



ART | By EMMA SPECTER | May 23 2019, 9:41am

The Wing's Diverse, Expansive Art Exhibitions Subvert Expectations

The co-working space's art is all by women and non-binary individuals, but don't expect portraits of flowers or babies.

For as long as art has existed, art by women has been relegated to the sidelines of history, a sad truth that the feminist collective the Guerrilla Girls addressed with a memorable question in 1989: “Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?” Thirty years later, the Guerilla Girls and their ilk are still fighting for gender parity, and sexism in the art world is, while perhaps ameliorated for some, still a fact of life for many female and non-binary artists. It was a pleasant surprise, then, to tour an art collection that excluded male artists entirely. (Don’t cry for them: they still dominate 87% of the museum market.)

The art that lines the walls of the Wing’s eight locations is the work of an all-female and non-binary lineup of artists selected by Lolita Cros, the Wing’s 28-year-old independent curator, who brings cool-art-girl cred to the Wing’s artistic roster; she curated one of her first shows, featuring the likes of Jemima Kirke and Dustin Yellin, at China Chalet when she was still an undergrad at Bard. Cros makes regular studio and gallery visits in each city in which the Wing is opening, in order to put together an art collection that truly reflects its surroundings for what the wing calls its “Salon.”

Mixing emerging and established artists and treating them the same—same frames, same placing and emphasis on their work—is a priority for Cros, who has nurtured artists including Tschabalaba Self and Rachel Libeskind. “My goal is to bring in an audience that’s maybe not as well-versed in art, because some people are intimidated. People’s perspective of art is often staring at a Rothko waiting to be inspired, but I want people to know it’s okay to roll your eyes and walk away.”

Rolling your eyes at the overwhelmingly white, straight, cis male old guard feels like as good an organizing principle as any for much of the Wing’s decoration and merch—the co-working space’s in-house publication is even titled *No Man’s Land*—but the Los Angeles location’s art exhibition is refreshingly free of boob art and RBG portraits. (The closest the art veers toward the expected is probably Sophia Le Fraga’s pieces from the *Feminist* series, which replaces every appearance of “men” in commonly used words with “women”: i.e. “impeachwoment,” “elewoment.”)

Since the Wing’s founding in 2016, it has spawned so many think pieces that it can sometimes feel less like a business venture than a three-dimensional, coral-toned virtue signal. The Wing continues to face criticism, most recently for the non-disparagement clause that it writes into members’ contracts, which the co-working space has since updated, but the organization hopes to spark a different conversation entirely with its art exhibitions. The Wing’s art roster boasts 127 artists total, 40% of whom are artists of color, and roughly 10% of whom identify as LGBTQ+: “We aren’t doing our jobs right if we aren’t lifting up those voices,” says Wing spokesperson Zara Rahim.

Men, or the absence thereof, are simply not the focal point of the L.A. exhibitions, setting it far apart from the classic gallery-going experience; instead, the city’s specific regional charm is given pride of place through

Judy Baca's giant sketches from a proposed mural devoted to the 1984 Olympics, the first year in which a women's marathon was held. L.A.'s large Latinx population is reflected in the work of artists like Baca, Linda Vallejo, and Gabriella Sanchez, the latter of whom avoids painting naturalistic skin colors, Cros says, "so that everyone can see themselves in her paintings."

The decor of the Wing's cafe features several of Jo Ann Callis's decadent dessert shots commingling with photographer Louise Parker's slim, blonde, bikini-clad self-portraits for a final effect that felt paradoxically instructive: Eat like this, yet somehow look like that.



Linda Vallejo, Cleopatra, from 'Brown Oscars' series, photo courtesy of the artist.

Near the cafe hangs a less conventional three-part homage to Hollywood by Linda Vallejo, whose Brown Oscars series features classic film posters from Cleopatra to Dracula with the leads' skin tones darkened. The "blonde and beautiful" archetype was further satirized with several of Lauren Greenfield's larger-than-life, inherently funny portraits of American life, including a still from the documentary *Queen of Versailles* and a shot of preening Minnesota teens whose hairstyles mirrored the flaxen bobs of several of the Wing members busily typing on laptops beneath it.

At the Wing Soho, by far the largest location at 20,000 square feet, members are immediately greeted with Angela Fraleigh portraits of women from the back, but Cros says she wanted to move away from the literal "images of women" theme in L.A. and in the Wing Soho's downstairs floor. "Male artists get to make work

about very different things, including environment, architecture, parenthood, et cetera,” Cros notes, adding that she tries to remain conscious of the Wing’s purpose as a work space while choosing art.

“Everyone deals with trauma in different ways, so time and place is important,” says Cros, saying she might opt not to display Erin M. Riley’s car-crash series pointing to Caroline Wayne as an example of a Wing-exhibited artist whose works address trauma (in Wayne’s case, her own history of abuse) in a way that’s subtle enough to go over the heads of many viewers. Wing founding member Naima Green’s “Open Tabs Piece” prints are on display, as are sketches by Vaginal Davis and Farah Al Qasimi’s “Still Life With Laptop,” a composition in bright-yellow, floral and LED that Cros says is one of the Wing’s most Instagrammed art pieces.

It’s hard to mount an argument that the Wing’s art exhibitions constitute some sort of radical public-art program—it is, by definition, private, and will cost you \$2,700 a year in membership to see all the various locations’ artworks, unless you go as the invited guest of a member. Still, what Cros and her coworkers are building on the Wing’s walls feels less like well-trod territory designed to boost productivity—as you might see adorning the offices of a San Francisco startup— and more like a gallery at which people just happen to be working.

Cros and her colleagues are conscious of the access barrier that comes with existing only in major American and European cities, and Rahim tells me, “We’re excited to expand to more Midwestern cities and bring art all over the country. We want to ask the question of, what does it look like to create visibility for women all over the country who’ve been creating amazing work?”

Although the Wing’s exhibitions are preternaturally polished, many of its artists had never shown professionally before. Everything on the Wing’s walls is for sale, but, Cros says, “Some artists don’t even know their own prices—I often have to tell women to make their prices higher.”

Ed.: An earlier version of this piece referred to the Wing’s art exhibition as a “collection.” In fact, the Wing exhibits work from artists, but does not purchase them.