gamble that paid off, you might feel fully INCorporated and think of yourself as a fully-fledged company. Perhaps you decide you like being an entrepreneurial-artist-





genius and you like the market – it *works* for you.

Art workers: maybe you facilitate the buying and selling of these stocks and shares, working on the trading floor. Maybe you actually head up a portfolio of companies. Perhaps you write about shares and review their value, or you archive the histories of big companies from the past. You might be someone who educates people about the market, or teaches them how to become a company. Or maybe you do one (or several) of these precarious things while your own shares are out there, too, floating on the stock market. In whichever way our contact with the market occurs, since the outcome of the trading that goes on above our heads (with our assistance) pays our wages,* we are all reliant on it and potentially, therefore, complicit. This means if we find ourselves in a comfortable place, we might also instinctively uphold the conditions that allowed us to get there.

We are being deliberately cynical in removing from this speculation any of the passion, enjoyment or genuine generosity and care that absolutely can and does exist in the field we have chosen to work in. We found it to be useful, however, to demonstrate to ourselves what we're left when these (often all too rare) elements are removed from the equation entirely. Looking at the bare bones of this risk and reward paradigm demonstrates how personal prejudices around race, gender, sexuality, class, and other factors can fit comfortably within a tendency to safeguard profits through 'non-risky' investments. Where it differentiates between known and unknown quantities, risk and reward, the drive to maintain profit and personal stability can absolutely be thought of as aiding and abetting the perpetuation of a canonised understanding of art as a white, male domain.

*(or not – you might also be 'gaining some experience' of some aspect of the market in return for your unpaid labour).

**'WE'RE GOING 'ROUND IN CIRCLES/
TELL ME WILL THIS DEJA VU NEVER END':
HOW THESE CONDITIONS PROPAGATE
CYCLES OF ABUSE** ²⁷

So far, this text has developed the idea of an art world-wide potential for complicity in upholding bias and discrimination throughout the structures within which art is produced, understood, shown, and sold. Here, we will expand the idea that the unstable economic landscape that helps maintain these conditions is *also* tacitly responsible for opening up spaces in which abuses of power are easily concealed. For one thing, economic precarity is bound to buy silence. The art world is full of freelancers, but not so full of HR departments: your decision whether to speak out or not is concretely and absolutely linked to your everyday survival.

The unavoidable metaphor of 'the art world' speaks

volumes about its cognitive disconnect from the 'real world' inequalities that are so clearly built into its structures. It is clear that, however much the art world as a body likes to imagine itself to be exceptional in its unimpeachably liberal values, it continually fails to address the glaring structural inequalities we have tried to capture throughout this text. The art world's image of itself as a special, liberated environment can mean that it arrogantly believes it is also liberated from the need to structure its work places to actively work against abuses of power. As Miya Tokumitsu writes, 'most of us who work in the arts were probably drawn to the sector in some part because working in the creative industries didn't seem like doing a 'regular' job, but rather, a way of expressing and exploring ourselves, letting our creativity take what form it will.'²⁸ In this context, due process goes missing and these self-proclaimed 'liberal values' become a flimsy insurance policy against abuses of power and discriminatory attitudes.

Within this 'special context', a continual blurring of the boundaries between social and professional activities propagates environments where abuses of power have been allowed to thrive. An apparent dissolving of hierarchies at events that fall somewhere between working and socialising can be used to obscure the direction of power and promote the idea that 'we're all adults' here.²⁹ Such tacit refusals of responsibility appear as part of a set of reflexes embedded in social operations within the art world.

The art world's fondness for the concept of the individual artist-genius also creates excuses for abusers. Borrowing the phrase from Linda Nochlin, Elvia Wilk suggests that the "golden nugget of artistic genius" has long been ascribed to male creators and has helped absolve them of other shortcomings. Arty excuses for the abusive behaviour of geniuses often rely on the wacky factor – "he's just socially awkward" – on the provocative factor – "he likes to push boundaries" – or on the idea that one's work and one's private life are separable – "he's an asshole but he makes great work."³⁰

This emphasis on the individual amounts to a fascination with the gloss of celebrity. With echoes of the shiny, salacious veneer lent to #MeToo by the media's focus on celebrity, there is a risk that individual cases are exceptionalised. There is also a risk that the personal sacrifice and diligent work behind the scenes to make it possible to hear these cases is drowned out by the art world congratulating itself for having listened. As with the wider #MeToo movement, it is important to recognise that this is not 'a moment', but the outcome of long and careful work that we should be mindful not to obscure, particularly where it is carried out at the grass roots by minority groups using care and generosity to transform these conditions. We can assume the art world has its own figures like Tarana Burke, whose work as a black American survivor of sexual assault helping victims of sexual abuse was

nearly eclipsed as #MeToo inadvertently appropriated the name of her long-standing project (Me Too) for a discussion that often centred around (an almost entirely white) Hollywood. In the art world too, a focus on individuals and an attention span that matches the cycle of fame can easily propagate blinkered view points from which it is easy for the art community to point to individual monsters (if their behaviour is deemed to be 'bad enough'), but impossible to implement any real structural change.

