

## Art & Exhibitions

# At the Every Woman Biennial, Joy Becomes a Form of Resistance

The Whitney Biennial alternative, now in its sixth edition, is a celebration of women and nonbinary artists of all ages.



The opening of the 2026 Every Woman Biennial, with remarks by founder Christine Finley, standing next to biennial curator and executive director Molly Caldwell; new media curator Erin Ko; and Pen + Brush Executive Director and Chief Curator Dawn Delikat. Photo by Sarah Cascone.

Sarah Cascone

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On the eve of International Women's Day, a line stretched down New York's East 22nd Street for the sixth edition of the **Every Woman Biennial**. Crowds waited up to an hour to enter the nonprofit gallery **Pen + Brush**, where the walls were hung salon-style with hundreds of works by women and nonbinary artists.

I arrived at the VIP opening, bags in tow, fresh off the train back from Washington, D.C., where I had attended the **Making Their Mark Forum**, a conference dedicated to promoting gender equity in the art world. The Every Woman Biennial was similarly born out of frustration with the art world's stubborn gender imbalance. Founded in 2014 by artist **Christine Finley** as a tongue-in-cheek alternative to the esteemed **Whitney Biennial**, it has since evolved into an intergenerational showcase that mixes emerging talent with established feminist art stars while maintaining the scrappy, activist energy that inspired it in the first place.

Back in 2014, before a **Donald Trump** presidency was anything more than a *Simpsons* gag, it was easy to hope that the need for shows pointing out that women are talented artists would soon be a thing of the past. Time has proven otherwise. As speakers at the Making Their Mark Forum stressed, it isn't enough to recognize the role of women in the art historical canon. We need to be promoting women and nonbinary artists working today, and creating new paths in a system that is not designed for them. So yes, we still need the Every Woman Biennial.



EWB Media Artists, She's Excited! and Clara Francesca (XREsemble) posing with Ariana Leon's *Happy Birthday, Sweetie* at the opening of the Every Woman Biennial. Photo: Laurie Rhodes.

## Continued Resistance

During the opening, drinks were flowing and the energy was high, with offbeat performances taking place throughout the evening against a backdrop that included works by **Swoon**, **Mickalene Thomas**, **Michele Pred**, and **Patricia Cronin**. There is also a late-breaking addition by Cronin's wife, **Deborah Kass**. A biennial veteran, she wasn't ready in time for this year's install, but realized after visiting opening weekend that she didn't want to miss out. Kass dispatched Finley to pick up a red and pink neon sign reading "enough already" to add to the show when it reopened on Tuesday.

The work captured a mood that pulsed throughout the exhibition: women are fed up with the patriarchy.

**Indira Cesarine** also contributed a neon work, displaying the word “rebel,” glowing red and reflected into infinity inside a two-way mirrored box. **Airco Caravan** had even stocked the bathroom with her signature cleaning products, designed to help us create a better world—spray bottles of imagined products like “Equal Pay Spray,” and “Ice Crusher Extreme,” which promises to “melt every ICE cop instantly.” She also had cast versions made from solid resin displayed on a pedestal, including an enlarged one for “World Peace Spray” that weighs 13 pounds.



Indira Cesarine, *Pandora's Box (REBEL)*, 2025. Courtesy of the Untitled Space.

“As creative weirdos, right now it is our divine calling to respond to darkness,” new media curator **Erin Ko** said at the opening. “You guys are the resistance right now. You are the ones who are going to keep us going.”



Deb Kass, *Enough Already* (2012). Photo courtesy of the artist.

### **A Platform for Discovery**

Originally called the **Whitney Houston Biennial**, the show started out as a one-night pop-up featuring 85 artists at Finley's DUMBO studio. The focus on women—and its cheeky title—was a hastily organized response to the **2014 Whitney Biennial**'s poor representation of women, who made up just 32 percent of that year's participants. The venue often shifts, and the event has been housed in **Chashama** in 2017, **LaMaMa Galleria** in 2019 and 2024, and **Superchief Gallery NFT** in 2021. It has also staged exhibitions in London in 2021 and Los Angeles in 2019.

