

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES TRANSFORMATIVE GIFT OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY WOMEN ARTISTS FROM THE HELEN KORNBLUM COLLECTION

Donation of 100 Works by 76 Artists Covers Over 100 Years of Photographic History

NEW YORK, NY, February 17, 2021—The Museum of Modern Art has received a major gift of 100 photographs from the Helen Kornblum Collection, adding significant examples of women artists' pioneering achievements across the field. The collection—including avant-garde experimentation, photojournalism, social documentary, commercial studio photography, and advertising, among other practices—is filled with both rare and important works and lesser-known or under-represented examples spanning the history of the medium. The gift features iconic images from the early modernist period to today by such luminaries as Gertrud Arndt, Lola Alvarez Bravo, Claude Cahun, Laura Gilpin, Kati Horna, Germaine Krull, Dora Maar, and Lucia Moholi, and contemporaries including Flor Garduño, Louise Lawler, Sharon Lockhart, Susan Meiselas, Catherine Opie, Tatiana Parceró, Lorna Simpson, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, and Carrie Mae Weems.

“At a time when it is more important than ever to affirm parity, equity, and diversity of voices, Helen Kornblum’s donation is a welcome addition to MoMA’s photography collection,” says Clément Chéroux, the Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz Chief Curator of the Robert B. Menschel Department of Photography.

“There could not be a better home for my collection of photographs by women artists than MoMA,” says Helen Kornblum. “Director Glenn Lowry is committed to having more art by women, not just in the collection but on the walls. It is my delight to have this gift be in honor of Dr. Roxana Marcoci, whose brilliant writings and exhibitions often about women artists were known to me long before I had the opportunity to meet her.”

Kornblum’s collection is guided by concerted attention to the specificities of gender politics within asymmetrical systems of patriarchal and colonial power. This major gift, spanning more than 100 years of photography, further amplifies women’s longstanding contributions that defined the field. Highlights range from Frances Benjamin Johnston’s *Penmanship Class* (1899), a picture reflecting the complexities of early pedagogy in the US while underlining the nation’s blind spot towards integrated education and access to advancement for African Americans and Native Americans; to *Wakeah* (2018), a portrait from the First American Girl series by Native American artist Cara Romero, a member of the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe of the Mojave Desert, which points to the creative power of indigenous women in redefining contemporary Native art.

Roxana Marcoci, Senior Curator in the Robert B. Menschel Department of Photography at MoMA, remarked, “We are honored that Helen Kornblum has made this extraordinarily generous gift, and for her far-reaching vision. The collection raises a whole set of questions: How do we go about unsettling established art historical narratives? Unfixing the canon? Researching counter-histories? This gift offers the perfect platform to examine women photographers’ self-agency within a diversity of artistic strategies and activate new readings about their contributions to contemporary culture.”

In recognition of the extraordinary quality and scope of the works in Helen Kornblum’s gift, the Museum will make this material available through collection installations and by encouraging collaborative study, research, and cross-disciplinary dialogues. In 2022, the Museum will also organize and present an exhibition featuring works drawn from this major gift, in addition to publishing an accompanying scholarly catalogue.

About Helen Kornblum

A psychotherapist and art collector, Helen Kornblum began assembling work by female photographers 40 years ago with the intention of bringing visibility to their undervalued contributions to art history. After joining MoMA’s Committee on Photography in 2014, she has unreservedly shared her inspiring and prescient commitment to women artists. Kornblum has distinguished herself through her advocacy against systemic social and racial injustice, and her engagement with establishing the Saint Louis chapter of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. For her preeminent work in the medical and arts communities, she has received the Women of Achievement Award from the Missouri House of Representatives. Her meaningful impact on social causes and the artistic field connects her commitment to women’s work with MoMA’s mission to prioritize art that reflects diversity in terms of race, culture, and gender and offers new ways to reconsider the complex narratives of modern and contemporary art.

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