WOMEN'S CAUCUS FOR ART

Honors:

Ruth Bernhard
Adelyn Dohme Breeskin
Elizabeth Catlett
Sari Dienes
Claire Falkenstein
Helen Lundeberg
Women of Art:
Women's Caucus for Art
Honors Exhibition

The North Point Gallery
72 North Point
San Francisco, California
February 20 - March 1, 1981

Curated by Tobey Moss

For sponsoring and organizing this exhibition the Women's Caucus for Art thanks Dr. Joseph Baird.
We also thank Paula Harper and Josephine Withers.

Awards Selection Committee

THALIA GOUMA-PETERSON, Chair, Art Historian, The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio.
PRISCILLA BIRGE, Artist, Berkley, California.
ALISON HILTON, Art Historian, Wayne State University, Detroit Michigan.
ORA LERMAN, Artist, State University of New York at Suffolk, New York.
CHRIS PETTEYS, Collector and Author, Sterling, Colorado.
ELEANOR TUFTS, Art Historian, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.
JOSEPHINE WITHERS, Art Historian, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.
The Women's Caucus for Art
3rd Annual Award Ceremony
For Outstanding Achievement in the Visual Arts

Program
February 26, 1981, 5:30 p.m.
Hilton Hotel, San Francisco, California

Panel: Homage to Women of Art

Chair: Thalia Gouma-Peterson, The College of Wooster

Greetings: S. Derenne Coerr, President
Women's Caucus for Art

Presentation of Awards:
ADELYN BREESKIN - Eleanor Tufts
RUTH BERNHARD - Priscilla Birge
ELIZABETH CATLETT - Alison Hilton
SARI DIENES - Josephine Withers
CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN - Ora Lerman
HELEN LUNDEBERG - Chris Petteys

Catalogue edited by Thalia Gouma-Peterson.

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Preface

This is the third year that the Women’s Caucus for Art presents awards for outstanding achievement in the visual arts to six distinguished pioneers.

The first awards ceremony, in January 1979, was a new beginning, an historic moment when women took into their hands the responsibility of awarding recognition to senior women, with life long achievements. None of us present at that first ceremony will forget the emotional intensity and elation of the moment when our first five honorees walked up to the podium. It was a beginning of great gravity and consequence.

As we hold our third ceremony we should not lose any of that intensity, gravity, and elation, for recognition accorded to women by women should never be taken for granted. We are honoring this year six women with life-long achievements in various fields of art. Each has earned national prominence. Ruth Bernhard, Elizabeth Catlett, Sari Dienes, Claire Falkenstein, and Helen Lundeberg, five remarkable artists of different personalities, chose to be faithful to their own inner visions. These visions have been and will continue to be a source of inspiration to younger women artists.

This is the first year that we are also honoring a woman whose life has been devoted to the history of art and to museum work. This adds a new dimension to our awards, for it recognizes that the contribution of women to the arts encompasses other spheres in addition to that of the creative artist. It is appropriate that we inaugurate this new category by honoring Adelyn Dohme Breeskin. Her work as art historian and museum director has set a model for many younger women.

We are pleased that our Awards Ceremony is taking place in the context of three national conferences, the Women’s Caucus for Art, the Coalition of Women’s Art Organizations, and the College Art Association. And we are especially happy that three of our honorees are California residents, whose recognition coincides with our annual meeting in San Francisco, highlighting the vital and pioneering role of California in the field of art.

As the Women’s Caucus for Art, a national organization of over 3,500 members and twenty-three Chapters throughout the United States, enters its tenth year, we look forward to many more Awards Ceremonies emphasizing the individual achievements of women in the arts and recording their creativity and survival as an example and inspiration.

S. Derenne Coerr
President, Women’s Caucus for Art

Thalia Gouma-Peterson
Chair, Awards Selection Committee
Ruth Bernhard — photographer — student of nature — explorer of form, light and image. Through your insight universal relationships become visible. Your deeply personal vision reaches beyond ordinary perceptions to grasp the order of being. Your awareness of the majesty inherent in common objects, and of symbols of eternity in the natural world, awakens us to the grandeur of life.

