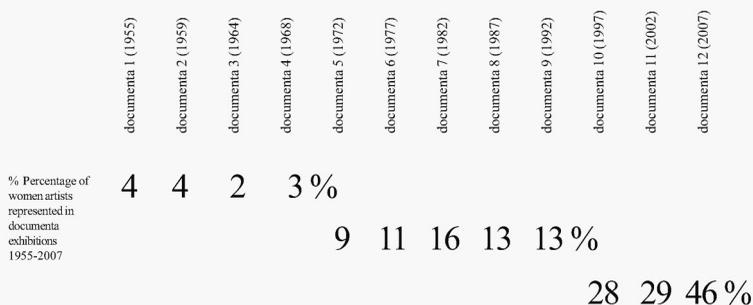


One of the central paradoxes in feminist theory is the apparently double (and simultaneous) claim of feminism(s) for both equality and difference. How can women be both different and equal? How can we measure when, where and how “equality“ has been achieved: is it a question of how we discuss rights, how we compile statistics, or the methods we apply to assess differences between women and between men and women? Feminist analysis starts from the recognition of the asymmetrical relationships between men and women in the world but even if women were to achieve a relative equality in terms of numbers in the workforce, in pay, in political or cultural representation, what would this mean for the differences which exist between women or between women and men? These seemingly simple questions about equality and difference appear to pull feminism in different directions but they actually represent some of the more complex politics, aims and strategies at work within feminist debates. Claims for equality in numbers (given that women represent 52% of the world’s population) present a means to examine a paradox based in feminist discussions about “rights for women“ as citizens or as human beings. This essay then explores how these debates are manifest in assessments of the current position of women artists, attempts to measure the progress of women artists and what constitutes a certain “avant-garde“ contemporary feminist art (albeit taken as a given by this author that not all women’s art production today is feminist).

The uses of statistics In August 2007, at *Documenta XII* as part of a discussion on ‘Re-gendering Documenta’ with Judy Freya Sibayan, I put forward a chart with the percentages of women artists included in all the Documenta exhibitions since 1945.¹ I deliberately placed a question beneath this chart, which shows the rise of women artists’ participation from 3% in 1945 to 44% in 2007 and asked “is this an adequate measure of the progress of women artists?“ (Abb. 4). In the talk, I commented on how the UK press had described this Documenta as the ‘worst Documenta ever’ and how a drop in quality was associated

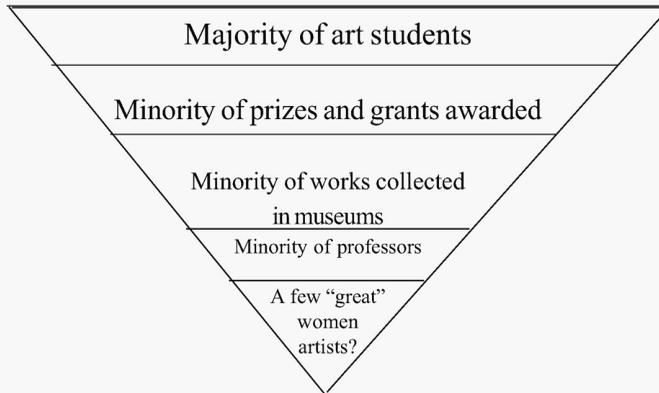
Is this an accurate measure of progress in the position of women artists?



1 Katy Deepwell.

with the greater equality in the numbers of women selected. In December 2005, I was invited to take part in a panel discussion “What about feminism?” at the Stedelijk Museum. When I and another speaker presented the levels of representation of women as artists, this provoked a very negative response from the audience, but especially from several young women curators present. The implication of their criticism was that figures about the proportion of male to female artists in exhibitions or in society are not relevant and to cite them or use them was not just inadequate, but even not permissible. Their objection seemed to indicate that the figures set a limit to what was possible. They did not see them as a partial snapshot of how culture itself was operating and they were not prepared to engage with this as an indicator of how discrimination continues. What has started to interest me is why these snapshots of continuing inequality in numbers – albeit with a significant shift in favour of women in the last 40 years – do not now provoke a willingness to change the situation but produce an outright denial that this information matters or might even contribute to how we might think about social changes in the position of women artists. This is different from the regular sexist denial that it is “quality” that counts in art and not who made it. This last argument has been discredited by feminists’ renewed attention

Are you aware of the inverted pyramid of success for women artists in Europe?



2 Katy Deepwell.

to the criteria under which quality assessments were made: i.e. more attention to differences and distinctions in how we judge art. However, there is a link between quality and numbers which still holds every time the question of women's level of representation in the visual arts is raised as an issue.

