

For Immediate Release

NYU's Grey Art Museum Highlights 25 Years of Women's Achievements in Contemporary Art

Anonymous Was A Woman: The First 25 Years

April 1–July 19, 2025

Exhibition celebrates landmark Anonymous Was A Woman artist grant, which has awarded over \$8 million to nearly 300 mid-career women artists



Judy Pfaff (AWAW 2012), *Ram's Delhi*, 2012. Wood, mild steel rod, melted plastics, black aluminum foil, and LED and UV Fluorescent light, 70 x 132 x 17 in. Courtesy the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York

(NEW YORK, NY, January 13, 2025)—The Grey Art Museum at New York University presents *Anonymous Was A Woman: The First 25 Years*, an exhibition celebrating recipients of the titular grant for mid-career women artists living and working in the United States. On view from April 1 to July 19, 2025, at 18 Cooper Square, this ambitious exhibition invites reflection on a quarter century of artistic achievement tied to the Anonymous Was A Woman (AWAW) grant program, which, since 1996, has supported women artists over the age of 40 with unrestricted awards. Six years in the making, *Anonymous Was A Woman* is organized by the Grey Art Museum at NYU and guest curated by Nancy Princenthal and Vesela Sretenović.



Elizabeth King (AWAW 2014), *Feints and Sleights*, 2017. Stop-frame animation, color, 3:00 min. Courtesy the artist, Richmond

Featuring some 50 artworks by 41 of the 251 award recipients from when the grant was inaugurated in 1996 through 2020, the exhibition showcases a range of media and subjects by artists including Jeanne Silverthorne (AWAW 1996), Laura Aguilar (AWAW 2000), Senga Nengudi (AWAW 2005), Mary Heilmann (AWAW 2006), An-My Lê (AWAW 2006), Carrie Mae Weems (AWAW 2007), Ida Applebroog (AWAW 2009), Jungjin Lee (2011), Janine Antoni (AWAW 2014), and Jennifer Wen Ma (AWAW 2019), among others. With each year represented by at least one artist, the exhibition includes works created within a few years of

their grant, demonstrating the significance of the award to the artist's growth. "Nancy and I sought to create a visually compelling and intellectually stimulating exhibition that balances work by well-established and lesser-known artists. We also wanted to highlight leaps in production that the grant made possible, both practically—many artists were enabled to try new materials and processes—and conceptually," Sretenović says. All 251 artists are represented in a publication accompanying the exhibition, which also includes critical essays about the awardees by Princenthal, Sretenović, and other women scholars.

Visitors to *Anonymous Was A Woman* will encounter works that trace the development of contemporary art practice over the last twenty-five years, addressing issues of identity and community; the position of women artists in society; the shifting value of craft; the changing possibilities for installation and time-based media; as well as the many uses of anonymity. *Flamethrower*, for example, a painting by Carrie Moyer (AWAW 2009) demonstrates the artist's characteristic high-gloss surfaces and curvaceous, colorful forms, and challenges gendered conventions of abstraction. Rona Pondick (AWAW 2016), also featured in the exhibition, has used her own body to create self-portraits in various materials—such as the colored molded resin of *Magenta Swimming in Yellow*—that are at once deeply personal and anonymizing. Likewise, Elizabeth King (AWAW 2014) often references her own body when creating precisely moveable, half-scale figurative sculptures and combining them with stop-motion animation, as in *Feints and Sleights*.

Princenthal explains, "Every single one of the artists who received a grant in our target period is remarkable, and it was an enormous challenge to choose among them. Vesela and I embraced the variety of thematic and formal approaches seen in the awardees' work, as well as the full range of their regional, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, and the several generations they represent." For example, Betye Saar's (AWAW 2004) assemblage, *Globe Trotter*, depicts a

worn vintage doll held captive inside of a small birdcage resting atop a globe—a combination of powerful symbols referencing the history of slavery. Claudia Joskowicz's (AWAW 2020) *Some Dead Don't Make a Sound*, like many of her video and installation works, evokes the transformative effect of violent political events on physical spaces and collective memory.

"I think what is astonishing for all of us," states Lynn Gumpert, director of the Grey Art Museum since 1997, "is to look over this list of amazing artists and realize the impact they have made on the last twenty-five years of the art scene. As of 2019—when we were first conceiving the show—just 11% of all acquisitions and 14% of exhibitions at major American museums over the past decade were of work by female artists, according to the Burns Halperin Report. We know that there is still a lot of work to be done."

Last year, Susan Unterberg and AWAW launched the Anonymous Was A Woman Artist Survey in collaboration with journalists Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin, arts leader Loring Randolph, and SMU Data Arts. A first-of-its-kind study, the survey aims to gain a better understanding of women artists' lives and careers, and the factors contributing to their successes and challenges. Findings will be made publicly available on April 9, 2025, as part of "Artists Speak: The Anonymous Was A Woman Symposium," hosted at NYU. Registration will be available on the AWAW website.

