



34 Revolutionary Women Artists Who Shaped Abstract Sculpture Inaugurate Hauser Wirth & Schimmel in Los Angeles

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY JESSICA SIMMONS
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“Why are there not more women sculptors?” asks curator Jenni Sorkin, posing the question to an eager crowd during the press preview of the freshly minted Hauser Wirth & Schimmel. She stands in the sky-lit atrium of a Neo-Classical bank building dating to 1917, which has been transformed into a soaring two-story exhibition space. Sorkin presents her question—which brings to mind Linda Nochlin’s iconic 1971 essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”—to emphasize the social conditions that underlie the surrounding exhibition, “Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016.” One senses that a rhetorical follow-up to this question is lingering among the nearly 100 artworks on view.



Installation view of “Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947 – 2016” at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 2016. Courtesy of the artists and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Brian Forrest.



Bourgeois, Claire Falkenstein, and Louise Nevelson—canonical artists of the post-war era, “the progenitors,” as Sorkin phrases it—as she begins to guide us through the inaugural exhibition, along with co-curator Paul Schimmel, vice president of Hauser & Wirth, and co-founder and president Iwan Wirth. Sorkin reminds us that while the history of artmaking has always been male-centric, sculpture as a medium has truly been a man’s game. She traces this fact to gender bias in skilled labor training (a precedent set in the early 20th century), and later to a general lack of funding, resources, and support for women sculptors. While conceptual and media practices were fertile ground for women in the 1960s and ’70s, sculptural work posed unique challenges. “Men had largely moved on past the sphere of the studio before, we might say, women had ever achieved the right to have a studio,” Sorkin explains, and adds, “or as Virginia Woolf might say, have a room of one’s own.”



Installation view of “Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016” at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 2016. Courtesy of the artists and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Brian Forrest.

Straddling an entire city block, Hauser Wirth & Schimmel—a veritable arts complex—in downtown Los Angeles’s Arts District, which opens to the public this Sunday, dramatically dwarfs the myriad galleries and project spaces that have been steadily peppering the neighborhood. The complex boasts a commanding presence—yet the structure itself has quietly been there for a century. Comprised of a collection of refurbished historic buildings including a repurposed flour mill, the expansive site is a bastion of architectural history that dates to as early as 1896—a rarefied gem in a city of perpetual youth and newness.

Fittingly, illuminating a history that’s been there all along is the resounding sentiment of the inaugural exhibition. “Revolution in the





recounted, male-centric history of late 20th- and early 21st-century art movements



of the 1960s and '70s
Don't Need to Be
Revived

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(see: [Minimalism](#), [Post-Minimalism](#), [Abstract Expressionism](#), etc.). While a thematic show dedicated to women artists has the potential to read as tokenism, by focusing on tendencies towards abstraction in sculpture, and specifically on the rejection of the immaculately fabricated sculptural monolith, the exhibition reveals a provocative assertion that shouldn't be provocative at all: Despite having to swim against the tide, women have been at the forefront of sculptural innovation all along.



Installation views of “*Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016*” at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 2016. Courtesy of the artists and Hauser & Wirth. Photos: Brian Forrest. Pictured right: Jackie Winsor, *30 to 1 Bound Trees, 1971–1972 / 2016*. © Jackie Winsor. Courtesy Paul Cooper Gallery, New York and Hauser & Wirth.

“*Revolution in the Making*” expresses fidelity to the idea of a “room of one’s own”—in this case, a series of literal and metaphorical rooms dedicated to material experimentation and innovation—and in doing so provides a plethora of spaces for the history of ingenuity among female sculptors to take root. Divided chronologically, the exhibition seamlessly occupies several galleries, each of which becomes its own diverse ecosystem. An aristocratic bank room with column capitals and a dramatic vaulted skylight beholds Asawa’s bulbous and intricately





book lab, a pristinely lit space with a studious feel, displays Bourgeois's prints, books, and ephemera as an exhibition within an exhibition.

The show spills out into a sprawling, sun-drenched courtyard, loosely framed by steel beams that appear to orbit Jackie Winsor's sapling sculpture, *30 to 1 Bound Trees* (1971-1972/2016), which the artist recreated specifically for this site. In its laborious monumentality, the work seems to function as the exhibition's conceptual and material compass. Nearby, twin refinished industrial spaces notably house *Augment* and *Aught* (both 1968), two latex and canvas works by [Eva Hesse](#)—united for the first time since the year of their creation—as well as [Magdalena Abakanowicz](#)'s imposing *Wheel with Rope* (1973), and works by [Mira Schendel](#), [Isa Genzken](#), [Senga Nengudi](#), and [Hannah Wilke](#), among many others. Lastly, a raw industrial warehouse with unfinished walls that betray the evidence of their century-long history includes recent work by [Jessica Stockholder](#), [Kaari Upson](#), and [Phyllida Barlow](#).



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Installation view of "Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016" at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 2016. Courtesy of the artists and Hauser & Wirth. Photos: Brian Forrest. Pictured left: [Abigail DeVille](#), *Intersection*, 2014.

By providing the works themselves with spaces of their own, free from the constraints of a patriarchal art history (or at least male company), "Revolution in the Making" adopts a generous stance that exults form, materiality, and process alongside the history of feminism, which allows for a breadth of new readings and understandings to occur, both between artists and generations of artists. [Abigail DeVille](#)'s ambitious sculptural work, *Intersection* (2014), directly challenges *Intersection II* (1992-1993) by [Richard Serra](#). Miming Serra's classic curvilinear structure, she downsizes it to an intimate, human scale and forgoes steel to expose a beamed skeleton, which she repetitively punctuates with drill marks, rendering it more transparent yet nonetheless formidable. As the youngest artist in the exhibition (born in 1981), her material approach and willingness to address the male canon becomes a bloodline shared with the pioneering post-war artists in the opening room.





that of a museum than a commercial gallery—and the complex itself rivals even other area museums in sheer scale. Indeed, a vast number of the works on view hail from other museums, estates, or private collections; such loan agreements remain uncommon in the gallery world. The term revisionist applies not only to “Revolution in the Making,” in its rethinking of abstract sculpture, but also to the gallery’s own institutional function; it blurs the boundary between a gallery and a museum.



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Installation view of “Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947 – 2016” at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 2016. Courtesy of the artists and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Brian Forrest.

Schimmel envisions the complex as an “industrial urban civic space” that embraces an open-door policy of free, unlimited admission, unfettered public access to a community garden and a pedestrian breezeway, and community-centric programming. “Conceptually,” Schimmel states, “building up a cultural community that reaches out to the community around it has been, in many respects, the model that has allowed us to really expand the notion of what a gallery can be, and its relationship to the public, to the viewer, and to artists.”

Generosity is a word not frequently associated with a commercial blue-chip gallery, yet Hauser Wirth & Schimmel seems intent on upending the traditional gallery profile, and in doing so altering the landscape of the city’s arts district as a whole. “This arts district may fulfill something that I think Los Angeles has long wished for and





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—Jessica Simmons

"Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016" is on view at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, Los Angeles, Mar. 13–Sept. 4, 2016.

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