There are plenty of figures available on the position of women in the arts, including from the EU, in a range of different publications, from protest groups like Artpies or the Guerrilla Girls,² on the numbers of women artists in museums; in galleries; in reviews. Most recent figures show that, after more than 100 years of access to art education, women artists form 40–50% of all professional artists in most European countries and the US, according to tax records or surveys of populations of artists.³ Women still form the numerical majority of art students across Europe and the US. Women's role as Professors in art academies and art colleges/universities remains small. In Germany, it is still 18%.⁴ Women artists' participation in international biennales and triennials is rising: from levels of 10% in the early 1970s to 20%–40% in 2000–2010.⁵ The numbers of women curators selected to organise such exhibitions remains small but there has been a notable increase recently. Three women – Rosemarie Trockel, Louise Bourgeois, Cindy Sherman – were in

What do you regard as an appropriate level of representation for women artists?

10% - 20% ?

20% - 30% ?

40% - 52% ?

3 Katy Deepwell.

the top 20 artists listed in the top 100 list *KunstKompass* in 2008.⁶ Women form the majority of curators of contemporary art (estimated at around 75% of the profession) but most of the most prestigious museum directorships in the world are still held by men. Museums with historical collections and very slow acquisitions policies have changed very little over the last 40 years. The Tate's collection still has only 7% of works by women artists, while the Tretayakov Galleries is 44%.⁷ A rehang of the main museum space at the Centre Pompidou in 2009 will show for the first time the range of women artists in its collection (around 20%), albeit under the ironic title of 'Madame Georges Pompidou'. Stella Rollig had organised a similar rehang of the Lentos Collection in Linz in 2004 with the exhibition *Paula's Home*, curated by Elisabeth Nowak-Thaller and Angelika Gillmayr.⁸ So what do these figures indicate? The not surprising revelation that inequalities between men and women in culture still exist and depending on what is being measured that 300–1000 years of collecting national treasures and masterpieces with a distinct preference towards the cultural production of men or 500–600 years of privilege in men's University education cannot be overturned in a 40–100 year timeframe. I repeat these figures here because in spite of their existence, they are still not popularly known or discussed and

% Share of Women in the 1990s

	as visual artists (painters/sculptors)	as visual arts museum directors	as female professors in fine art
Austria	45	22	18
Finland	44	52	25
Germany	43	22	18
Italy	33	no data	no data
The Netherlands	44	31	19
Portugal	38	38	no data
Spain	no data	28	25 (Madrid)
UK	38	22	no data

4 Figures from D. Cliche, R. Mitchell and A. Joh. Wiesand (ed) *Pyramids or Pillars: Unveiling the Status of Women in the Arts and Media Professions in Europe* (Bonn: ARCCult Media 2000).

they have not entered into any populist feminist discourse. Everyone knows discrimination against women artists exists, since women are generally understood to be less visible, less notorious and do not command the highest prices at auctions for their work. This situation, however, is not a barrier to women working as artists or earning a living in greater numbers than ever before. Curators, contrary to received common knowledge do not have a small number of contemporary women artists to choose from, they have a wealth. More people than ever can cite a woman artist they like or respect or whose work interests them.

Arjun Appadurai discusses how “one” as a measure of individuality is so important in liberal political theory in contrast to conceptions of the “masses”, which in the plural as a collection of “ones” have somehow lost or suspended a part of their individuality.⁹ He highlights how increasing anxiety in the processes of globalisation has fuelled the division of populations through censuses and modern bureaucracies into divisions of major and minor groups within populations. Minority populations have emerged post-1945, he argues, as symptom of an “anxiety for completeness” in nation states (based on a majority ethnos), even though it is as “special interest groups” that people have increasingly

and successfully put forward the views of different ethnic or religious minorities to extend their political, legal or civil rights. Significantly he notes the elision between “special interest” groups as temporary political alliances of dissent from majority views (in liberal political thought) and identification with their personhood as dissent embodied in an ethnic, religious or minoritised group of people. The same tensions are present in discussions about women artists (a population majority rendered a cultural minority in the arts): who, in the 1970s and 1980s, temporarily became a “special interest group” because of feminist protest in the West but have generally in cultural, financial or economic terms refused this status for their art production because the culture of “one” vested in the figure of the artist as genius remains so strong. While periodically the euphoric celebration of an exhibition which focuses on women artists reinstates women’s claim to be a ‘special interest group’ whose views have been ignored; culturally and financially this status as a minority or as a coalition of political protest has been a short-lived campaigning technique. Artists generally do not want their creative production to be seen as part of collectives or “masses”, as the “blue chip” status of art practice lies in its definitions of singular quality and recognition of works being produced by unique individuals. This myth is so central to contemporary art production and so deeply entrenched in art production as a value that we rarely set the measurement of women’s participation as workers in the cultural industries in the context of women’s progress in other professions – their representation in government, for example, or the percentage of budget spent on women’s activities in cultural budgets – and other patterns in women’s working lives, for example, periods spent as full-time carers for their families; or their role in other industries. Cultural production nevertheless is part of the fabric of society itself, even if it has distinct features to its production, reproduction, exchange and distribution. Women’s desire to evade “special treatment” (in which special pleading or different criteria should be applied) or to see themselves as a ‘special interest group’ – combined with the criticisms of the women’s movement as white, bourgeois and professional – have, however, resulted in a failure to see the value of continuing temporary strategic alliances rather than ‘identity’ politics as a means for political campaigns in modern democracies. Political alliances however remain the most realistic prospect for change in modern society. Women’s role as a majority part of the population, rendered a minority in professional life, produces some strange effects: frequently separating women in other majority groups within populations (or the “controlling classes”) from women in minority groups (or “the disadvantaged”) within the same population. Class and race continue to divide women as well as men from women.