About AWAW

Founded by visionary philanthropist and photographer Susan Unterberg, the Anonymous Was A Woman (AWAW) grant program has provided annual unrestricted gifts of \$25,000 each to ten exceptional artists over the age of 40, enabling them to further push boundaries in their creative fields. In 2024 the number of awardees permanently increased to fifteen and the cash prize doubled to \$50,000. "Since I am an artist, I knew firsthand that the needs of mid-career artists were generally overlooked," says Unterberg, who herself remained anonymous until 2018.

The groundbreaking program, inspired by a line from Virginia Woolf's essay, "A Room of One's Own," was established in response to the National Endowment for the Arts's decision to end funding for individual artists. True to its name, AWAW selects artists via anonymous panels based on recommendations proposed each year by a group of anonymous nominators comprising previous awardees, curators, writers, and other art professionals. Unterberg says, "Women throughout history—and especially women artists—have often remained anonymous. They didn't sign their work, and of course, they received very little recognition. AWAW has given me an immense amount of joy—and mostly since I've gone public. It's a way to show my activism and advocate that women shouldn't remain anonymous any longer." Over the years, this grant has been transformative for many artists, offering critical financial support and awarding over \$8 million to more than 300 recipients to date. In 2022 AWAW partnered with the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) to initiate the Environmental Art Grant, a yearly open



Betye Saar (AWAW 2004), *Globe Trotter*, 2007. Mixed-media assemblage, 32 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 14 1/8 in. © Betye Saar Courtesy the artist and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles

call for woman-led art projects that inspire thought, action, and ethical engagement with the environment.

For more information on Anonymous Was A Woman, please visit anonymouswasawoman.org.

Publication

Anonymous Was A Woman: The First 25 Years is accompanied by a 392-page volume of the same name, which will be released prior to the opening of the exhibition. Co-published by Hirmer Verlag and the Grey Art Museum at New York University, the publication commemorates all 251 recipients of the award from 1996 through 2020, offering a visual and critical account of their work and careers. Featuring new essays by Nancy Princenthal, Vesela Sretenović, Valerie Cassel Oliver, Alexandra Schwartz, Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, Jenni Sorkin, and Gaby Collins-Fernández, as well as a roundtable discussion with founder Susan Unterberg, the book also unveils previously untold histories, underscoring the lasting influence of these artists. “The book, unlike the exhibition, functions as kind of a mini-history, which is exciting,” shares Gumpert. Available soon at the Grey Art Museum Bookstore, \$55 retail, and [online](#).



Cover of *Anonymous Was A Woman: The First 25 Years*.
Courtesy Hirmer Verlag and
Grey Art Museum, NYU

Credits

Anonymous Was A Woman: The First 25 Years is organized by the Grey Art Museum, New York University, and curated by Nancy Princenthal and Vesela Sretenović. The exhibition is made possible in part by the generous support of the Grey’s Director’s Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends; and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Curators

Nancy Princenthal is a Brooklyn-based writer whose book *Agnes Martin: Her Life and Art* (2015) received the 2016 PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. She is also the author of *Hannah Wilke* (2010) and *Unspeakable Acts: Women, Art, and Sexual Violence in the 1970s* (2019), and co-author of *Mothers of Invention: The Feminist Roots of Contemporary Art* (2024). Princenthal has taught at Bard, Princeton, Yale, the School of Visual Arts, NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts, and elsewhere.

Vesela Sretenović is an art historian and curator of modern and contemporary art with a special interest in cross-disciplinary art practices and in bridging theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience. From 2009–23 she served as Director of Contemporary Art Initiatives and Academic Affairs at The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. She is currently working as an independent curator and educator.

About the Grey Art Museum

After nearly a half-century on Washington Square, the Grey Art Gallery became the Grey Art Museum, New York University, in 2024. The Grey’s new facility occupies the ground floor of a brick and iron building in the NoHo Historic District, its open storefront façade facing out onto a busy pedestrian thoroughfare. The new location accommodates three galleries—expanding

exhibition space by 40 percent—and, on the lower level, the Cottrell-Lovett Study Center, which will enable more direct access to the collection for students, faculty, and researchers.

Over the last five decades the institution has organized exhibitions that have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the museum hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide. In 2025 the Grey Art Museum celebrates its 50th anniversary.

General Information

Grey Art Museum, New York University
18 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003

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Tel: 212-998-6780, Fax: 212-995-4024

E-mail: greyartmuseum@nyu.edu Website: greyartmuseum.nyu.edu

Hours

Tuesday: 11 am–6 pm

Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Thursday: 11 am–6 pm

Friday: 11 am–6 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

Admission

Suggested donation: \$5; free of charge to NYU students, faculty, and staff

Press Contact

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