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RIOT GRRRLS

December 17, 2016 – June 4, 2017



The **Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago** presents **Riot Grrrls**, an exhibition that celebrates the profusion of brash and adventurous paintings by female artists and also responds to the charges of sexism that pervade the art world, from male artists garnering the highest prices for their work, to their disproportionate representation in exhibitions. In reaction to these conditions, the MCA has been consciously collecting works by female artists who are making the boldest and most exciting painting today, presented together in this exhibition. *Riot Grrrls* is organized by Michael Darling, Chief Curator at the MCA and is on view from December 17, 2016 through June 4, 2017.

Achieving a level of mastery, innovation, and chutzpah that doesn't require outside validation, the artists in this exhibition challenge the 'boys club' sensibility that has historically shaped abstract painting. This show includes the pioneering American painter Mary Heilmann, as well as subsequent leaders like Charline von Heyl, Judy Ledgerwood, and Joyce Pensato, but also a newer crop of rebels like Molly Zuckerman-Hartung and Amy Feldman. As with the musical movement that gives this exhibition its title, these artists have influenced each other and emerging artists.

Specific works in the exhibition include *Alastor*, by German artist Charline von Heyl, who came of age during the 1980s amidst the burgeoning art scenes in Cologne and Dusseldorf. Her painting in this exhibition

represents one of her most fiercely contested canvases, featuring bloody hues and the artist's own handprints that drag across the canvas as if there were a major struggle to bring the painting into being.

Mounted nearby von Heyl's work is Chicago artist Judy Ledgerwood's *Sailor See Green*. Early in her career, Ledgerwood began incorporating pastel colors, traditional signifiers of femininity, into her paintings in an attempt to confront and undermine the historically male-dominated tradition of modern abstract painting. As her work has progressed, Ledgerwood continues to question the traditions of modernist painting through the use of formal motifs that are often associated with decorative arts traditions. In *Sailor See Green*, she uses bright, optically aggressive color combinations, metallic paint, and repetitive yet gestural marks that challenge the promise of perfection in painting.

Mary Heilmann's *Metropolitan* is also featured in the exhibition. In a productive career that spans the 1970s to the present, suggestions of fashion, architecture, design, and landscape often are part of her works. The red, black, and white palette of this work is evocative of fashion and design, not only of the 1950s retro style of diners and poodle skirts, but the resuscitation of that look in the 1980s with the advent of punk, mod, ska, and new wave, which all drew from it to differing effect. Heilmann holds a particular fondness for that era and even in 1999 when this painting was made, it was a source of inspiration.

Both a new mural by Joyce Pensato and her work *Silver Batman II* are part of the exhibition. Pensato's paintings are a unique synthesis of Abstract Expressionist bravado and Pop Art's love of kitsch and the vernacular. In her monumental mural—installed in the MCA's Lefkofsky Family Lobby—she scales photographic imagery of her studio to massive proportions, combined with images of a young Abraham Lincoln layered over an abstracted Felix the Cat painting. Rendered at an extremely large size, the spattered paint and helter-skelter arrangement immerse viewers. The image is relevant to Chicago, too, which claims Lincoln as a native son.

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Image: Judy Ledgerwood, *Sailors See Green*, 2013. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, gift of Katherine S. Schamberg by exchange. © 2013 Judy Ledgerwood. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago. Joyce Pensato, *Silver Batman II*, 2012. © 2012 Joyce Pensato. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.

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The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue, one block east of Michigan Avenue. The museum and sculpture garden are open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday from 10 am to 8 pm. The museum is closed on Monday. Tuesdays are Community Free Days with free admission for Illinois residents. Suggested general admission is \$12 for adults and \$7 for students and seniors. Children 12 years of age and under, MCA members, and members of the military are admitted free. Information about MCA exhibitions, programs, and special events is available on the MCA website at mcachicago.org or by phone at 312-280-2660.