A "sense of wonder at the miraculous visual world and the mysteries that lie beyond limited human perceptions" is the motivating force behind Ruth Bernhard’s photographs.

Born in Berlin, Germany, in 1905, she studied at the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts before moving to New York in 1927. Her first job in New York introduced her to the rudiments of photography. She made a living from advertising and fashion photography for several years. During this period her work appeared in Advertising Art, the magazine section of the New York Times, and in a book called Machine Art published by the Museum of Modern Art. It was at this time that she began experimenting with personal image building, working solely with images which greatly interested her.

On a trip to California in 1935 she met Edward Weston, saw his work, and for the first time, realized that photography could be an intensely personal art form. She felt impelled to study with him. Unfortunately, she moved to Los Angeles only to learn that he had moved to Carmel. Knowing she could not make a living in Carmel, she settled in Hollywood, continued her commercial work, and devoted herself to her own inner vision. There she had her first one-person exhibition. Although never a pupil of his, Weston’s work and attitudes influenced her greatly and she maintained close contact with him.

She moved to San Francisco in 1953. Here she continued her photographic work and began teaching private classes in "Photographing the Nude", and "The Art of Feeling". Later she taught at the University of California. She is an impassioned teacher who has lectured and taught classes and workshops throughout the United States.

Two retrospective portfolios: "The Gift of the Commonplace" and "The Eternal Body" were produced in the mid 1970’s. The majesty inherent in the common object, and human body as a symbol of eternity, recurrent themes in her work, are the subject of these two portfolios.

Ruth Bernhard’s photographic images explore the order and harmony evident in the visual world. The ability of light to reveal the essence of form is central to her work. She draws from the symbols of life and eternity found in nature. The search for meaning behind visual form, pattern, and image are motivating forces in her creative experience.
Her work springs from deep inner feelings, from intense personal reactions to the images she photographs.

Priscilla Birge

1905 Born in Berlin, Germany, October 14
1925-27 Attended Academy of Fine Arts, Berlin, Germany
1927 Moved to New York City; introduced to fundamentals of photography
1935 Met Edward Weston on trip to California
1962 Included in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York
1971 Taught a master class at New York University and the International Foundation for Concerned Photography, New York
1976 Exhibited at Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
Adelyn Dohme Breeskin

We honor today Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, genial museum director and respected authority on American art. The Baltimore Museum of Art and the persona of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin have become indelibly linked in art history annals, and the name of an American artist who went to France - Mary Cassatt — cannot be pronounced today without thinking of the scholarship of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin.

For her three pioneering books on Cassatt, for her 23 years at the Baltimore Museum, 20 of which were spent as director of the museum, whose acquisitions she significantly increased; and for her important exhibitions arranged subsequently at the National Museum of American Art, we salute Adelyn Dohme Breeskin as an exemplary model whose distinguished career is permanently etched in the fertile ground of American art history.

The Baltimore Museum of Art and the persona of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin have become indelibly linked in art history annals, and the name of an American artist who went to France - Mary Cassatt — cannot be pronounced today without thinking of Adelyn Dohme Breeskin.

Her pioneering book of 1948, *The Graphic Work of Mary Cassatt*, was followed by a 1970 Catalogue Raisonne of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors and Drawings of Mary Cassatt, and last year Breeskin's third book on Mary Cassatt was published by the Smithsonian.