However, is the concept of equality or change adequately measured by this kind of numbers' game and which historical timeframe do we measure? Looking at the last year or the last five or ten years – which is generally the maximum used for political or semi-sociological analysis in the popular press – is not going to assist us in finding the broader patterns of change in women's lives and opportunities. Looking generationally is often chosen as the next step but this does not necessarily reveal the political determinants of people's lives or their social and political options in limited or rather pre-determined social and political circumstances. The range of professions in which women now operate and the educational opportunities between women of different generations remain major differences in their "equal opportunities" in life. The issue remains how do we measure equality? When we have equal numbers in representation of women artists in shows, on museum walls, in the administration, amongst the cleaning staff, will this suffice? Are we discussing "equal access" to financial or intellectual resources through equal share of government tax revenue invested in women as producers of the visual arts, and would this produce an equality of treatment, of production, of quality? Or is it a worker's problem of equal time spent at work or home and equal pay for work of equal value (when the pay gap is still 13% between men and women in Europe and up to 30% elsewhere in the world)? We are back to the contrast between equality in numbers and differences in judgement. Since the 1980s, any idea of a quota system to "redress the balance" has received a barrage of negative press from both feminists and anti-feminists alike. It was discredited as a system for "preferential" treatment; it was seen as a form of sexism or racism in reverse; it was seen to appoint poorly qualified or inept candidates over better qualified ones; it produced much 'tokenism' of the worse kind. However, the use of quota systems or select shortlists did elect more women to parliament and did provide more opportunities for people from a wide range of ethnic minorities to obtain a greater diversity of positions within the workforce. In the 1980s, "equal opportunities" became the bureaucratised mantra for how to shift women's participation in the work force: today, the role of women in decision-making at policy level seems to have replaced it.

Concepts of equality as citizens... In thinking about whether numbers are adequate to measure women artists' equality and problems with quotas, I started to think more carefully about the two quite distinct historic agendas at work in arguments about equal rights for women. The first is about women's equality as a citizen in a democratic state and this is where (in post-feminist debates) most people now think a battle for equal rights is over because they take these rights for granted as a condition of being a modern citizen. Ta-

king these basic (and limited) rights for granted has contributed to a repeated refusal to acknowledge that discrimination continues, but particularly as no account is taken of situations in developing countries. The second group of claims is based on rights for all human beings, regardless of what kind of social, economic or political system they live in. In this second group of rights, it is absolutely clear that the world has not yet arrived at any form of equality of treatment for human beings. Recognising these two competing sets of claims is important as it underpins how we discuss notions of equality and difference for women today and which women in the world are included or excluded by these ideas.

Claims for equality for women as citizens are centred on having a vote in a democratic society; paying taxes on the same basis as men; having the same rights in law or government to representation; having the right to own property in their own name; having status as an equal partner in marriage/divorce or in the care and custody of their children; having the same rights of access to the state's provision of education or training, health or social services; having the same rights as men to work in trades and professions regulated by government (or the removal of any gender-specific barriers to doing so). These claims for equality form the basis of much of the 19th and early 20th century campaigns for women's suffrage and citizenship in most democratic societies and they have formed focus of many different legal campaigns for change in the position of women before the law. Steadily, what was a limited definition of political rights has been extended into a broad agenda of "social" rights. It is this agenda for suffrage and "rights" which is the common sense agenda for most modern women about what they can expect as citizens of the country in which they live, if it is a democracy and if they hold a passport. I can vote, I can be educated, I can choose to work in any profession, I can raise a family, I can expect support from the government in so far as it organises health, housing, education, social services or pensions or support for the arts and culture. These expectations are now embedded in most democratic states – even though political apathy, cynicism, an absence of any historical understanding or indifference to government policies is unfortunately widespread. As a citizen (male or female) who votes and pays taxes, I expect to have a say in how government manages our society, locally, nationally or in terms of the services it supports, including the support given to the arts and culture. This political representation is underpinned by individual's contributions to taxation in most democratic societies but it is not dependent on how much money any individual contributes.

