

'Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947-2016'

# AN ARTISTIC PREFERENCE FOR SCULPTURES WITH COMPLEX INTER-LOCKING PARTS

Much has been written about 'Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947-2016', the stellar exhibition of 104 sculptures, produced by 34 women over the past seven decades. This exhibition launches the international art conglomerate Hauser & Wirth's Los Angeles operation, which is called Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, since former Los Angeles MOCA Chief Curator Paul Schimmel is both a partner and exhibition co-curator.

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With 20 sculptures borrowed from museum collections, 41 from private collections and 43 from art dealers, the overall grandeur of 'Revolution in the Making' confirms this brand's commitment to women artists of all ages and levels of renown. Since 35% of the 66 artists and estates represented by Hauser & Wirth are women, this massive exhibition hits home. Strangely, all of the staging of borrowed works, the presence of rare sculptures by eminent artists, and the accompanying 256-page hard-cover catalog serve to remind viewers just how difficult it still is to lure collectors to plunk down big bucks for artworks produced by women. I imagine that the strategy of making so few sculptures available for purchase prompts 'red-dot syndrome,' whereby paucity encourages desire, as collectors crave what others possess. It just goes to show how much one had better hedge one's bets if one wants to promote women artists.

In my opinion, what really requires a hard sell is the hollow theme of sculptures articulating a 'female sensibility and experience in their work,' contrived by the curators to connect this exhibition's fabulous sculptures. Problem is, for every woman artist who employs a certain 'female sensibility,' whether dangling wire-mesh nests from the ceiling, stacking abstract forms vertically, or casting latex, one can identify a male counterpart with a similar enough practice, which not only challenges this exhibition's organizing principle, but demonstrates the discrepancies lurking beneath most essentialist assertions.

Moreover, the other organizing principle 'abstract sculpture by women' only makes one wonder why the curators ignored Lita Albuquerque, Polly Apfelbaum, Alice Aycock, Janine Antoni, Chakaia Booker, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Judy Chicago, Lygia Clark, Agnes Denes, Lili Dujourie, Maren



'Revolution in the making', installation view, 2016 © photo Brian Forrest

Hassinger, Barbara Hepworth, Ann Veronica Janssens, Patricia Johanson, Agnes Martin, Judy Pfaff, Charlotte Posenenske, Susana Solano, Coleen Sterritt, Alina Szapocznikow, Rachel Whiteread, and scores more, all of whom have produced revolutionary original abstract sculptures. Despite the extreme ambitions of 'Revolution in the Making,' this impressive exhibition manages to overlook some obvious contenders, while overstating its exclusivity on radicality.

## INTERTWINING COMPONENTS

There is, however, a genuine theme linking the sculptures in 'Revolution in the Making,' though

it is barely mentioned. What particularizes these sculptures is not necessarily their abstractness, since there are thousands more art-historically significant abstract sculptures, but some artistic preference for making sculptures with complex inter-locking parts like jig-saw puzzles, lattices, webs, or woven objects. What distinguishes the curators' select set of sculptures is that these sculptors jostled some pretty complicated part-whole relationships. All of the works, except Eva Hesse's 'Aught' (1968), employ intertwining components. These artists seemed bent on transforming otherwise slight materials such as steel and copper wires, nylon mesh, golden thread, metal, or cast polyurethane into enduring objects

by intermingling, tying, bracing, and knitting elements together.

Exploring Ursula von Rydingsvard's nine cones up close, one realizes that each upright conduit comprises cedar fragments leaning against one another. The plush surfaces of Hannah Wilke's elliptical wall works entail hundreds of interlocking latex petals. Jackie Winsor bound branches and logs together. Ruth Asawa suspended mesh objects within dangling woven biomorphic forms. Magdalena Abakanowicz simulated giant rope with twisted cords. Lee Bontecou sewed interspersed fabric scraps to create comprehensive

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assemblages. Lynda Benglis' aluminum pours evoke cascading pools. Heidi Bucher fastened shimmering, wearable sculptures out of fine tulle. Françoise Grossen knotted five red tassels together in a manner that conveys connectedness. Marisa Merz's woven copper triangle mesmerizes as it changes hues. Lygia Pape's nearly invisible corner installation strung in gold silently glistens. Such intricate details abound and astound throughout.

People have roundly criticized the East Gallery for featuring 24 newer works (1988-2016) by eight artists in a snug space that doesn't present artists' best efforts to date. Both concerns seem motivated more by this exhibition's overall ambitions than what's presented. No doubt, South Gallery sculptures receive the most attention, but the freedom and autonomy granted East Gallery installations radiate a greater confidence, indicative of a no-holds barred attitude that is frankly absent elsewhere. Lara Schnitger's figures are kooky, provocative, and titillating, while Phyllida Barlow's carwash plumes marvel and excite. Karla Black presents delectable lollipops of delight, while Abigail DeVille's cut-outs intrigue.

'Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947-2016' until September 4th at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 901 E 3rd St, Los Angeles. Open Wed and Fri-Sun from 11 am-6 pm., Thu from 11 am-8 pm. [www.hauserwirthschimmel.com](http://www.hauserwirthschimmel.com)