



WHATCOM MUSEUM

For Immediate Release

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Show of Hands Takes In-depth Look at Northwest Women Artists

Exhibition coincides with centennial of women's suffrage in Washington State



Mary Henry
1913-2009
On/Off 8A On/Off 8B, 1967
Acrylic on canvas
PDX Contemporary Art

February 18, 2010; Bellingham, WA---Featuring more than 90 works of art by 63 women artists from Washington, Oregon and British Columbia, *Show of Hands* opens April 24 at the Whatcom Museum's Lightcatcher building. Celebrating women's contributions to the legacy of Northwest art, this unprecedented gathering of women artists examines the myriad talents women of the Northwest have displayed in all media since 1880.

Historically, the work of women artists, including those of the Pacific Northwest, has been somewhat overlooked.

"Having arrived recently from the East Coast, I was unaware of the talented mix of artists working in the region, said Curator of Art Barbara Matilsky. "Learning its history and the major players associated with the emergence of the Northwest School, I became conscious of the many 'unseen artists,' women who, exhibiting nationally and highly regarded during their lifetime, have since been forgotten."

Female artists part of Museum's heritage

Fortunately, the Whatcom Museum has been dedicated to the research and exhibition of important Northwest artists since its inception, including women artists (most recently the 75th anniversary exhibition of Women Painters of Washington held in 2005). Several women represented in *Show of Hands* have been subjects of solo exhibitions at the Whatcom Museum. With 18 works represented, *Show of Hands* also draws upon the strength of the Whatcom Museum's own collection of Northwest art.

"To be able to gather the artworks of these women in one place is exciting for us, in part because from what we could discern from our research, an exhibition this comprehensive – both in terms of chronology and the range of media – has not been done before," said Executive Director Patricia Leach.

Show of Hands includes paintings, drawings, sculptures, photography, video and site-specific installations from 1880 to the present. The exhibition's title references the many ways that art is made, as well as the fact that the show coincides with the centennial of women's suffrage in Washington State.

"What better way celebrate the empowered voices of Northwest women than through their art?" said Leach.

Against the backdrop of this milestone, the exhibition offers a forum for considering women's history and future as contemporary culture continues to redefine traditional gender roles and relationships.



Diem Chau
Born 1979
Given, 2009
Silk organza, thread, and
porcelain plate
Courtesy of the artist and
G. Gibson Gallery, Seattle



Imogen Cunningham
1883-1976
Dream Walking, 1968
Gelatin silver print
Courtesy of Joshua Partridge and G.
Gibson Gallery, Seattle

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Depth and range

The exhibition reveals a rich tapestry of creativity, from the heroically scaled abstract paintings of **Mary Henry** to **Diem Chau's** delicate images embroidered on silk and mounted on porcelain dinnerware to **Imogen Cunningham's** internationally recognized photographs. An intergenerational dialogue between artworks emerges as the exhibition unfolds both thematically and chronologically from 2010 to 1880.

Where possible, two works by each artist were selected to show their development from early to later periods in their careers.

Site-specific wall paintings for the Lightcatcher passageway by **Margie Livingston** and **Victoria Haven** introduce a large gallery devoted to **biomorphic** and **geometric abstraction**. Rooted in prehistoric art, the arts of Nonwestern cultures, and early modernism, these works by artists such as **Maude Kerns**, **Margaret Tomkins**, **Mary Henry** and **Lucinda Parker** confirm abstraction's vital role in expressing the spiritual aspects and formal beauty of life.

Show of Hands also features artists whose approach is more **representational** and driven by content. Some artists, including **Fay Jones**, **Elizabeth Sandvig**, and **Claire Cowie**, interpret the figure to relate personal or communal stories, at times conjuring up narratives that reference historical, social, and environmental issues. Many artists, including **Ebba Rapp**, **Marie Watt**, and **Louise Crow**, find inspiration from **Native American art**.

The heritage of **women's handicrafts** is given a new twist by contemporary artists like **Sherry Markovitz** and **Sheila Klein**, who resurrect and reinterpret skills passed down through generations. The final section of the exhibition focuses on **landscape**, the genre that motivated many of the earliest artists, **Abby Williams Hill**, **Emily Carr**, and **Z. Vanessa Helder** among them, to paint a variety of environments, including mountain panoramas and intimate forest views.

Show of Hands brings together the work of women artists over 130 years to offer another perspective on the art of the Northwest. It presents only a partial glimpse of the many talented artists who have contributed to the heritage of the region. For every artist represented, there are many more who have not been included. The exhibition reconfirms the strength of art in this region and the contribution of women to its legacy.

"We hope that the creativity of this gathering of women will stimulate insights and observations that will inform future studies on the subject," said Matilsky.

The Whatcom Museum

Located in the heart of Bellingham's cultural district, the Whatcom Museum, a non-profit organization operated jointly by the City of Bellingham and the Whatcom Museum Foundation, provides innovative and interactive educational programs and exhibitions about art, nature and Northwest history. The Museum's collections contain more than 200,000 artifacts and art pieces of regional importance, including a vast photographic archive. The Museum is accredited

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nationally by the American Association of Museums and is a Smithsonian Institution affiliate. The 1892 Old City Hall Building is located at 121 Prospect St. in Bellingham. The Lightcatcher building is located at 250 Flora St. Regular hours are Tuesday-Sunday noon-5 p.m. Admission for museum members is free; \$10 general; \$8 student/senior/military; \$4.50 children under 5.

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