Cassatt and Breeskin have more in common than the latter's many decades of study of the earlier artist, for Breeskin was born only 200 miles away from the painter's birthplace of Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, in neighboring Maryland. Both young women grew up in prosperous, business-minded families and both showed an early interest in art. After Breeskin's childhood in Baltimore, where she painted at the Charcoal Club, she enrolled at Radcliffe College. She combined her undergraduate studies in Cambridge with art instruction at Boston's School of Fine Arts, Crafts, and Decorative Design. Breeskin's first full-time job was an assistant in the print room of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After two years she left to marry Elias Breeskin, a concert violinist, and in the 1920's she gave birth to three children. During this time Cassatt died at the age of 82 in France, and soon after, on the other side of the Atlantic, Breeskin decided to resume her career in the art world.

Breeskin's 32 years at the Baltimore Museum, of which the last 20 were spent as director, witnessed the acquisition of the famous Cone Collection and the
expansion of the print holding from fewer than 50 items to over 80,000. Breeskin earned the admiration of her staff through her long hours of devoted work; she often helped until midnight or later before an exhibition opening, pitching in with final touches.

Her subsequent posts have been Director of the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, Curator of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture at the National Collection of Fine Arts, and today she is consultant at the National Museum of American Art.


Ever in demand as a jurist, she served as U.S. Commissioner in charge of the American Pavilion at the 30th Venice Biennale of 1960 and headed the jury of the Pittsburgh International of 1964.

Her preeminence in the field was recognized in 1956 by her election as President of the Association of Art Museum Directors and more recently by her 12 years as a Trustee of The American Federation of Arts.

In recognition of these many accomplishments the Women’s Caucus of Art salutes Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, an exemplary model whose distinguished career is permanently etched in the fertile ground of American art history.

Eleanor Tufts

1896  Born in Baltimore, Maryland  
Studied at Radcliffe College and at School of Fine Arts, Crafts and Decorative Design, Boston

1918-20  Assistant, Print Department, Metropolitan Museum of Art

1930-62  Baltimore Museum of Art, Curator, then Director

1962-64  Director, Washington Gallery of Modern Art


Recipient of Katherine Coffey Award for Distinguished Accomplishment in the Museum Profession, 1976, and recipient of honorary doctorates from the following institutions:

1953  Goucher College

1961  Washington College

1963  Wheaton College

1966  Hood College and Morgan State College

1978  Barnard College

Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, Mary Cassatt Graphic Work (1980)
Elizabeth Catlett

Elizabeth Catlett, you have survived and have worked to help us all to bring about "the changes that we must make in this world in order to survive." Belief in the importance of art, care for your people and pride in the heritage of black America and the traditions of your adopted country show in all your work. The image of the strong Working Woman inspires deep respect and, for many of us, a genuine empathy. Your sculptures from the early Mother and Child to the most recent monumental pieces, speak to us above all of the powers of human feeling and of art.

For Elizabeth Catlett art is a social necessity. Her career of art and teaching demonstrates her fierce care for students and for her people. "Our work can help us in the changes that we must make in this world in order to survive," she said in the early 1970s.

From early childhood, Elizabeth Catlett was sensitive to issues of survival. Not only was she aware of the need for change, but in many ways she pushed changes along against tough odds. She grew up in Washington, D.C. and studied design at Howard University. A chance to work under the WPA attracted her to mural painting, an interest she was to pursue much later. She managed to go to the University of Iowa for graduate work and had the good fortune to study under Grant Wood, whose high standards stimulated and encouraged her. She was awarded one of the University's first MFA degrees in 1940. Her thesis project, a stone sculpture entitled Mother and Child, earned the first prize for sculpture in the American Negro Exposition in Chicago later that year.

With her advanced degree and a sound reputation as a sculptor to her credit, Catlett found teaching jobs in black schools; in New Orleans she served as head of the art department at Dillard College. A year in New York was a major experience. She was welcomed into a circle of talented musicians in Greenwich Village (she was herself a fine singer) and she also had the opportunity to study with Osip Zadkin. During the mid 1940s, Catlett began to exert some influence as a teacher. She worked briefly at Hampton Institute; she visited the Art Department at Atlanta University, where she suggested the establishment of purchase prizes of students' work, the foundation of the University's permanent art collection. Back in New York, she taught at the progressive George Washington Carver school in Harlem, and did a great deal, along with other black artists and writers, to help the school survive.