When most people discuss women's equality, it is these rights as a citizen that they immediately think of. Even where the right to vote arrived at different political moments in democratic states: in 1898 in Australia, in 1918/28 in the UK; in 1945 in France, in 1970/

1971 in Switzerland, the consensus of equal rights for women as citizens for most of the twentieth century has been accepted as the basis for a modern democracy. The US bill of rights is a constitutional bill of these basic “political rights“ for its citizens, outlining the organisation and role of government, the election of representatives, the role of the Supreme Court and the rights of citizens in law, and the balance of power between national and state government. It was modified to abolish slavery in 1865 and to allow (male) citizens, regardless of race, colour or previous slavery, to vote in 1870 and it was modified again in 1919/1920 to include the rights of all women to vote. The Equal Rights Amendment proposed in the US against discrimination by sex in 1972 was not ratified and expired in 1982 but this was modern feminism’s attempt to enshrine extended social rights for all women. The political and historical differences between different nation states often remain unrecognised but these differences in history have created quite different social and political struggles in separate national legal battles across European states. In Eastern Europe the absorption of a basic equal rights agenda for all comrades (regardless of gender) within party organisations and government as official Socialist policy for much of the twentieth century has led to a deep-seated ambivalence amongst many working women towards this agenda of political rights post-Socialism other than the basic right to vote and to education, because of their experience of the double burden of work outside and inside the home as their lot. A weak civil society and difficulties in key political parties maintaining a balance of power with elected governments, coupled with the rise of Orthodox or Catholic religious views of women, has led to a loss of “social and political rights“ for many women post-socialism.

The political changes in the rights of women have often been at odds with the changes in the economic life of different countries. Women’s employment or right to work has never been guaranteed in times of high unemployment: in fact women have often lost their jobs in greater numbers at times of high unemployment. Yet, post-WWII women in developed countries have been entering the paid workforce in ever greater numbers but this has also been the time in which the greatest number of women have benefited most from access to secondary and tertiary levels of education in modern democratic states. Expectations that most women should join the labour market, regardless of marital status or their responsibilities to the care of their children or extended family have grown. Even still, the rate of their participation in paid work outside the home has remained variable and between 25%–60% of women in actuality still do not work on a part-time or full-time basis in the waged labour market across Europe,¹⁰ since many remain full-time carers for their immediate or extended families, as well as providing an army of volunteer (unpaid) labour

for voluntary organisations, schools and charities. There are plenty of differences amongst women in terms of who are the most likely to be employed: by age, by education, by ethnic background. In Russia, the group that has fared the best in employment terms and in social mobility in the twenty years post-Glasnost have been young single women; those who have seen their employment chances decrease have been middle-aged and older women, regardless of their high level of education.

The women's liberation movement in the US and Europe in the 1960s began with all these basic rights in place but women's role as "second-class citizens" was nevertheless the primary issue. This seems to be forgotten in post-feminist claims which mimic the neo-conservative agenda's extremely narrow view of "political rights".¹¹ However, contemporary feminism has not been a battle about these basic rights to equality as citizens (holding a vote; before the law; paying taxes; access to social services) but about the extension of those rights in social, cultural, economic and political spheres (over control of one's body, achieving economic autonomy, equal pay for equal work). The discontent of the middle-class well-educated housewife fuelled it, but so did protests from activist students, campaigns by workers against low pay in an era of strikes and social and political protest about poverty, injustice and political oppressions as well as distinct anti-war activism: against the war in Vietnam, against dictatorships in Latin America and Africa (notably anti-apartheid in South Africa), and the anti-nuclear movement against Super-Power proliferation of nuclear arsenals in the Cold War. Important extensions of women's social rights were achieved and these include: reforms to tackle how violence against women is handled by the law and victims of violence supported (including the recognition of rape in marriage and as a war crime); women's control of their own health and bodies particularly in terms of abortion rights or the choice of single motherhood without social stigma or in lesbian partnerships; campaigns for equal pay for work of equal value and reforms in how maternity leave or childcare itself is organised by the state. These "rights" have been introduced at different times for different nation states in Europe in the last 40 years, but some have never introduced them. For those who may live in a democratic state and are not citizens of it (and these people may be working and paying taxes and not illegal workers, economic migrants, refugees or asylum seekers), a different sets of rights or a complete absence of these rights exists in their daily lives. Arguments continue about the access, quality and level of social services offered by nation states, or the actual exercise of equality and social justice as a principle in daily life, particularly at work, where discriminations on account of sex, class and race and prejudices or about a person's sexual preference or their disability still operate. Here, the distinctions between citizens and non-citi-

zens regarding access to the resources offered by the state has become an acute area of “national” anxiety. It is the recognition of the continuing discrimination on the basis of differences between individuals of different sex, race, class and disability and sexual preference which has formed the main agenda of organised feminist campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, debates about “equal rights” mutated into discussion about “equal opportunities” and conflicting conceptions about “balancing” work and parenting or work and leisure/lifestyle but at the same time legislative agreements against discrimination on the grounds of gender has increased.¹²