Between a discussion of the unwieldy, depersonalising 'systems' and 'structures' at work within the art world and the singular abuses by powerful men that become public domain, it is vital that we don't lose sight of the subtle, intimate, and very personal ways individual abuses of power effect us. What happens (for instance) when, while socialising after an opening, a younger, female artist realises that a male artist who she considered to be a mentor and friend has slid his hand onto her inner upper thigh?

Although their lines of control might not be so easy to trace, the exploitation of subtler advantages of power and privilege within tightly meshed peer groups and smaller communities from the grassroots level and up is no less easy to stomach – and maybe even harder to point out. It is essential that the art world's collective idea of what constitutes abuse of power expands to include any and all ways (even at the subconscious level) of using your experience, your position, or a greater level of acceptance by the art world, to undermine the presence of someone with less of these things.

'THE TOP IS SO HIGH YOUR ROOTS ARE FORGOTTEN': REFUSING FROM BELOW³¹

The scale of the task at hand in righting the wrongs of the art world (rather than just un-writing them) can feel vertiginous, or even unimaginable. As a result of (or maybe in spite of) having mapped the convergent structural and individual biases that create the full range of these wrongs, we would like to conclude by developing the idea that they can absolutely be interrupted through collectively sustained practices of refusal, but also kindness, generosity, and solidarity.

Elvia Wilk has suggested that a response to abuses of power in the art world 'might look a lot like a union.'³² Care represents a commitment to transforming working conditions through process, while refusals are effectively strikes. It is significant, of course, that this dual set of actions amounts to a DIY kind of unionisation in a field where *actual* union membership is particularly low.³³ Given that union leaders have identified the 'gig economy' as the main perpetrator of an especially accelerated drop in membership across all sectors in recent years,³⁴ it is unsurprising that this should be the case in an industry built around the work of artists as perpetual freelancers. Why commit when everything

feels contingent and unstable? We suspect that our own non-membership is very much related to the delicate balance of our relatively new existence in the art world – as well as our coincidence with the timeline of neoliberal acceleration, Spice Girl logic, and art world privatisation.

On refusal, Morgan Quaintance writes that 'by simply withdrawing their affective labour, their cultural and symbolic capital, their work from circulation within exploitative inter-institutional networks, artist and arts professionals could reclaim that power and finally torch the tired myth that moral or political compromise is always, at some level, the fundamental structural inevitability of creative practice.'³⁵ The reality is, of course, that refusal is usually far from simple. As Liv Wynter has said, 'there's so much job insecurity in art. [...] we have to fight to get paid. There's so much labour that goes into just being an artist and surviving in the world and that makes us really, really unsafe and it makes us really insecure to talk about stuff.'³⁶ We are hopeful, however, that an increase in collective feeling and support for those who do feel safe or stable enough to refuse will help multiply chances to 'lean out.' As Wynter's own resignation demonstrates, the more individual refusals are spoken about and validated by the community, the more they become evidence of a collective will towards transformation.

What does care and generosity look like in the art world? Evaluating their own practice as a curatorial collective, Electra highlight the idea that 'notions of care, long-term commitment, attention to detail, and slow, well-developed outputs all stem from the socially undervalued realm of unpaid, traditionally female labour (the domestic) in which well-being emerges from process, not grand gestures and bombastic events.'³⁷ This statement reads as a methodology for undoing the assumptions underlying the way our field currently operates: care and generosity are the obvious antidote to competition and individualism. For us, too, the most transformative and helpful moments in our experiences as artists so far have been quiet moments of generosity.

As it stands, GIRLFORUM is an attempt and not a solution. Our project now is to reach out to and listen to other groups and small organisations. Alongside a continued demand for change within institutions, on the outside – at the 'grass roots' – we can all choose to operate as part of a horizontal network that refuses to play by the rules of competition. Without the same cumbersome, monolithic structures as the institution, smaller, informal, and radical groups can act together as a specialised and mobile support structure, capable of paying careful attention to the specific and intersecting needs of its members. By amplifying and supporting individual acts of generosity and refusal, we hope that the intergenerational network we have begun to build within GIRLFORUM can be one group within many working to effect this important and much-needed 'refusal from below.'



ARTISTS ANONYMISED

Starting with the next issue, GIRLFORUM will begin a series of anonymous interviews with young and emerging artists. Every month, a set series of questions will be adapted to the interviewee. By keeping the identity of the artist secret, we hope to initiate an open and useful alternative to writing that either isolates work from the context and realities of its production, or aestheticises the lifestyle of the artist. Both of these approaches inevitably obscure the political reality of who is able to become and remain an artist, as well as overlooking the experiences of artists while they are in the 'incubation period' after art school. This leaves this type of discussion on the fringes, taking place quietly (if at all) between friends as 'admissions' that things aren't going as smoothly as you might outwardly present to an art world that demands competition and leaves no space for vulnerability.