In 1946, a fellowship allowed her to travel to Mexico to work on a series of sculptures, paintings and prints on the lives of black women. Her admiration for Diego Rivera and other Mexican muralists seemed to accent a deep-seated sense of kinship with the Mexican people, who were, like American blacks, victims of oppression and neglect. In Mexico, Catlett immersed herself in the study of traditional arts, turning first to terra cotta sculpture and then to wood carving. She soon began working at the Taller de Grafica Popular, where she eventually became a full member and took part in such important collective projects as the production of an album of prints illustrating life in Mexico. In 1959 she was made the first female professor of sculpture at the National University of
Mexico. While she taught, she continued to exhibit in Mexico and the United States. One of her most important shows consisted of a cycle of sculptures and prints on "The Black Experience."

Catlett has been identified with a degree of radicalism. When she spoke before a meeting of black artists in 1961, she emphasized their responsibility to look to the needs of their communities, to leave behind traditional criteria for success in the white commercial art world in order to become socially effective.

Elizabeth Catlett's art is political in that it is a declaration of confidence in excellence, of serious commitment to move viewers. It is above all a personal expression of a woman artist who identifies strongly with the broad communities of the striving black and Mexican people.

Alison Hilton

1915- Born in Washington, D.C.
1937 B.S. in Art, Howard University
1940 M.F.A. University of Iowa
1941 First prize in sculpture, Golden Jubilee National Exhibition, Chicago, Illinois
1946 Travel to Mexico on Rosenwald Fellowship; became member of Taller de Grafica Popular
1959 Became first woman professor of sculpture, National University of Mexico
1962 First Mexican Biennial Exhibition, major award for sculpture

Elizabeth Catlett, Target Practice (1970) Bronze, 13 1/2 H. The Aaron Douglas Collection of Afro-American Art Photo: David C. Driskell

1964 Second Mexican Biennial Exhibition, major award of sculpture
1966 Commission for the National Politecnical Institute, Olmec Bather
1970 Exhibition "The Black Experience," Museum of Modern Art, Mexico
1972 Solo Exhibitions at Howard University Galleries, National Center of Afro-American Artists, Dorchester, Mass., Atlanta Center for Black Art, Rainbow Gallery, Berkley
1974-75 Solo Exhibitions at Southern University, Baton Rouge, and Scripps College, Claremont, California
1975 Proclamation of "Elizabeth Catlett Week" by Mayor of Berkley, California as part of International Women's Year
1977 Workshop Exhibition, Humanities Museum, Scripps College, Claremont, California
1980 Seminar, Scripps College
Sari Dienes

We honor today Sari Dienes for her contributions to the avant garde spanning two continents and fifty years of work. Her art lets the things of this world speak in their own voice and hovers always on the edge between matter and spirit.

"Everything has mind, spirit, intelligence," Sari Dienes has written. "I honor these in everything and do not separate myself as a human being from them. My work is to reveal the inherent intelligence of things." This statement may have been partly inspired by her study of Zen, and a two-year sojourn to Japan in the late fifties, but it describes as well as any words can her lifelong artistic mission. Being open and sensitive to the music, the form, the character, the individuality of every object allows Dienes to create art out of the most improbable materials and in unexpected combinations, even in this century of surprises. Long before "process art" had achieved its special cachet in the sixties, Dienes's work was clearly less about producing objects than about having an ongoing dialogue with the intelligent and spirited stuff out of which she created her art: lint, bones, seed pods, street litter, mylar, feathers, mirrors, sounds, color Xerox, and yes, even paint.