Discussions about the value of feminism or whether it is still relevant continue to be a popular subject in the daily press but no one in democracies is proposing a withdrawal of women's right to vote or right to work, or the removal of women from government or the stopping of girls' education (as the Taliban did in Afghanistan and is starting to do again in Northern Pakistan). What often seem like trivial topics are regularly raised to dismiss or devalue feminist agendas in the popular media: should a University host a beauty pageant; how elegantly do women parliamentarians dress; is it feminist to be a lap dancer; what should be done to improve boy's education since girls are achieving so much more in exams. (I heard all these discussed on the radio recently). This represents a trivialisation of the women's liberation movement's campaigns to understand the 'personal as political' and to reinscribe feminist politics as only a liberal question of choice for “one” person in a democracy where social equality is somehow “achieved”. We cannot afford to be complacent about our “social rights” as women in a modern democracy as the real issue is how to exercise them more effectively and collectively for social change. The criticism that this view of equality in feminism as equality in citizenship (which was already achieved by 1970) is confined to Western democratic states and has to be examined more closely as well as the claims that it is this level of equality has been achieved (and more dubiously we are in a post-feminist state as a result).

... as human beings This is where a second level of discussion about equality in terms of human rights within feminism is important. The UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which celebrated 60 years of existence last year, put forward an agenda for “dignity and justice” for all, regardless of the political status of the countries in which individuals are based. This agenda for human rights is not the same as the rights of a citizen expressed in modern democracies or the United States bill of rights: although it often appears as if the two are confused in modern political imaginations in discussions about “freedoms” or in the identification of American imperialism and neo-liberal rhetoric about

democratic freedoms as universal. It remains an aspiration that all democracies should behave in accordance with the UN Declaration – even though there remain abuses of these human rights by democratic states who are members of the United Nations. Rights here are often expressed in terms of “freedom“ from: freedom from slavery, torture, cruel or degrading treatment; freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile; freedom of movement; the right to asylum; freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The right to security (as freedom from violence), to education, to freedom of expression are also part of the declaration and these statements form a part of a very broad agenda of human rights meant to apply worldwide regardless of the way in which any nation state is governed.

The UN Declaration acknowledges that people of the world should fight against tyranny and oppression – outlining this fight as an object of legitimate protest, campaigns and peaceful assembly and positioning the taking of arms in this struggle as a recourse of the last resort – but that this protest against injustice should never entail violation of people’s basic human rights which should be protected by law. While the language in which the document is written expresses the vision of all nations standing together “in the spirit of brotherhood“ and uses a generic “he“ to stand in for all human beings, it is made quite explicit in the introduction and in Article 16 (on marriage) that these human rights are for both male and female and regardless of class, race, ethnicity, religious belief.¹³ The infamous slogan of the 1980s that women’s rights are indivisible from human rights became the means to make this broader agenda of cultural, social and political rights active for all women and many attempts were made to set this as the agenda for the United Nations conferences for women since the 1970s.

Article 27 of the UN Declaration also states:

‘(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.’

If one takes away the sexism implied by the “he“ only, then this statement is about the basis for protection of authorship (copyright and intellectual property rights) and about participation and enjoyment of the arts for the whole of society. While this might be taken – in a very sexist reading – as protection of (male) authors and position women as only consumers of the arts: without the sexism, it can be read as protection of men and women as both cultural producers and as consumers within the arts. A lot remains to be done to ensure women’s recognition as producers of culture, not just consumers.

This shift between equality for women in terms of democratic citizenship and equality for women as human beings should not pass without a few further remarks. Appadurai interestingly points to the grey area generated between the conceptions of “rights“ as human rights and rights as a citizen.¹⁴ This is where many Western feminists (identified with the North/West of the globe) coming with a strong conception of rights as a citizen in a developed democracy and arguing for an expansion of those rights received the sharpest criticisms from African women and women in developing countries (identified with the South/East) in UN congresses for women. The basic guarantees of civil democracy and rights as citizens experienced by women in the West were not the most pressing questions for societies dealing with urgent questions at the level of basic human needs, in the distribution of food and access to clean water, supplies of electricity/fuel, basic health care or primary education, and facing a lack of political representation or overt political oppression and corruption in government and/or the legal system. Even on questions of forced marriage, the abuse of women, the trafficking of women as sex-slaves or as domestic slaves/indentured labour: there are substantial asymmetries or differences between countries and experiences.¹⁵

