

## Art Agency, Partners

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**“Am I Surprised? No.”**

**But the grim facts are startling**

in other words    ×    **artnet** news



history does have ways of correcting itself. And at a certain point, historical value and financial value more closely align. And when they don't, markets suffer and collapse. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled (Stripe 2)* (2019). Courtesy Sprüth Magers

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*In Other Words*, in collaboration with [artnet News](#), recently published an extensive, [landmark study](#) about how the attention of museums and the art market on the work of women artists has changed in recent years—or, as became resoundingly

clear from the studies conducted by Charlotte Burns, Julia Halperin and Julia Vennitti—has not changed, despite the extensive lip service paid recently to museums redressing this imbalance in their programming and collecting.

Equal rights have become a false truism in the art world, despite reverse claims that the white male artist has become an endangered species recently.

What was most enlightening for me about the study was how stunned the field was that nothing much has changed in decades. The articles caught on like wildfire. *The New York Times* published an extensive story based on Charlotte's and Julia's analyses, as did numerous other publications across the spectrum, from art to business to general news.

### **The only people not surprised were women artists**

The study sparked lots of conversations on social media while museum directors and curators of different generations (as well as other art journalists) reached out to Charlotte and Julia to express their shock and dismay, many of them leaders in the field and at the forefront of re-examining the history of the art of the past 50 years, with a strong gaze on the art of women.

They thought that progress had been made, that work by female artists has been seen, heard and embraced. Instead, they were shocked by even their own museums' statistics. The only people not surprised by dismal and flat results were women artists, which makes sense. The most silent population, sadly, was men—few male directors, curators or dealers responded (and most of the few who did sought to slam the data).

When I mentioned to Charlotte that I wanted to write an intro about their study for this issue, she suggested I focus on what I found surprising in it. After thinking about it for a week, I have to say: nothing. Even though I was shocked, the grim facts are not surprising. Sad for me, especially, since my mentors—[Linda Nochlin](#) and [Marcia Tucker](#) chief amongst them—were all women, art historians whose focus on the work of women changed the course of art history (which says a lot about the value of art-critical thinking to the market today, as we have addressed in another recent issue).



From a political perspective, I could say that the first wave of feminist artists were too radical in their work to gain mainstream acceptance at the time. Here, Louise Bourgeois' *I do* (2010). The Baltimore Museum of Art © The Easton Foundation/ Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

I could look at this from a political perspective and say that the first wave of feminist artists were too radical in their work to gain mainstream acceptance at the time—even though [Louise Bourgeois](#) or [Nancy Spero's](#) markets didn't take longer to kick in than [Lawrence Weiner's](#) or [Gordon Matta-Clark's](#).

Or I could talk about how the next generation of women artists, such as [Barbara Kruger](#), [Cindy Sherman](#), [Sherrie Levine](#), [Louise Lawler](#), and [Jenny Holzer](#), intentionally, politically, and morally chose to not work in the medium of male mastery (and market sanctification)—painting.

(It is worth adding that the market for male artists who worked in the realms of photography and appropriation, such as [Richard Prince](#), were at the back of the bus until they made paintings.)

But the argument falls apart thereafter. Or maybe it becomes more textured, more driven by strong primary-market activity, and by the increasingly speculative nature of the market for artists of the last decade or two, which is resulting in increasingly wobbly moments lately. And maybe even more for male artists than female artists, though that is a study for

another day.

As I said in one of the study's articles, the work of women artists whose identities burst into maturity in the late 1960s and early 1970s changed the course of art history; indeed, the whole language of contemporary art. Before the women's movement contemporary art couldn't be psychologically vulnerable, personal, diaristic, tender, self-revealing, small, fragile, colorful, eccentric, handmade. But ever since, most valued contemporary art is many of these things. So women's work changed everything in the work of nearly everyone, but it didn't change the market.

Am I surprised? No. I don't think that's what so many of the most significant women artists of the past half a century regarded as their highest value.

But history does have ways of correcting itself. And at a certain point, historical value and financial value more closely align. And when they don't, markets suffer and collapse.