The discerning eye will appreciate in Dienes's restless explorations and ceaseless experimenting with new materials and technologies a subtle and pervasive attention to form and aesthetic detail which has a thoroughly classical foundation. In her early years in Paris and London, Dienes either studied or worked with Fernand Leger, Amedee Ozenfant, Andre Lhote and Henry Moore: all of them classical in the best sense of the word, all committed to the articulation of structure and form in their art. One can hazard the guess that Dienes's solid formalist training and her early obsession with technique created the solid base from which she could launch herself into the faerie realms of snow painting, light sculpture and sidewalk rubbings.

Critic Elise Grille has observed that her art "remains groping, breathing, yet always imbued with a controlling taste and artistry that prevents the sort of blind eruption which often passes for experimentation." Artists, musicians and poets have all been attracted to Dienes's artistry; Rauschenberg and Johns were among the many artists who directly profited from her free-wheeling but disciplined approach during their formative years in the fifties.

In a recent People magazine interview, Dienes remarked, "I put everything into my art." By the same token, every corner of Dienes's life is susceptible to invasion by her very original tastes: the kitchen, the bedroom, the correspondence file, her wardrobe. Indeed, Dienes should be credited as the inventor of "wearable art," and no art event is complete without the movable artwork that is Sari Dienes.

Josephine Withers
1898  Sari Dienes, née Chylinska, born in Debrecen, Hungary
1930-39  Worked with Leger and Lothe in Paris and Henry Moore in London, where she was Assistant Director of the Ozenfant Academy
1939  Came to New York City and taught at Ozenfant's New York school, Parson's School of Design, and Brooklyn Museum Art School
1942  Had her first one-artist show at the New School for Social Research, New York
1950  Became associated with the Betty Parsons Gallery, where she had four solo shows
1954  Developed a method of rubbing with inks and rollers to preserve in graphic form the designs on Colonial gravestones
1957-58  In Japan studied the Japanese method of printing wood blocks and worked in ceramics
1965  Received Ford Foundation Artist in Residence Grant

Sari Dienes, Sidewalks (1955) Ink rubbing on paper

Sari Dienes, Hommage to the Worm (1979-80) Pine cones, seed pods, string, and mixed media

1971  Received American Federation of the Arts Grant for film "Painting in the Snow"
1973-77  Solo exhibitions in New York City at Andrew Crispo Gallery, Andre Zaree Gallery, and three at her current Gallery, A.I.R.
1976  Received the International Women's Year Award
1977  Film about Dienes by Martha Edelheit, "Hats, Bottles, and Bones", screened at M.O.M.A.
Claire Falkenstein

We honor Claire Falkenstein who, in sharing her openness, has captured a view of a changing world in the shape of a concrete object. She has become a modern "alchemist", searching for tangible forms for the elusive, life-giving substances . . . and as a result, creating sculptures that form endless connections.

How does the artists create an image that will express herself and her time? Claire Falkenstein’s work embodies this fusion through continuous experimentation. Two forms dominate her body of work. One is a centralized image which "grows" from the inside out. And the other is a field of modular units which spread in all directions endlessly, as in "U" as a Set. Often these two concepts merge, and the centralized image evolves from a grouping of modular units, or the moving field opens to let the center spaces expand, as in Emblem.

These two directions are foreshadowed in the seminal work, Fertility of 1940. The modules in this case are three ax handles which form a centralized image with the "pelvic shape" directing the energy outward, into what is to become in later work, a field of motion. This outward direction is accentuated by the resultant opening in the center. She reflects her times in this desire to "dissolve" the center, which has been treated, traditionally, as a solid mass. And she expresses her introspective aspect, as she asks retrospectively, "Was I in love?"

Thus, Ms. Falkenstein’s work balances her feelings with a quest for a structural counterpart. As an example, in mid-career she journeyed to Europe as a means to grow personally, to enlarge her structural vocabulary and to weld these two pursuits into a visual expression. Her work has been typified by a need to balance her vision of what her life means with the ideas she absorbs from sources outside herself, as from the works of Brancusi, O’Keefe, Tobey, and the Abstract-Expressionists.