Transnational communication across feminist groups and activist movements has been important in creating the opportunities for women in different countries to put pressure on their national governments to fund initiatives to improve the position of women or provide relief for women as victims of violence or poverty.¹⁶ This has happened in many nation states even where the need to build a strong civil society in which people come together to organise change, produce new initiatives, campaign, or peacefully protest is still a long way from being achieved. Attempts to raise the question of culture in these debates often feel dwarfed by the overwhelming difficulties caused by war, poverty and lack of primary health care or basic education. Today, large multi-national NGO’s supported financially by the North distribute “humanitarian“ aid and development agendas to the South. They simultaneously risk being seen as further “importations“ of Western values to humanitarian relief or as unwarranted political interference if their programmes extend beyond basic needs. The extent to which NGO’s successfully use local knowledge and local groups for the distribution of relief, in contrast to their subjection to local government restrictions on their actions or military/government corruption, and the partial, remedial and temporary relief they can actually provide are all subjects worthy of greater debate.

Many of the most prominent areas in the human rights agenda have also risen to the fore as the content of much contemporary art: the status of holding a visa/passport; the situation of migrant workers; the abuse of women trafficked in the sex trade; women’s

work in developing countries as an extension of global economic practices; life in “transit” camps for refugees or illegal immigrants; the presentation of women in marriage markets; victims of war and torture, visible differences between women in dress/religious belief.¹⁷ All these themes have been produced in both feminist-motivated and non-feminist contemporary art but there is a frequent deficit in how these works are read as well as widely known or exhibited. Contemporary art continues to embrace the problems associated with “globalisation” as a topic. At the same time, as the art world holds more “international” exhibitions both in the North/West and witnesses the proliferation of international biennales in every corner of the globe. Here, representation in terms of numbers also raises itself as a question. Contemporary art itself is far from being a global phenomenon in spite of the expansion and attention given in recent years to globalisation in the visual arts and to a broadening of its interests in artists’ production away from its continuing dominant US/Eurocentric bias and economy. Most “global” exhibitions with major budgets rarely involve artists from more than 30 countries: and closer examination often establishes that they live in substantially fewer metropolitan centres, regardless of their country of origin. Artists from 60 countries of origin took part at *Documenta XI*, albeit that they lived and worked in fewer than this and more than half lived in or near New York or major metropolitan centres in Europe. A recent analysis of *KunstKompass*, in the context of “globalisation” in contemporary art, shows a minimal change of 3% in artists in the top hundred living outside the US or Europe rising from 8% in 1970 to 11% in 2005 (although it should be remembered that the survey’s evidence base remains in US and European magazines and exhibition venues which have held more “international” exhibitions).¹⁸ Contemporary art does not possess the global reach of international sports events like the World Cup in Football or the World Olympics where nearly 200 countries participate. Only 78 countries have ever been represented at the Venice Biennale but not all of the countries that do participate in international biennales are democracies, so the question of which definitions of women’s rights or equality in terms of numbers which we are discussing is still prescient. The participation of the maximum number of countries in international biennales which have proliferated around the globe is still less than half those of the countries represented by the UN. n.paradoxa’s own claim to operate as an international feminist art journal is based on how in 12 years, articles and features on 200 women artists from more than 45 countries in the world as its writers are as diverse as the artists covered. The above comments are not meant to ignore the range of different forms of art that are present in every country in the world, but that the specialised infrastructure on which contemporary art depends and is generated through is absent from many countries: i.e. museums of modern

or contemporary art; state funding for contemporary art events and its export abroad; specialist commercial or not-for-profit galleries which support artists and a local art market; local collectors; an arts press of either journalists in newspapers or in specialist art magazines; art schools or university training in the visual arts; or artists' communities and collaborative or co-operative initiatives. Contemporary artists, no matter where in the world they are based, are overwhelmingly University-educated. Most possess two or three degrees and they often travel from their country of origin to achieve these levels of education. Women curators, critics and artists are not a minority amongst the new "global" intellectual elite in the art world, who travel, write, produce and organise in international venues.

The transformation of very low levels of selection of women artists (10%) in the early 1970s to a norm of around 30% in international biennales and triennials in the 2000s could be seen as part of a general transformation of the position of women in the world but this is not an argument for the qualities and issues in the work produced by women artists as central and not marginal to definitions of contemporary art practices. In a survey of new and emergent contemporary art biennales across South East Asia since 2000, I found that women artists (from US, Europe, Middle East and Latin America and Asia) are present at levels between 20–30%,¹⁹ whether the shows were curated by Western or Asian, male or female curators. Many of these exhibitions have been criticised for their adoption of Western or international standards which have marginalized local/national artists or art forms. If we accept these criticisms, which have often nationalist or even "traditionalist" rationales, would we also accept the implication that to restore a more local dimension to a biennale would reinstate local forms of sexism and discrimination against women? Instead, it is often understood to be an identifiably progressive and socially "enlightened" attitude to include more work from national/local women artists in "global" exhibitions: whether the artists are from India, China, Lithuania or the Middle East. The organisation of alternative "women artists" shows from different nation states in minor venues where a major export of a "nation" through a festival or as part of a cultural exchange programme has been organised in a major metropolis continues to be a key feature of exhibitions in the West. Are these shows simply political opportunism or a real attempt to transform how a nation's culture might be perceived?

