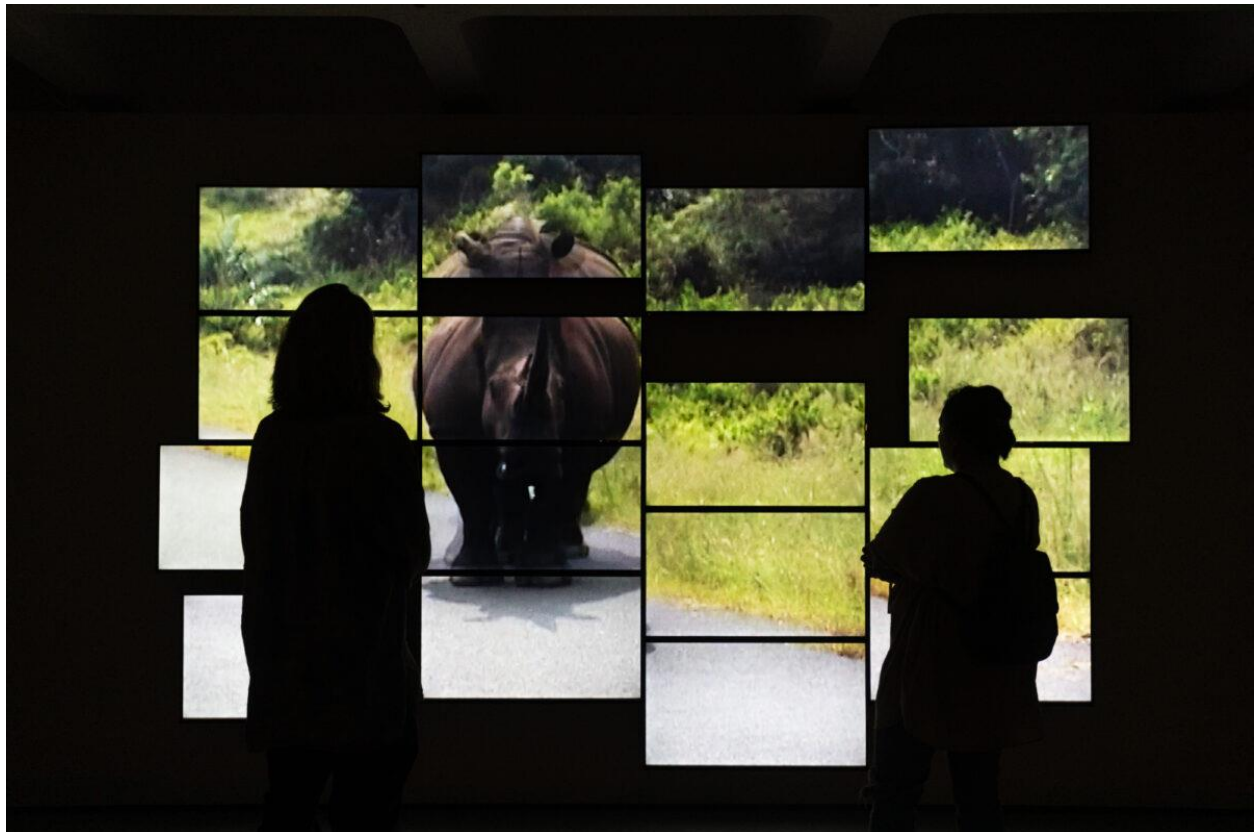


RE/SISTERS: A LENS ON GENDER AND ECOLOGY

By Mark Westall • 5 October 2023

Barbican Art Gallery presents RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology, a major group exhibition surveying the relationship between gender and ecology to identify the systemic links between the oppression of women and the degradation of the planet.



Re/Sisters: A Lens on Gender and Ecology Installation view Barbican Art Gallery 5 Oct 2023 – 14 Jan 2024 © Jemima Yong / Barbican Art Gallery

This expansive exhibition brings together photography, film, and installations by nearly 50 international women and gender non-conforming artists whose work is united across decades, continents, and media by an urgent engagement with, and protest against, the ongoing ecological crisis. Platforming work by artists from the Global Majority and Indigenous peoples, RE/SISTERS explores the indivisible bond between environmental and social justice, offering a vision of an equitable society wherein people and planet alike are venerated and treated fairly.

With women and marginalised communities often placed at the forefront of advocating and caring for the planet, RE/SISTERS offers a depiction of nature that explicitly resists the mechanical, patriarchal order that is organised around the exploitation of natural resources and the oppression of “othered” bodies. Across roughly 250 works, the exhibition presents a roadmap for creative forms of civil disobedience and protest: a lesser explored, cautiously optimistic route to reconsidering our relationship to the Earth and our problematic co-existence with it. Tackling unequal power structures which oppress and threaten both marginalised communities and our precious planet, RE/SISTERS advocates for empowerment in the face of destruction, reflecting a radical and intersectional brand of eco-feminism that is diverse, inclusive, and decolonial.

RE/SISTERS brings together a global array of nearly 50 pioneering artists, including: Laura Aguilar (US); melanie bonajo (NL); Judy Chicago (US); Minerva Cuevas (Mexico); Agnes Denes (US); La Toya Ruby Frazier (US); Anne Duk Hee Jordan (Korea/Germany); Barbara Kruger (US); Ana Mendieta (Cuba); Otobong Nkanga (Nigeria); Ingrid Pollard (UK); Xaviera Simmons (US); and Pamela Singh (India).

Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican, said:

In this era of deepening ecological crisis, we are proud to present RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology, which interrogates the disproportionate detrimental effects of extractive capitalism on women and in particular Global Majority groups. This expansive exhibition, bringing together a truly international array of pioneering artists working with film and photography, will provide a powerful message of resistance in the face of crisis, and furthermore speaks to the Barbican's ongoing work to foreground inclusivity and sustainability. We hope that in contrast to a rhetoric that is often cynical about environmentalism, it offers visitors a thoughtful, optimistic and sometimes joyful way to consider the world's current climate.

Organised thematically, RE/SISTERS is presented across six sections, addressing the politics of extraction; acts of protest and resistance; the labour of ecological care; environmental racism; and queerness and fluidity in the face of rigid social structures and hierarchies. Together, these groupings – encompassing a multidisciplinary range of film and photographic media – cast a new lens on critical issues at the forefront of our collective consciousness, re-framing our thinking around the environment and gender, and emphasising the radical power of care in the face of ecological destruction.

Ecological destruction and racism are two of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. They are also inextricably intertwined: there is a stark divide between who has caused, and continues to exacerbate, climate change, and who is suffering its increasingly catastrophic effects. RE/SISTERS explores this knotty matrix, asking how the commodification of common land and the exploitative extraction of natural resources speaks to environmental racism and a pervasive colonial-capitalist mindset, of which the physical act of extractivism (drilling, mining, pillaging resources) is a key symptom. Poignant works by Mabe Bethônico (Brazil) and Simryn Gill (Malaysia) expose the disproportionate and devastating impact of

these unsustainable practices on local and Indigenous communities, whilst Dionne Lee's (US) collage work interrogates the racialised histories of the American landscape and the profound structural inequalities surrounding land ownership and climate justice. Similarly, Zoe Leonard's (US) powerful series *Al Río / To the River* (2016-2021) examines how the Rio Grande is weaponised in the starkly racist rhetoric around immigration in the US. Mindful of the historic association of the feminine with nature as both a productive symbol as well as a problematic binary, *RE/SISTERS* examines how women at once embrace and This work is presented in dialogue with images and ephemera from Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, including never-before-seen colour images taken by women's UK photography collective Format, who celebrate their 40th anniversary this year. Also exploring the intersection of care and activism will be the powerful film work by melanie bonajo (The Netherlands), *Nocturnal Gardening* (2016), which presents alternative and pre-colonial uses of land in an exploration of political and social agency in marginalised communities.

With a focus on empowerment rather than despair in the face of ecological breakdown, *RE/SISTERS* seeks to encourage a more reciprocal, grateful, and joyful relationship with our animate Earth, platforming works which reclaim nature as a feminist political space and which argue fiercely for the rights of Indigenous and Global Majority groups. Artists explore the use of camouflage and performance to construct dialogues between the body and its environment, as well as troubling the binaries of male/female and nature/culture. Ana Mendieta's (Cuba) pioneering 'earth-body' works are critical to the exhibition, channelling Mendieta's own belief in "one universal energy," whilst Laura Aguilar's (US) series *Nature Self-Portrait* looks to muddy the boundaries between body and earth. Taking the notion of transformation yet further, the exhibition explores liquidity and fluidity in a tender consideration of queer ecologies and hybridity. Anne Duk Hee Jordan's (Korea/Germany) mesmeric film installation *Ziggy and the Starfish* (2018) presents hermaphroditic examples of aquatic life, drawing playful parallels with non-binary identity and questions of gender, whilst the Indigenous queer performance artist and activist Uýra (Brazil) uses their drag persona to transform into a hybrid plant-human organism and advocate for greater environmental awareness in the Amazon basin.

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RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Ecology, 5th October 2023 – 14th January 2024
Barbican Art Gallery

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barbican.org.uk/resisters-public-programme

This exhibition is generously supported by Vestiaire Collective.

Participating Artists: Laura Aguilar (US); H el ene Aylon (US); Poulomi Basu (India); Mabe Beth onico (Brazil); JEB (Joan E Biren) (US); melanie bonajo (The Netherlands); Carolina Caycedo (Columbia); Judy Chicago (US); Tee Corinne (US); Minerva Cuevas (Mexico); Agnes Denes (US); FLAR (Feminist Land Art Retreat) (US); Format Photography (UK); LaToya Ruby Frazier (US); Gauri Gill (India); Simryn Gill (Malaysia); Fay Godwin (UK); Laura Grisi (Italy); Barbara Hammer (US); Taloi Havini (Bougainville / Australia); Nadia Huggins (St Vincent and the Grenadines); Anne Duk Hee Jordan (Korea/Germany); Barbara Kruger (US); Dionne Lee (US); Zoe Leonard (US); Chloe Dewe Mathews (UK); Mary Mattingly (US); Ana Mendieta (Cuba); Fina Miralles (Spain); M onica de Miranda (Angola/Portugal); Neo Naturists (Christine Binnie / Jennifer Binnie / Wilma Johnson) (UK); Otobong Nkanga (Nigeria); Jos efa Ntjam (France); Ada M. Patterson (Barbados); PARI (People's Archive of Rural India) (India); Ingrid Pollard (UK); Zina Saro-Wiwa (Nigeria); Susan Schuppli (Canada); Seneca Women's Encampment for the Future of Peace and Justice (US); Fern Shaffer (US); Sim Chi Yin (Singapore), Xaviera Simmons (US); Pamela Singh (India); Gurminder Sikand (India); U yra (Brazil); Diana Thater (US); Mierle Laderman Ukeles (US); Andrea Kim Valdez (UK); Francesca Woodman (US)