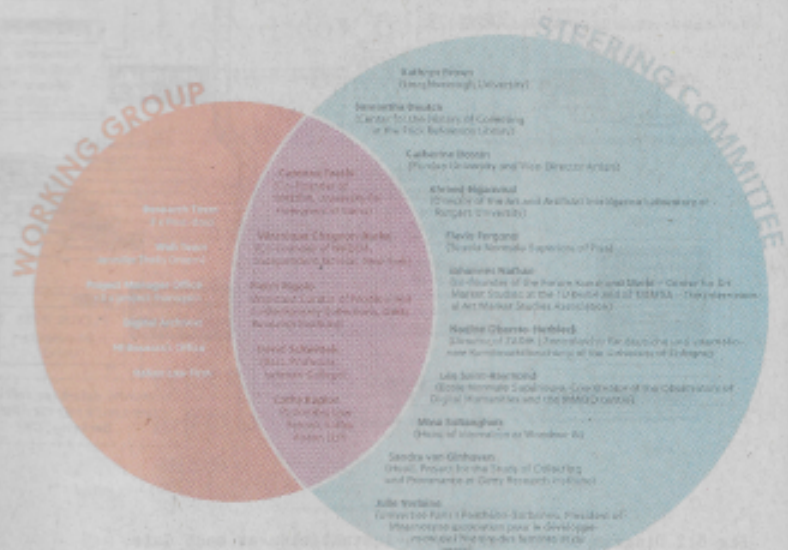


Women Art Dealers Digital Archives [WADDA]: From the Gallery to the Museum, Mapping How Women Art Gallerists Supported Contemporary Art in New York

This short essay will introduce a new archival project and propose a few suggestions for further inquiries. Dr. Caterina Toschi, Associate Professor at the University for Foreigners in Siena and I are the co-founder of a collaborative digital art history project which focuses on mapping the activities of women art dealers.¹ Women Art Dealers Digital Archives or WADDA combines primary archival research, geospatial mapping, data visualization and network analysis to contribute to the on-going attempt to challenge the myth of the women art dealer as an isolated oddity. We want to better understand the role that these women played in the art ecosystem and how their contribution was central to canonization of modern and contemporary art movements. WADDA will provide a centralized resource and digital-lab space where traditional research may be conducted, and innovative approaches to analyzing conventional data may be tested and applied. It will be an open access platform. We think that digital mapping can afford a good solution to this type of project, as it allows for growth. As the project is archeological in nature and its relevance depends on its attempt to be comprehensive, it will need to be global. In its first phase, which consists in the launch of the website in 2022 and the publication of a book by Bloomsbury Visual Arts in late 2023, WADDA will be focused on Europe and North America. But a second phase will follow as early as April 2022, at the Association for Art History conference in London, where our session, "Born from the Margins: Women Gallerists Creating New Markets, 1800-1990," will focus on other geographies.

The first phase of WADDA aims to collect, digitize, and make accessible the abundant but disparate data sets which elucidate these women

art dealers' footprint on the primary art market as well as their networks. By creating partnerships with public and private archives repositories, WADDA will provide tools and access to information to re-assess the contribution of women art dealers, cementing the role of these women as agent of change instead of just exchange. WADDA hopes to correct the historiographical marginalization of women art dealers to provide a more balanced view of the development of the market for modern and contemporary art, which had traditionally been dominated by male figures. Because of its global geographical footprint, WADDA will also disrupt the western-centric axis of the contemporary art market, allowing for a better understanding of the essential cultural role played by these women in emerging art markets, such as Asia and Africa. Through the power of digitization and open



1 Our core team includes Pr. David Schwittek, who teaches graphic design and digital media at Lehman College, CUNY, Dr. Pietro Rigolo, Assistant Curator of modern and contemporary art at the Getty Research Institute and of an editor/project manager Matthew Gilbert. We are supported by a steering committee and are in the process of creating partnership with archives repositories.

access, WADDA will bring to the fore the agency these women had as business entrepreneurs, contributing to the wider debate about gender roles. But more importantly, envisioned as a largely autonomous interactive digital platform, WADDA users will be able to collaboratively engage with colleagues and institutional archives depositaries such as the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, across disciplines to devise and implement new applications of big-data principles to bring more transparency to the study of the art market.

Collaborations and exchanges are essential to the development of WADDA, I hope that this essay will prompt people to want to work with us. The central role played by art dealers in the domestication of contemporary art since the late 1800s needs to become more visible in traditional art history, which is still often too focused on the artists and not enough on the systems that supported them. WADDA wants to participate in promoting a better understanding of the role of the gallerists in the creation of the art historical canon. Taking the example of New York City, where women art dealers have always been important players in the local art ecosystem, I propose a journey from Madison Avenue in New York Upper East to the East Village, to bring awareness to the numerous women art dealers which legacy still need to be acknowledged.² Historical figures like Peggy Guggenheim, Edith Halpert, Martha Jackson, Iris Clert and Virginia Dawn have shown that there is a long tradition of women art dealers who disrupted the primary market rules and the white cube model. These women chose to nurture the career of artists who at the time were challenging the dominant taste, with WADDA we aim to recover many more.