The general problem for women artists remains a lack of in-depth analysis of their work: in retrospective catalogues – a primary form of recognition and status for artists – or in well-informed critical overviews of their work in art magazines as well as how to think more critically about the work produced, away from any simple agenda for their "repre-

sentativeness“ as “national“ darling, “ethnic other“ or as the “feminine“. Discussions of women artists’ work from different parts of the globe risk repeating forms of Western imperialism where there is an over simplistic identification of women from different regions of the world with current Western feminist debates on women’s subjectivity, problems of identity/identification, body politics, the occupation of social space, social and political violence against women or varied forms of cyberfeminism and feminist online protests? Even though many major publications of Western feminism are widely read and known in different parts of the world, something different frequently exists to which more attention needs to be paid to explore how the work is mediated by a range of local forces and contemporary concerns. Discussing differences from known or familiar Western feminist perspectives can reinforce discrimination (even in forms of liberal representative inclusion) when hostile or stereotyped differences along the lines of the West and “the rest“, to emphasise a Western “avant-gardism“ or “we did it first-ism“ are used.²⁰ Recognising differences between women, their politics and their feminist agendas is not a justification for further discriminations between women but it does requires greater attention to differences, freed from an “identity“ politics based in “politically correct“ agendas about certain races, nationalisms or ethnicities. This attention should ideally become the basis for how we build together strategic alliances in the world today as more and more women operate internationally as cultural producers.

Attempts to marginalize or reject feminism’s import as a ‘Western phenomena’ in developing countries continue in spite of many different and proliferating articulations of feminism worldwide. Feminism in the West remains an unfinished project in the terms of the 1960s Women’s Liberation Movement. It is certainly unfinished worldwide, if one considers how feminist art production challenged norms and expectations about femininity and women’s role or practices, introduced new forms of subjectivity as well as new subjects into art and provided models for different forms of social and political engagement in contemporary art practices. The Women’s Art Movement created many new institutions, organisations, publications as forums to develop new forms of art and art discourse. These became centres from which new campaigns were started. This infrastructure, which created an alternative – a counter-culture – another set of possibilities for cultural production, was important to the movement of women. Today, there remains a problem of dis-investment in this civil society created by the women’s movement (particularly in the West and the US) in modern democracies. A false post-feminist rhetoric is used as justification for this dis-investment. Women’s organisations are made to appear “outdated“, “unfashionable“, “sticking to an old political agenda“ by those who speak supposedly a more progressive

language or have quite simply another agenda or focus, when these organisations may in reality be financially or administratively challenged to continue. The archives and registries which were so central to the building of a collective spirit in the women's art movement and a recovery of that "hidden history" of women artists have regularly been split up, devalued or accessioned into other collections although there remains a strong network of women's libraries/archives who have survived. Is this "loss" or lack of investment contributing to the minimal and superficial political education among the majority of women or is it the result of the specialisation of feminism in the academies, which happened for some women in the late 1980s-1990s, such that it can only produce an elite few who follow its debates? Has the circulation of feminist debates become too insular in a culture, which is overloaded with information and trivia, but has a profound poverty of new ideas?

In spite of this, women artists continue to organise collectively, to mount shows about the history of women artists, to found galleries, to organise workshops, publications, and start email lists in every part of the world. This is not a "reinvention of the wheel". Generally, their access to resources remains limited, circumscribed by this general social lack of investment: particularly the lack of research monies from the State (via Universities) for feminist projects. Women are not uncharitable: they give time, resources, energy, devotion, loyalty to these initiatives: what they get back is a community of interest, an investment in a better society, perhaps friendships and insights into a different way of life. They search for other means, grants, sponsorships; self-funding (since they have some of their own money now!); or private investors. They just decide to do it regardless, online, from their homes, on their own, with what their colleagues or friends can do to help, with what is available and without waiting for it to be a fully-funded project. Why? Because ultimately, it is not about having a greater share of the pie dished up for professional artists, it's about another vision of how to operate in the world and about building different audiences and communities in and through their work. Because after having considered the options, thought about their politics, assessed the situation, this seems to be the only way to proceed if they want to make a difference in how women's voices are heard in contemporary cultural life, locally, nationally or internationally. This was certainly how I felt when I founded n.paradoxa. The grey area between one's rights as a citizen of a country and those rights for all human beings in the world remains a critical problem where the pressures of globalisation are felt everywhere while the distinctions between national and global processes have less and less clear boundaries and the sites for political intervention or the articulation of feminist approaches appear more complex. In this, the field of contemporary art is no exception in who and what it represents. _____

