

# M+B

## Harper's BAZAAR

### How Feminist Artists Are Staging Their Own Protests with Paint

February 6, 2017  
By Amy Louise Bailey



Angela Dufresne, *Unholy Trinity Anna Magnani from L'amore (segment "Il miracolo")*, 2017, 18 x 24 inches

In the late 1960s, a number of female artists aimed to influence the cultural conversation around gender equality through their artwork. The general message was simple: women deserve to have the same fundamental rights as men. Fifty years later the world has evolved beyond measure, but the central issues of gender imbalance remain, leaving feminist art and expression more relevant than ever.

The misogynist rhetoric used by Donald Trump throughout the presidential campaign (and the looming blow to reproductive rights) has galvanized a new wave of female artists who are set on delivering empowering statements with unique visual content.

In New York alone, several group shows and projects have echoed the sentiments of the Women's March, which last month saw millions of women gather in protest—and solidarity. #PUSSYPOWER (an exhibition that is now wrapped up) referenced the evolution of feminist art and showcased works from industry figureheads including Marilyn Minter, Katherine Bradford and Angela Dufresne, alongside emerging female artists that played with the representation of women's bodies in broader culture.

Similarly, Nasty Women featured a group of female artists and nearly 700 pieces that symbolized what came to be the slogan of sisterhood during election season. The Brooklyn show was initially conceived as a stand-alone fundraiser for Planned Parenthood, but when artists and curators around the world got word of what was happening in New York, related exhibitions emerged across America and Europe. Over the coming months, venues in Portugal, England, Australia and the Netherlands are unveiling their own Nasty Women exhibitions, in a show of solidarity.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) Coalition has also engaged in the creative movement, aiming to

# M + B

elevate feminist voices and values through art. The organization partnered with TriBeCa gallery director and artist Indira Cesarine to present *Uprise / Angry Women*—a radical group show that comprised politically charged works from eighty female artists. The show, which ran during the week of the presidential inauguration, donated a portion of the proceeds to the Fund for Women's Equality.

"It's an incredibly exciting time for the female art world; there's a strong sense of unity and liberation," says New York-based artist, Natasha Wright, who is launching her first solo exhibition in Greenwich Village this Friday.

The show, titled *MasculinFéminin* represents female empowerment and experience in an intimate context, depicting women that are in complete control of their bodies and their sexuality—a stark opposition to the rollbacks of the new administration.

The large-scale oil paintings are visceral and abstract; it's almost as if they provide a passage into the female mind with dream-like scenarios that are infused with sensuality and vivid color.

"Women painting women is such a powerful art form," Wright says; "Female experiences can be expressed through an organic, unfiltered lens. Before the Second-wave movement, this type of art had been largely ignored or trivialized, so it's empowering to see this new crusade of emotionally charged, female-focused work back in the spotlight."

*MasculinFéminin* expresses different states of the female psyche and explores a broad spectrum of universal human emotions. The subjects are complex and contrasted: vulnerable and seductive; exposed and concealed; aloof and domineering.

Female dominance and seduction is perhaps most explicit in a graphic composition inspired by a scene from a banned Nagisa Oshima film, whereby the female accidentally chokes her husband during an intense moment of passion. On the other end of the spectrum, a submissively reclining woman floating gracefully and naked in mid-air channels a certain vulnerability.

"The master narrative of the series intends to highlight the dichotomies of human emotions through a female lens," explains Wright. "The nature of the female experience is channeled through figurative, multi-layered works that stimulate critical thought. We can be strong, but we can also be vulnerable, and this is something that makes us unique, beautiful and equal."

Representing a female perspective is more important than ever in post-election America, and Wright hopes that fellow Nasty Women will take solace in the rising feminist art movement that is challenging outdated representations of women in the media and broader visual culture: "*MasculinFéminin* is a celebration of women that aren't restricted by superficial, antiquated stereotypes, but rather, they are emboldened by the fact that they are multifaceted, powerful humans, deserving of equality and respect."