The questions asked will be designed to unpick the tensions of trying to support a practice as an emerging artist – recognising that there is no 'perfect' situation or balance between making money and making work. We will also cover the financial and/or emotional support that has helped the interviewee to become and remain an artist so far. Each artist will be asked how their identity has impacted on their experience of working as an artist, allowing for an outlet for the frustrations of working within an art world that remains structurally capitalist, racist and sexist, amongst others. There will also be no 'artist-in-the-studio' shots, with all the divisively gendered implications they carry with them. We hope the anonymity of this section will allow each interview to come under the collective voice of GIRLFORUM – allowing personal experiences to be accepted as being part of the wider context of the art world.



- 1 We are acting on an idea highlighted by Paola Bacchetta, as discussed here: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/216046/transforming-whiteness-in-art-institutions/>
- 2 Bell hooks writes an incisive criticism of 'Lean In' here: <https://thefeministwire.com/2013/10/17973/>
- 3 e-flux, Transforming Whiteness in Art Institutions, – Petrešin-Bachelez demonstrates that rather than progressive politics, the art world is more usually driven by 'neoliberal progress-driven modes of living and thinking.' <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/216046/transforming-whiteness-in-art-institutions/>
- 4 <https://www.law.columbia.edu/pt-br/news/2017/06/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality>
- 5 <https://frieze.com/article/what-audre-lordes-language-self-care-can-teach-us-after-metoo>
- 6 <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/the-new-conservatism-complicity-and-the-uk-art-worlds-performance-of-progression/7200>
- 7 https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/bn3vq5/girl-power-spice-girls-jenny-stevens-geri-horner
- 8 <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/04/09/margaret-thatcher-the-glass-ceiling-shatterer-who-thought-feminism-was-poison/>
- 9 '2 become 1', Spice Girls, Richard Stannard & Matt Rowe, 1996
- 10 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/205536/feminism-art-contradictions/>
- 11 <https://cargocollective.com/livwynter/RESIGNATION-FROM-TATE>
- 12 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/13/tate-female-artists-museum-diversity-acquisitions-art-collect> (the point that the Tate's collections impact the market is particularly interesting here.)
- 13 <https://freelandsfoundation.co.uk/research/representation-of-female-artists-in-britain-2017>
- 14 As intersectional statistics are so hard to come by in general, we felt it was pressing to highlight the statistics on race and pay (and gender) back in the 'real world' of the NHS that were revealed during the writing of this essay. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/sep/27/black-medics-in-nhs-paid-thousands-less-than-white-medics>.
- 15 <https://frieze.com/article/art-world-overwhelmingly-liberal-still-overwhelmingly-middle-class-and-white-why>
- 16 'Who Do You Think You Are?', Spice Girls, Andy Watkins and Paul Wilson, 1996
- 17 <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/the-new-conservatism-complicity-and-the-uk-art-worlds-performance-of-progression/7200>
- 18 <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29-reader/we-falter-with-feminist-conviction.html#.W7PcPa2ZN24>
- 19 <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/the-new-conservatism-complicity-and-the-uk-art-worlds-performance-of-progression/7200>
- 20 'Wannabe', Spice Girls, Richard Stannard & Matt Rowe, 1996
- 21 Hito Steyerl goes further and connects the artist-genius construction to contemporary modes of dictatorship: 'Post-democratic government is very much related to this erratic type of male-genius-artist behavior. It is opaque, corrupt, and completely unaccountable. Both models operate within male bonding structures that are as democratic as your local mafia chapter. Rule of law? Why don't we just leave it to taste? Checks and balances? Cheques and balances! Good governance? Bad curating! You see why the contemporary oligarch loves contemporary art: it's just what works for him.' <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/21/67696/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>
- 22 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/205536/feminism-art-contradictions/>
- 23 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92/205536/feminism-art-contradictions/>
- 24 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/217252/editorial/>
- 25 <http://feministinstitution.cz/code-of-practice/>
- 26 'Spice Up Your Life', Spice Girls, Richard Stannard & Matt Rowe, 1996
- 27 'Say You'll Be There', Spice Girls, Jon B & Eliot Kennedy
- 28 <https://frieze.com/article/after-metoo-its-time-democratize-art-worlds-workplaces>
- 29 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/feb/15/chuck-close-art-sexual-harassment-pafa>
- 30 <https://frieze.com/article/no-more-excuses#1>
- 31 'Who Do You Think You Are?', Spice Girls, Andy Watkins and Paul Wilson, 1996
- 32 <https://frieze.com/article/no-more-excuses#1>
- 33 Yearly statistics by sector, age and gender can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2017>
- 34 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/01/union-membership-has-plunged-to-an-all-time-low-says-ons>
- 35 <https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/the-new-conservatism-complicity-and-the-uk-art-worlds-performance-of-progression/7200>
- 36 <http://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/39336/1/liv-wynter-tate-artist-in-residence-quit-protest>
- 36 <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29-reader/we-falter-with-feminist-conviction.html#.W7PcPa2ZN24>

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