The repetitious use of an open-form-modular unit, often a U-shape, allows her to describe a world that is changing; and she integrates this sense of flux to enable her work to reflect this concept. Ironically, Ms. Falkensteins sculpture captures a view of a changing world in the shape of a concrete object. But it is just such an intent that makes her a modern "alchemist", searching for tangible forms for the elusive, life-giving substances . . . and as a result, creating sculptures that form endless connection.

Ora Lerman
Born in Coos Bay, Oregon
1950-63 Established a studio in Paris
1954 Discovered a means to fuse metal and glass, Rome
1961 Commission: Garden gates for Peggy Guggenheim, Venice, Italy
1965 Solo Exhibition, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York
1966-69 Commission: St. Basil Church, Los Angeles, California; innovative use of glass as spatial form in doors and windows
1977 Film: "Claire Falkenstein, Sculptor" by Jae Carmichael
1978 Received the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship
1980 Retrospective, Palm Springs Desert Museum, Palm Springs, California
1981 Solo Exhibition, Neill Gallery, New York

Claire Falkenstein, Emblem (1978) Bamboo and natural linen, 9' x 9' x 41"

Claire Falkenstein, Fertility (1940) Polychrome wood, 40" x 8" x 15"
Helen Lundeberg enjoyed immediate success when she launched her art career 50 years ago. A founding member of Post-surrealism and innovator in stylistic changes, she has maintained an exceptional consistency of quality throughout her long career. Her achievements and talent have won international acclaim.

We salute and honor Helen Lundeberg for her contributions to modern art and her inspirational high standards in painting and life.

Born in Chicago and a resident of California since age four, Helen Lundeberg's career began in 1930 when she began art studies at Pasadena with Lorser Feitelson. A year later she had a painting accepted for exhibition at the San Diego Fine Arts Gallery and two years later began a series of solo and group exhibitions in California. This early success is continuing throughout her career as evidenced recently by a joint exhibition with her late husband and former teacher, Lorser Feitelson, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

In 1934 Lundeberg joined Feitelson in developing the California Post-surrealist movement, beginning a new chapter in the history of American art. The National Collection of Fine Arts purchased her 1935 painting, Double Portrait In Time, considered an outstanding achievement in her total oeuvre. It was painted after only five years as a professional artist.

Lundeberg continued to develop new frontiers. She designed and supervised murals in Southern California which reflected her deep respect and knowledge of Italian Renaissance painters. Always concerned with classical formal structure, she progressed into hard-edged but carefully refined abstractions.

Her imaginary landscapes, still lifes and fascination with the planets and the cosmos stretch the viewer's imagination as she reflects the private realms of her personal vision.

Called a poet among painters, Helen Lundeberg has maintained an exceptional consistency of quality throughout the distinct phases of her life’s work.

Chris Petteys
1908  Born in Chicago
1912  Family moves to Pasadena
1930  Begins art studies with Lorser Feitelson, Pasadena
1933  Solo Exhibitions: Stanley Rose Gallery, Hollywood,
      Assistance League, Los Angeles
1934  Develops with her husband, Feitelson, the California Post-
      surrealist movement
1936-42 Designs and supervises murals in Southern California for
      WPA/Federal Art Project
1950  Receives $1,000 First Purchase Award, Los Angeles
      County Museum
1953  Retrospective exhibition, Pasadena Art Institute
1962  Participates in “Geometric Abstraction in America” at
      Whitney Museum of American Art
1971  Retrospective exhibition, La Jolla Museum of
      Contemporary Art
1979  Retrospective exhibition, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
1980-81  Joint retrospective exhibition with Feitelson, San Francisco
       Museum of Modern Art and Frederick S. Wight Art
       Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles

Helen Lundeberg, Arcanism #2 (1968) 60" x 60".
Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.

Helen Lundeberg, Double Portrait of the Artist in Time
(1935) Oil on masonite, 48" x 40", National Museum
of American Art, Washington, D.C.