

From June 29, 2023

# *Women in Art 1975*

## *MNBA Collection*



Image: assembly of the exhibition "Women in Art", in 1975.

**Within the framework of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the military coup, from June 29 the exhibition *Women in Art 1975* is presented at the National Museum of Fine Arts, which proposes a critical revision of the homonymous version, rescuing artworks, documents and archives that account for the concepts of "woman" and "artist" that were promoted within the halls of the MNBA in the context of dictatorship.**

Curated by Gloria Cortés Aliaga (MNBA) and art historians Nicole González Herrera and Mariairis Flores Leiva, the exhibition is part of the reflections initiated around the MNBA collection with the exhibition *Luchas por el arte. Mapa de relaciones y disputas por la hegemonía del arte (1843-1933)*.

Based on the review of the 1975 exhibition and the documentation preserved at the MNBA Angélica Pérez Germain Documentation Center, the curators critically review the notion of "woman" and "artist" promoted by the civic-military dictatorship, through official institutions and the press. This meant a pattern regarding the role of women in the new cultural policies, defined that same year by the dictatorship and reinforced in the speech *Message to Chilean women*, delivered a year earlier by Augusto Pinochet in the so-called process of "National Reconstruction".

"The MNBA has been working for years from gender and feminisms perspectives, in order to reverse the historical invisibility and precepts about the role of women in art, but also taking charge of institutional history from the absences both in the collections and in the field of exhibitions, writing, management, among other fundamental issues for the development of an egalitarian museum. This exhibition, in the context of the 50th anniversary of the coup, critically reviews the definition of these canons and the misleading enunciation of the concept of freedom at a time when women's struggle is fundamental to social justice and human rights," says Varinia Brodsky, director (s) MNBA.

The exhibition *Women in Art* was held in the Matta Room of the museum for 20 days in September 1975, on the occasion of the commemoration of International Women's Year. 85 works (paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures) from public and private collections, created by women artists of different generations, were exhibited.

The National Museum of Fine Arts was the organizing institution together with the National Secretariat for Women, an organization created in 1972 during the government of Salvador Allende. The director of the museum, sculptor Lily Garafulic, together with Rosa Abarca (researcher of the museum), worked the exhibition along with a team composed of Mercedes Gaju (coordinator of the National Secretariat for Women), Ángela Riesco (research assistant), Paz Romero (assistant coordinator) and Ernesto Muñoz (coordinating secretary).

"(...) it is very important to carry out, even if it is in a synthetic way, an assessment of the meaning of the painters and sculptors of Chile. The hierarchy reached by other women in other disciplines of culture, imposes on us a search in the spirituality of our compatriots expressed in artistic works", said Rosa Abarca in the catalog that was published for that occasion. It recreated a chronological itinerary and made explicit the need to include many more women artists, but did not incorporate a reflection that considered the social and cultural history of women.

The unpublished research of Abarca was found in the archives of the museum, revealing an important work of gathering information in more than 40 pages that only today come to light and that, finally, were cut and briefly summarized in the original catalog of the exhibition. In its pages you can realize the processes of censorship that the research may have suffered, as well as the institutional position on contemporary art, artistic manifestations linked to politics, among other fundamental issues in the context of the moment.

The current exhibition, mounted on the second floor of the museum, integrates a selection of pieces from the collection exhibited in 1975, along with works by artists mentioned in the research, but which were not included in the original exhibition despite being part of the collection at the time. Given this background, the curators wonder how the process of selecting artists operated and who was left out for eminently political reasons. Such is also the case of women artists who at that time were working intensely, but who were removed from the official story.

"These layers of visibility/invisibility allow us to see how the omissions of historiographical construction operate —a fact that Garafulic herself points out in an interview— and other institutional, aesthetic and/or political arguments that problematize issues such as censorship, the inscription of contemporary art, the formation of associative networks and the consequent exclusion from the art scene," the curators explain.

"Through this exercise, we want to make visible not only the omissions inherent to the artistic system, but also to show what happens repeatedly with women and thus create a space for critical reflection, which from art expands to all areas of life," they continue.

Along with pages from the catalogue with images of the works, the exhibition graphically displays quotes from press headlines, comments and reviews from the critics of the 1975 exhibition, as well as official statements referring to the role of women. A newspaper indicates that the opening ceremony was presided over by military, artistic and ecclesiastical authorities. For instance, Gaby Garfias, artist and art critic, announces "Matriarchy in Chilean painting", while in a newspaper article the expression "weaker sex" is used.

In a symbolic gesture on women activists and dissidents, the image of Mónica Briones, young painter and sculptor murdered in dictatorship, has been incorporated, being considered the first documented case of a lesbophobic hate crime.

The exhibition *Women in Art 1975* will open its doors with a meeting with the living artists who continue to actively develop their work, in which they shared their life experiences, exiles, the difficulty in the development of their careers and affective networks, solidarity and resistance.

[www.mnba.gob.cl](http://www.mnba.gob.cl) | Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Youtube, Spotify: @MNBACHile #Lamujerenelarte #50añosdelgolpe

