

unique skills and to share and make visible their efforts. As movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp suggest, the time is at hand to recognize that we do not, in fact, live in a “man’s world.”

Assembling these accounts has also been a long time in the making. Not everyone who initially thought they could participate was able to, in the end. And since we began, Bisi Silva has passed away. Silva’s interview, recorded while she was in the hospital, we believe to be her last. As she was the scholar responsible for the first special issue of the feminist journal *n.paradoxa*, devoted to Africa’s women making art today, it is a fitting tribute that we dedicate this volume to her. She wrote in that 2013 volume that

An important development in less than [a] decade is the proliferation of independent art organizations across the continent in the absence of government interest and support of art and culture. In West Africa alone these include Nubuke Foundation, Accra; Ker Thioissane and Raw Material, Dakar; CCA, Lagos, Nike Art Gallery and Terra Kulture all in Lagos; and of course the twenty-year-old Doual’Art in Douala. In the past twelve months others have opened [in] Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Congo Brazzaville. What unites many of these organizations and other initiatives too numerous to list is that they have all been started by or are headed by women

curators and cultural producers. The question therefor is with so many women directing visual arts organizations, does this signal the beginning of a new trend? (Silva 2013: 4).

I would suggest that the answer is yes, but the trend predates the twenty-first century.

STORIES TO TELL OURSELVES

This volume might well look different if it were published from Paris, Cairo, Luanda, or Tokyo. Within any story that is told, there are power differentials depending on who gets to do the telling. As the feminist art historian Griselda Pollock has written so influentially,

In the end, all our histories will be just that: stories we tell ourselves, narratives of retrospective self-affirmation, fictions of and for resistance that are, nonetheless, answerable to a sense of the real process of lived and suffered histories. Thus, to enter critically into the problematic of narrative, representation, history, and the politics of meaning, we shall need self-awareness of who we are when we “tell a story,” what its effects will be, what is excluded and how contingent it will be, however diligent we are in our scholarship and research (2003: xviii).

The stories that follow unfold from changes that were implemented within the power structures of the West, before these were decentralized by women and organizations like

those cited by Bisi Silva. It does not compile the stories of every noteworthy female arts leader on or from the continent, although this would be a worthy endeavor. It is a provocation that begins in New York and includes voices from Newark, London, Paris, and Lagos, and individuals whose home base shifts—holding a mirror up to our globalizing times. It looks to where centers were and how they have moved; and it invites each of us to consider where they might go.

As much as possible, the accounts that follow are told by the women themselves. Each has been asked to take on the uncomfortable task of writing about herself, or she has been interviewed by another influential woman. Together a picture emerges of the cultural shifts taking root over the past forty years, some underrecognized connections between individuals and organizations, and the extraordinarily courageous and daring initiatives launched by this collective of twelve women.

Risham Majeed, a former student of Susan Vogel’s at Columbia University and now an assistant professor at Ithaca College whose research explores the intersections of medieval and African art histories, the non-Western influence on prominent mainstream art historical ideologies, and the history of museums like those of the Palais du Trocadéro, took on the daunting task of interviewing her

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