The theme of the summer school, galleries-anti galleries, was very fitting for our line of inquiry, as one of our main questions what is how to define what an art dealer is, especially in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when the professionalization of the field was not yet complete. How relevant is the commercial-anti commercial model in the institutionalization of contemporary art? Considering only a few examples such as Eleanor Ward founder of the Stable Gallery, who showed Warhol's boxes in 1964; Gertrude Stein of the Gallery Gertrude Stein who gave Kusama her first New York show also in 1964; Marilyn Fischbach who opened to doors of her gallery to Lucy Lippard in 1966, where she curated the historical show *Eccentric Abstraction*; and we know even much less about figures like Jill Kornblee, who organized an important show called

Poem Painting, with artists like Grace Hartigan, Larry Rivers and Frank O'Hara among others, or Terry Dintenfass who was Jacob Lawrence's dealer and had a gallery 50 West 57th Street. All these women chose to operate in a commercial environment at the heart of the New York art world of their time, but the art they championed was very often non-commercial. Should we then rethink the artificial boundaries between the commercial art gallery and the alternative space? Did the pressure of the market, the high stake placed on contemporary art as well as the rising financialization of the art world, which started in New York in the late 1970s increase the separation between nonprofit and for-profit spaces, a distinction which may not have been as relevant in the immediate Post-War period? Did that lead the artists to want more control over their careers and to the creation of cooperatives galleries, another type of hybrid model where we find women taking the lead with the founding in 1972 of A.I.R. Gallery, the first artist-run gallery for women in the United States?³

Many of the women gallerists embraced alternative business models and established commercial spaces very different from the more traditional white cube model; Gertrude Stein showed the work of Sam Goodman [*Sam Goodman: NO SCULPTURES: Shit Show*, 1964] not just in her gallery 24 East 81st Street but also in the small courtyard in the back of her building.⁴ This kind of alternative strategy is of course not unique to New York; from 1966 to 1972, in Rome, Mara Coccia ran Doc bar, since 1970, Lia Rumma runs two galleries one in Naples and one in Milan; their galleries functioned more like meeting places for European and North American artists and intellectuals than spaces for commercial transactions. In the 1980s, the apartment gallery of Gracie Mansion was a staple of the New York downtown scene. These alternative spaces allowed these women to give an international visibility to their artists. Their transnational networks are a central aspect to their legacy. There is still a lot of work to be done on this topic, but as it has already been demonstrated in the case of male art dealers, connections with other art professionals across borders were always a key to success.⁵ By the time Ileana Sonnabend settled back in Paris in 1971, women gallerists like Erica Brausen, Jeanne Bucher, Denise René, Iris Clert, Agnes Widlund, were operating internationally; one of the most interesting collaboration on the photographic market to this day was between the Gallery

2 Among other factors, the number of women art dealers is of course predicated on their legal status and on society's gendered view of identity. In the United States because of the 'Women's Property Act,' passed in 1848, women had control over their finances, which gave them more agency and account partly for the stronger number of women art dealers in the US at least until the 1950s. The Frick Center for the History of Collecting published a telling time line which chronicles the rise of women gallerists in the US starting in the late 1800s: <https://research.frick.org/directory> (accessed October 29, 2021).

3 <https://www.airgallery.org/history/> (accessed October 29, 2021)

4 This of course should remind us of *Yard*, the exhibition staged by Allan Kaprow in 1961 at the Martha Jackson's gallery

5 In recent year thanks to publications like the one edited by Christel H. Force, ed., *Pioneers of the Global Art Market: Paris-Based Dealer Networks, 1850-1950* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021) or by Denise Vernerey-Laplace and Hélène Ivanoff, *Les Artistes et leurs galeries Paris-Berlin, 1900-1950*, 2 vols (Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2020) and by the work done by Dr. Titia Hulst's on the Leo Castelli Gallery (see among other sources: *Archives of American Art Journal* 46, 3-4 Fall 2007: 14-27), we have become much more aware of how depend dealers were on other dealers.

Zabriskie, Agathe Gaillard and Helen Gee founder of the Limelight Gallery.⁶

One of WADDA's goals is to determine if women gallerists had to devise specific strategies to contribute to the institutionalization of contemporary art. One way would be to establish a historical genealogy of the placement of works by female gallerists in public institutions; working back for example from the recent acquisitions of works by major female artists such as Carolee Schneemann by the Museum of Modern Art [*Four Fur Cutting Boards*, 1962-63], through the New York gallery PPOW or by Regina Bogat [*Phoenix and the Mountain #2*, 1980] in 2017 by the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou or by Kazuko Miyamoto [*Untitled*, (String and nails) 1977] by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2019, through the work of Gwenolée Zürcher of the Zürcher Gallery NY/Paris.⁷ Through its multi-faceted approach, we hope that WADDA will give us a better handle on the collective impact female gallerists had on artists who have become central to the canon of modern and contemporary art.



Opening of Andy Warhol at the Stable Gallery
New York, 1964

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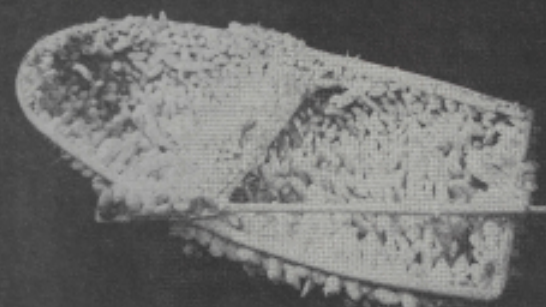


"When you are not rich you either buy clothes or you buy art"
— Gertrude Stein

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- 6 Helen Gee ran open a photographic gallery in New York in 1954 and run also a coffee-house; Lia Russa with galleries in Naples and in Milan supported Arte Povera and Minimal and Conceptual artists over 50 years, as patron/collector and as an art dealer (Naples Milan), commissioning work by Kiefer and by Kentridge in 2004 for the Naples subway.
- 7 Kazuko Miyamoto was one of the founding member of A.I.R. and in 1986, she created Gallery onetwentyeight, a community art space in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. <https://www.galleryonetwentyeight.org/> (accessed October 30 2021)