This year's hang is curated by **Molly Caldwell**, the biennial's executive director, with Ko and art director **Ash Edes**. It features 275 artists, plus 125 more participating through videos or performances, with ages ranging from 19 to 90.



Founder Christine Finley with her painting at the Every Woman Biennial in New York. Photo: Laurie Rhodes.

“We really try to do intergenerational work,” Finley told me, calling the show “a discovery platform.”

More than 2,500 visitors came in search of discovery over the course of the opening weekend, with the show running through April 11. And despite the biennial’s now 12-year history, many women artists are still in need of this kind of dedicated showcase.

Male artists continue to dominate both the auction market and institutions. And if women want to make further inroads in terms of their representation in museum collections—their work has made up just 11 percent of acquisitions between 2008 and 2020—that has to start with individual collectors, who are the ones donating art to institutions.

Everything at the biennial is on sale, with prices starting at just \$35 for mystery works being sold out of a vending machine. (I scored a lovely little wall-mounted sculpture by **Sarah Walko** with pinecone scales surrounding a blue stone that looks like an eternal flower.) Kass’s neon is among the priciest at \$32,000.



Resin cleaning products by Airco Caravan on view at the Every Woman Biennial in New York. Courtesy of the artist.

## A Message for Women

It's hard to pull out a cohesive theme at a show where the art is stacked four or five works high on the walls, and there's no interpretive text. But the eclectic mix is a big part of the biennial's appeal. At the bustling opening, it was easier to just assume that someone was standing next to their work, and ask them about it.

I met **Joanne Steinhardt** by asking her about the delicate dollhouse-like model displayed on a pedestal in the corner. She built it inside a toilet bowl salvaged from her parents' home, recreating the childhood bathroom she had shared with her sisters, drawing all over the walls over the years. She was showing the work to the daughter of **Kathleen Vance**, who she had met in line bonding over their shared work in diorama.

Vance, also a director at New York's **Front Room Gallery**, is known for her "Traveling Landscapes," which she creates inside vintage suitcases. The miniature scene, depicting the confluence of the Rondout

Creek and the Hudson River, brings nature into the gallery, reclaiming a tiny bit of the manmade environment.

It stood just across from three giant illuminated “trashformer” robots greeting visitors to the show, titled *Three Wise Monkeys*, built from discarded plastic by [SEVINCY](#). The figures are meant to represent resilience, and our ability to overcome the crisis of plastic waste, a message that seems deeply aligned with ecofeminism.



Adelle Lin Yingxi and Young Sun Han, *Soft Upload* at the Every Woman Biennial in New York. Courtesy of the artists.

Some of the work on view was participatory. [Adelle Lin Yingxi](#) and [Young Sun Han](#) presented a surprisingly meditative, A.I.-powered interactive fortune teller work titled *Soft Upload*, in which viewers type their confessions into a neon console. The piece then generates a printed receipt with a customized “ritual of reconstruction” that combines your input with the responses of other visitors. Snippets of those messages, from a prompt about what participants wish to preserve, are displayed on a monitor at the booth’s entrance.

“I wanted to collect the spirit of the audience that comes to the Every Woman Biennial because it’s such a strong feminist vibe,” Yingxi said. “Hopefully by the end of the show, we’re gonna have a beautiful tapestry of what strong, empowered women in New York believe we need to preserve in the world right now.”

This is a critical moment for women in the U.S. right now, as the government works to roll back reproductive rights and even to limit our right to vote, with the SAVE America Act currently before the Senate potentially disenfranchising tens of millions of married women and other Americans. The Every Woman Biennial is a joyful reminder that women will never be silenced, and that we will always find new venues to tell—and celebrate—our stories.

*“Every Woman Biennial: Spectalia” is on view at Pen + Brush, 29 East 22nd Street, New York, New York, March 8–April 11, 2026.*



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