

In 1972, the West German artist Marianne Wex set out to document and analyze the gendered body language she observed in everyday life. She picked up her camera and covertly photographed people in her hometown of Hamburg, observing how men and women had been socialized to inhabit space differently. Wex organized the images into categories like “standing arms,” “sitting legs,” “lying down,” and “possessive holds.” She wrote: “I see these mostly unconscious actions as essential parts of our communication.”

By pasting her photographs onto over 200 panels alongside pictures appropriated from advertisements, mass media, and art historical sources, she constructed a critical archive of everyday gestures. The sweeping installation premiered in Berlin in 1977, as part of *Künstlerinnen International 1877–1977*, a major exhibition of art by women. Two years later, Wex published the project in a book of the same title, *Let’s Take Back Our Space: “Female” and “Male” Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures*. Responding to the era’s radical feminist thought and activism, Wex aimed to reveal how culture and history shape—and make seem natural—the ways we live in and use our bodies.

This exhibition brings Wex’s sociological intervention into dialogue with seven contemporary artists whose practices extend and complicate a feminist photographic history: Nona Faustine, Martine Gutierrez, K8 Hardy, Yuki Kihara, Joiri Minaya, Paulina Olowska, and Wendy Red Star. Attentive to the intersections of race and gender beyond the binary, these artists confront societally constructed relationships between bodies and space. Within this framework, “taking back space” is both an embodied practice and an act of critical engagement with sovereignty and decolonization. It involves reclaiming physical space, as well as challenging who controls historical narrative and self-representation.

Organized by Roxana Marcoci, The David Dechman Senior Curator and former Acting Chief Curator of Photography, with Caitlin Ryan, Assistant Curator, and Ekan Hou, former Marron Research Consortium Fellow, The Robert B. Menschel Department of Photography.

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We invite you to explore the accompanying publication, *Taking Back Our Space: Photographic Perspectives*, which is available in the Museum Store.

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