

AFTER NYNE



Anouska Beckwith - The Artist's Mentor

12
ART LOVERS - THE MAGAZINE
FOR

Anouska Beckwith · Barbara Hulanicki · Cornelia Parker
Helen Marriage · Julia Merhej · Abby Hignall

AFTER NYNE

LALI MARGANIYA & LILI JASSEMI



Founders & directors of
Sophia Contemporary Gallery
talk about their female
art inspirations

Lali Marganiya

Yayoi Kusama is an iconoclast whose boundary breaking ways helped shape the Avant-Garde movement, and she is a revolutionary in terms of approach and Weltanschauung. Her deployment of a wide array of media, including painting, collage, sculpture, installations and performance art, as well as her pattern and repetition based psychedelic work, mark her as a one of a kind artist. Kusama's hallucinatory works stand in the midst of a boundless visual universe, merging with her radiant and riotous art, resulting in a deeply personal and obsessive affect.

Having begun drawing and painting at the age of 10, the now 87 year old Kusama's eventual impact reached far beyond her home country of Japan, breaking across borders into the international art scene. These boundary breaking ways have made her a seminal precursor to the feminist, minimalist and pop art movements, influencing contemporary artists such as Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg.

As a feminist, Kusama is not only a creator of art, but a prime mover who has published eight novels and several books of poetry, founded an erotic newspaper entitled "Kusama's Orgy", designed a bus, and directed and produced movies - even inspiring and working with the English musician Peter Gabriel, a natural pairing given Gabriel's expressionist, visual representations within his music career.

Kusama's iconoclastic creative streak extends beyond objets d'art. In 1966 Kusama was ejected from her first Venice Biennale while exhibiting her work Narcissus Garden - hundreds of mirrored spheres that she offered for sale at \$2 each, while wearing a gold kimono. This comment on the commercialisation of art did not sit well with the organisers of the Biennale, and Kusama was promptly escorted from the premises, which illustrated her point.

In creation and in deed, few artists have reached as far and wide as Yayoi Kusama.

About Lili

Lili Jassemi is a co-founder and manager of Sophia Contemporary Gallery. She is Iranian and grew up in Munich. She has a background in political science and international affairs and studied at Sorbonne and the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). She is a specialist in Iranian culture and is currently involved in several business and cultural projects in Iran. She previously worked as a consultant in European Affairs in Brussels.

Lili Jessemi

Undoubtedly, Cindy Sherman is an artist who extensively contributed not only to the contemporary art world but also to the notion of feminism. What is revolutionary and groundbreaking in her approach is that Sherman alternates between various female roles in her works, while assuming the voyeuristic male position behind the camera. She acts as both photographer and subject by transforming herself with the help of over the top make-up and elaborate costumes. Sherman became a key figure in the discussion on the distinction between femininity based on male expectations and 'real' femininity. By reinventing portraiture and blurring the lines between photography and fine art, Cindy Sherman greatly influenced fellow photographers as well as painters and performance artists.

One of those fellow artists was Jenny Saville who admitted looking up to Cindy Sherman at the beginning of her career, as both artists shared an interest in exploring the similar myths of femininity. Saville creates large-scale canvases depicting women with generous, sometimes obese or distorted bodies, which challenge dominant aesthetic conventions of female forms and beauty. Saville's works explore the notions of feminism and fattism as the artist is fascinated by aesthetic and materialistic possibilities of the human, especially the female body. Saville often uses photographic material, internet, magazines, medical books in particular, which she joins together to create extremely sensuous and tactile surfaces.

Sophia Contemporary actively promotes female artists by providing them with a platform to exhibit on the international art stage. We aim to create a balance between female and male artists in our roster. For example, in November the gallery will present a solo show by a contemporary Iranian female artist Azadeh Razaghdoost. Often Azadeh's work has been overshadowed by that of her husband who is a prominent artist in Iran. However, we believe that the opportunity of a solo exhibition in London will give her paintings the exposure and recognition they deserve.

About Lali

Lali Marganiya is a co-founder and co-director of Sophia Contemporary Gallery. She is of Russian and Georgian origin and grew up in St. Petersburg. Her background is in history of art, cultural studies and finance. Her previous experience includes working in Old Masters painting and Russian art. She developed an interest in contemporary Middle Eastern art through frequent travel in the region. Lali has worked for a number of years as an independent art advisor.