1 The transcript of this talk was published in Ctrl+P issue at http://www.ctrlp-artjournal.org/pdfs/CtrlP_Issue9.pdf

2 Their websites are: artpies.samizdat.net/ and www.guerrillagirls.com/

3 Katy Deepwell, *Pyramids or Pillars*. Review of Danielle Cliche, Ritva Mitchell and Andreas Joh. Weisand (ERICarts/ZfKf) (eds.) *Pyramid or Pillars: Unveiling the status of Women in Arts and Media Professions in Europe*, Bonn 2001, in: TIF: Women's Studies Newsletter Bielefeld University, Dec. 2001. There are significant gaps in the collection of data, and I remain sceptical about whether the policy of 'gender mainstreaming' advocated in the report would result in an improvement in the opportunities for women as cultural producers in the visual arts.

4 *Pyramid or Pillars: Unveiling the status of Women in Arts and Media Professions in Europe*, ed. by Danielle Cliche, Ritva Mitchell and Andreas Joh. Weisand (ERICarts/ZfKf), Bonn 2001.

5 These figures are from the research by the author published in *n.paradoxa* between 1998–2008.

6 2008 figures are reported at www.manager-magazin.de/magazin/artikel/0,2828,590528,00.html

7 Tate figures can be found in Alicia Foster: *Tate Women Artists* (London 2004) and Tretayakov figures in N.Kamenetskaya and L.Iovleva, *Femme Art: Women Painting in Russia XV–XX centuries* Exh.-cat. Tretayakov Gallery, Moscow 2002.

8 See Stella Rollig, *Working on Rafts*, in: *n.paradoxa*, vol. 18, 2006, pp.82–88.

9 Arjun Appadurai, *Number in the Colonial Imagination*, in: *Modernity at Large* (Minnesota Press 1996) pp. 114–137 and in: *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Duke University Press 2006).

10 Figures from the International Labour Organisation's publication *GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT TRENDS FOR WOMEN*, (March 2009) indicate how women's employment varies across 9 regions in the world and varies from 20% in the Middle East to 51% in Europe, 60% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 70% in East Asia amongst all women: producing an average of 40.8 of women working amongst the total workforce in 2008 in the waged labour market. The assistance and impact of women's unpaid labour and care as well as domestic work in their own homes is another story. This report

highlights how women's labour is divided globally into service sectors 46.3%; agriculture 35.4%; industry 18.3% of the total workforce. In Europe the service sector accounts for 80% of women's employment (constituting nearly two thirds of the workforce in education, health and social work); whereas outside developed countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, the numbers of women is concentrated in agriculture (up to 60% of the workforce): often as farmers of small holdings working on their own account or as contributing (unpaid) family members.

11 See Anne Phillips, *Must Feminists Give Up on Liberal Democracy?*, in: *Political Studies*, XL Special issue, 1992, pp.68–82.

12 In addition to EU legislation on gender equality, 185 countries have ratified the UN General Assembly's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979. The EU, Australia, New Zealand and the USA are also signatories to the OECD Development Assistance Committee's Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Co-operation (1998) which require a commitment to gender equality in policy, in projects, programmes and policy management and in decision making within government-funded agencies and government itself.

13 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 1948). Accessed online at: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

14 Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Duke University Press 2006, p. 42.

15 For an indication of some of these debates within 1980s feminism and at the world conferences, see: *Women: a World Report*, London 1985.

16 Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*, Duke University Press 2005.

17 Some examples include the works of: Milica Tomic, Ursula Biemann, Shirin Neshat, Ana Adamovic, Ann-Sofi Siden, Coco Fusco, Prema Murthy, Sopawan Boonnimitra.

18 Larissa Buchholz and Ulf Wuggenig, *Cultural Globalization between Myth and Reality: The Case of the Contemporary Visual Arts*, on: http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_buchholz_en.htm *Artefact* issue 4. They note the dominance of the (eco-

nomically dominant) triad – US, the EU (and Japan) – in KunstKompass from 1970 to 2005 is between 82% and 95% of all artists listed. The respective figures for 2004 and 2005 are 86% and 87%.

19 C-Arts Mag (Singapore) Special Issue on Women in the Arts, June 2009, guest editor: Katy Deepwell.

20 Bojana Pejic, The Dialectics of Normality, in: After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe, ed. by D. Elliot and B. Pejic, Moderna Museet, Stockholm 1999, vol. 2, p. 26.