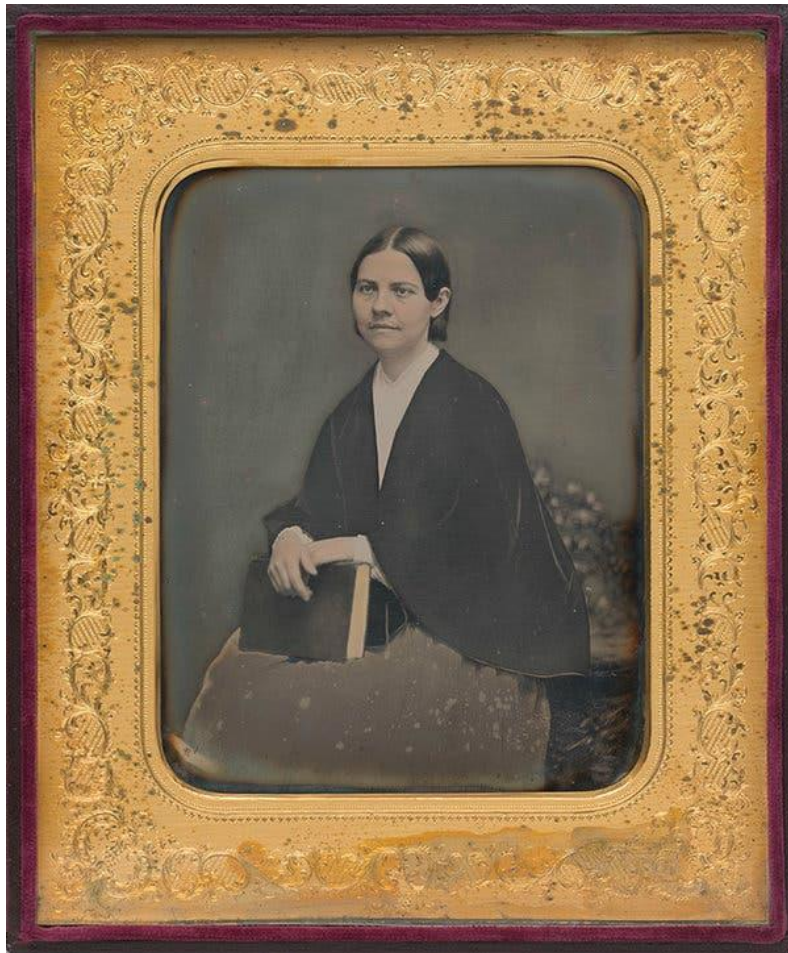


The New York Times

In the #MeToo Era, Museums Celebrate Women

Some cultural institutions are taking substantial steps to address gender inequity and diversity in their programming, their collections and their leadership.



Daguerreotype portrait of Lucy Stone by unidentified artist, circa 1855, part of the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition. Credit...National Portrait Gallery/Smithsonian Institution

By Kerry Hannon

Oct. 23, 2019

WASHINGTON — Her somber gaze is direct, and in her lap, she firmly holds a book.

The circa 1855 daguerreotype portrait of [Lucy Stone](#), the suffragist and abolitionist, is powerful in its simplicity. Not surprisingly, Ms. Stone's mission was incited by the inequality in a society that discouraged women from becoming educated.

The image is part of "[Women of Progress: Early Camera Portraits](#)," an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, one of several major exhibitions in the nation's capital that celebrate women — from the battle for voting rights, spurred by the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, to artworks by feminist icons who embody the challenging issues of their epochs.

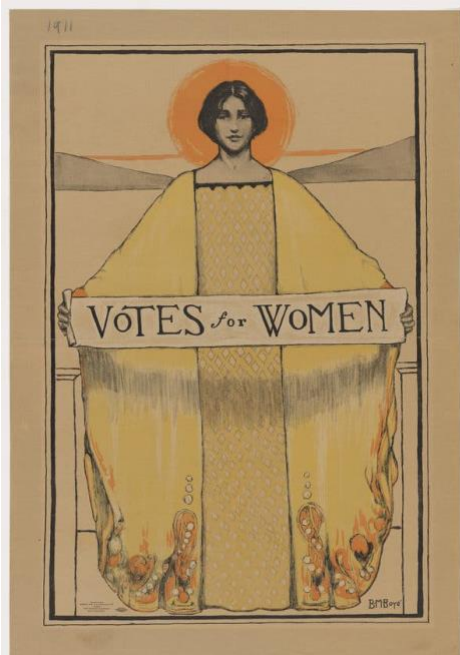
"Considering the longstanding imbalance in museum prerogatives, a convergence of exhibitions addressing women — as artists, as activists, as historical figures — is

notable,” said Susan Fisher Sterling, the director of the [National Museum of Women in the Arts](#).

“In part, this is inspired by the news cycle or the centennial anniversary of women’s suffrage. However, from the vantage of history, it hardly seems enough,” Ms. Sterling said. “It is essential for cultural institutions to take substantial and systematic steps to address gender inequity and diversity in their programming, their collections, and their leadership, so that this conversation moves beyond a single moment.”

