Riot Grrrls

Brash, risky, and unafraid to take up space: the women whose works are included in this exhibition are making some of the most exciting abstract painting today. Their paintings are not confined to feminine stereotypes or easy descriptors. Instead, they are buoyant and gutsy, tender and sinister, messy and meticulous—often all at once—and operate at the highest level. Yet sexism still pervades the art world. Male artists garner higher prices for their work and are disproportionately represented in exhibitions and art history.

Riot Grrrls highlights the MCA's commitment to counteracting this imbalance. The museum consciously collects works by female painters across generations: from pioneering artists whose careers span decades to those emerging more recently as leaders and innovators in the field of painting. This exhibition marks the first time that several of these works have been on view at the MCA.

The title of the exhibition references riot grrrl, a feminist punk movement started in the early 1990s in Olympia, Washington. Tightknit yet inclusive, the movement sought to foster a safe space for girls and women to express themselves according to their own standards rather than those of men. Handmade zines and the lyrics of bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile provided a crucial outlet for advocating female empowerment. Though most of the artists in this exhibition were not personally involved in riot grrrl, their aggressively independent spirits reflect its ethos: mastery, innovation, and chutzpah that requires no outside validation.

MCA DNA

MCA DNA: Riot Grrrls is part of an ongoing exhibition series featuring iconic works from the MCA Collection. This exhibition is organized by Michael Darling, James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator.