

# Playing to the gallery

How can the art world better represent female artists?

Galleries are showing more female artists than ever. But men still take the lion's share of sales and exhibitions. How can the art world change? And how can you help shine a light on female artists? Sigrid Kirk, a leading player in the art sector, provides five practical tips...

Over the past decade the global art market has boomed.

In 2019, sales were an estimated \$64.1 billion, while transaction volumes hit a decade-high of 40.5 million.<sup>1</sup> Superstar female artists, such as Cindy Sherman and Tracy Emin, appear regularly in the media and at prestigious exhibitions worldwide.

But when it comes to female representation, the figures tell a different story. Male artists continue to dominate auctions, with female artists representing just 7% of total lots sold and 6% of sale values. The figures improve for female artists represented by galleries in the primary (commercial) market but still don't match their male counterparts. Last year, 44% of galleried artists were female and accounted for around 40% of the galleries' turnover.<sup>1</sup>

At a UBS (custodians of one of the world's largest corporate contemporary art collections) Women Forum event the issues and solutions were explored. The event played host to Sigrid Kirk, co-founder of the Association of Women in the Arts (AWITA) and cultural production agency, Arts Co; and curator of Bloomberg's Waste Not Want It initiative.

Over 20 years ago, Sigrid relocated from her native New Zealand to the UK after gaining a master's in art history. "The art market was changing, and it was hard getting a job in the sector," says Sigrid. "So I used the time to understand how the market operates, working for an art shipping company and dealing with galleries."

Armed with new insights, Sigrid set up an art agency and explored the philanthropic and non-profit areas of the art world. In 2016, she co-founded AWITA with Kate Gordon and Katrina Aleksa, supporting professional women with development, mentoring and networking opportunities.

"Many workers in the visual arts market are women – for example, 62% in the global gallery and dealer sector<sup>1</sup> – but this isn't mirrored in the female artists represented or exhibited," continues Sigrid. "Art employees also lack job security because it's an unregulated industry with limited support and practices, such as zero-hour contracts."

Why, despite so many women working in art, are so few female artists represented? "I think the art world is embedded in a patriarchal system, particularly in Europe. I just don't believe that men's art is intrinsically better than the work of female artists."

There are signs the art world is starting to focus more on females: "It's not all bad news. Progress is slow but things are changing. For example, the Tate and Tate Modern now have two female directors: Maria Balshaw and Frances Morris, respectively. There's also a rise of female collectors in Asia, and younger millennial collectors are acquiring a larger proportion of works by female artists."

So, how can the art world go further? And how can you help female artists gain a fairer share of the market? Check out Sigrid's top tips...

## Five big takeaways

1. Represent more females. If you're a collector, look at your collection. If works of male artists far outweigh those of females, ask yourself why and think about what you buy. Acquiring art offers emotional dividends. It's about reflecting your view of the world. Involved in exhibitions? Give women more opportunities to show their work, in ways that highlight their skills not just their gender.

2. Provide networking opportunities. How can you make it easier for female artists to have successful careers? Or support women working in the sector? There are many ways you can get involved. For example, you might set up an association, or provide mentoring and sponsorship.
3. Keep artists in the public eye. Female artists typically need to take career breaks. But maintaining perceptions and getting back on the scene is tricky. Women can also be financially insecure during these breaks, as the sector doesn't provide fixed pay or cover. Technology and social media can help female artists stay in the public eye and remain represented, whatever their personal circumstances.
4. Support artists financially. Artists create and inspire, but they also need to pay their bills and put food on the table. Go to shows, support exhibitions and consider buying more artworks by women.
5. Educate and nurture. Female artists often lack confidence. If you work in the education sector, consider ways to nurture their confidence and offer access to the art world. Providing mentoring programs and inspiring female role models are key to this.

### What do you think?

Have these tips inspired you? How do you feel the art world represents women? What needs to change? And what more could you do? We'd love to [hear](#) from you!

### Get the picture

Want to know more about the current art market and women's place in it? [Download](#) The Art Market 2020 report by Art Basel and UBS. [Find out more](#) about the UBS Art Collection and sign up to the UBS Art newsletter.

<sup>1</sup> The Art Market 2020 report by Art Basel and UBS

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