Following is a selection of current and upcoming exhibitions here addressing women’s issues.

National Portrait Gallery



B.M. Boye, “Votes for Women,” 1911. Credit...Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University

“[Votes for Women: A Portrait of Persistence](#)” commemorates the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The exhibition runs the gamut from early photographs and paintings to newspapers and fliers, as well as original banners from the National Woman’s Party. It’s organized chronologically: “Radical Women: 1832–1869,” “Women Activists: 1870–1892,” “The New Woman: 1893–1912,” “Compelling Tactics: 1913–1916,” “Militancy in the American Suffragist Movement: 1917–1919” and “The Nineteenth Amendment and Its Legacy.”

There are portraits of Susan B. Anthony and the abolitionist Sojourner Truth, Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for president; Alice Paul, who organized the first march on Washington’s National Mall; and Lucy Burns, who served six different prison sentences for picketing the White House.

“It’s something that I’ve been really committed to,” said Kim Sajet, the director of the museum, who is the first woman to lead the Gallery. “As soon as I arrived in 2013, we made a policy that 50 percent of all the funds we would spend should go to a minority subject or artist, which means that well over 50 percent of the portraits we have collected are of women — now at 53 percent.

“It means, as we have been collecting more women, it gives us more opportunities to put them up on the walls and tell their stories and build exhibitions around them. So many of these stories are just unknown.”

“[One Life: Marian Anderson](#)” explores the life of the renowned contralto and how she became an icon of the civil rights movement. Ms. Anderson sang for 75,000 people on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 after segregationist policies barred her from performing at Washington’s DAR Constitution Hall — the largest auditorium in the city.

The exhibition goes beyond that pivotal performance and examines her entire career, emphasizing her influence on other artists ranging from the Harlem Renaissance painter Beauford Delaney to the fashion photographer Irving Penn.

“It is still kind of shocking to me how few people know her name, or what she did in terms of civil rights,” Ms. Sajat said. “I think it is really important to keep innovating and keep updating our knowledge and our history of women’s stories and their contributions to America. We know that representation matters.”

National Archives Museum



A 1918 photograph of women suffragists with a bonfire and posters outside the White House, part of the National Archives Museum’s exhibition “[Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote](#).” Credit...National Archives, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs

“[Rightfully Hers: American Women and the Vote](#)” conveys the story of women’s suffrage through items such as an image of women suffragettes with a bonfire and posters

outside of the White House in 1918, a gendered “voting machine” patent from Aug. 10, 1910, and a 1916 postcard from the Georgia Association Opposed to Woman’s Suffrage.

Library of Congress

“[Shall Not Be Denied: Women Fight for the Vote](#),” displays items relating to significant leaders in the campaign for women’s voting rights from Susan B. Anthony’s own copy of Mary Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” to personal letters, rare film, photos and scrapbooks created by suffragists.

National Museum of Women in the Arts



Judy Chicago, “Mortality Relief,” from the National Museum of Women in the Arts exhibition “Judy Chicago — The End: A Meditation on Death and Extinction,” 2018. Credit...2019 Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Salon 94, New York and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco; Photo: Donald Woodman/ARS, NY

“[Judy Chicago — The End: A Meditation on Death and Extinction](#)” is a series of nearly 40 works of painted porcelain and glass, as well as two large bronze sculptures, that reflect the artist’s views on her own mortality, compassion and justice. Ms. Chicago is one of the principal artists from the feminist art movement of the 1970s.

“For decades, Judy Chicago has modeled for artists of all genders how to step up and speak out about inclusion and injustice,” said Kathryn Wat, deputy director of arts, programs, and public engagement and the chief curator at the museum.

“‘The End,’ which presents an unflinching reflection on individual mortality and our shared ecological fragility, demonstrates how she continues to fearlessly confront the subjects that many prefer to ignore or deny.”

“[Live Dangerously](#)” spotlights the works of 12 photographers who defy predictable, passive images of the female form in nature. It includes works by Ana Mendieta, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Anna Gaskell, Dana Hoey, Graciela Iturbide, Kirsten Justesen, Justine Kurland, Rania Matar, Laurie Simmons, Xaviera Simmons, and Janaina Tschäpe.

National Museum of African Art

“[I Am ... Contemporary Women Artists of Africa](#)” culls its selection of 27 featured artists — including those who are globally familiar, such as Ghada Amer, Zanele Muholi and Wangechi Mutu — from its permanent collection. The majority of the pieces were acquired in the past five years and have not previously been shown in Washington.

On display are short videos, sculptures, textiles, ceramics, paintings and photography. Since 2014, the museum has been driven to procure more work by women, doubling its works by women artists to 22 percent today.

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery



A detail from the Gohar Dashti photograph “Untitled,” from the series “Iran,” 2013. Credit...Gohar Dashti, via Smithsonian Institution

“[My Iran: Six Women Photographers](#)” investigates the difficulties of life within and outside Iran. Hengameh Golestan’s shots of women demonstrating in the streets of Tehran in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, for instance, seize the spirit of a social and political movement that still echoes.

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