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MONTCLAIR
Local

Women's History Month: Heather Zises Showcases Artist
March 6, 2020



"Wall Bearer" by Kate Gilmore. IMAGE COURTESY KATE GILMORE

50 Contemporary Women Artists

Author talk and booksigning with Heather Zises, and MSU Professor Charlotte Kent

Sunday, March 8, 2 p.m.

Watchung Booksellers, 54 Fairfield St.

March is Women's History month: and Sunday, March 8, is International Women's Day.

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It is not a new holiday; in fact it is over 100 years old — it was founded by the Socialist Party of America in 1910, and the first one was celebrated in 1911. The holiday was not commonly celebrated in Western countries until the 1960s, but it is an event now.

Then Congress declared March Women’s History Month in 1987, bolstered with resolutions after that.

This Sunday, to honor the day, Watchung Booksellers presents Heather Zises, curator and editor of “50 Contemporary Women Artists,” in conversation with Montclair State University Professor Charlotte Kent. The 50 artists represent 30 different nationalities. “We tried very hard to make it as intersectional as possible,” Zises said, stressing that these are not the only women making art.

Among the artists included are Kara Walker, who had a solo show at the Montclair Art Museum in September, 2018, Sandy Skoglund, a Jersey girl whose works are in MAM’s permanent collection, and multimedia artist Zoe Buckman who embroiders rap lyrics onto vintage lingerie.

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Heather Zises looks through her book "50 Contemporary Women Artists" at Java Love. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

Zises, a Montclair resident who describes herself as a cultural producer, curates and writes about art, with a specialty in feminist practices.

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The book came out in 2018. It grew out of an article Zises had written for a women’s edition only of Fjords Review, an art journal.

“I think that women artists have gone through different phases,” Zises said. Her book begins in the 1960s. Elizabeth Sackler, a champion of feminism and the founder of the Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, writes the introduction to the book. The book is now available at the Brooklyn Museum, at MoMA, The Hirshorn and ICA Boston.

“Wall Bearer,” by Kate Gilmore, is an image that launched the entire project: it shows women of all shapes and sizes into a pink space. They are all dressed uniformly. It shows how women represent a united whole, Zises said.

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“Clara 8, Beirut, Lebanon” by Rania Matar. IMAGE COURTESY HEATHER ZISES

Some of the artists in this book have a “female gaze” — in contrast to the much-written about “male gaze.” For example, Lebanese photographer Rania Matar captures girls on the cusp of womanhood. “That is so crucial as a portrait of feminism continues to move in the future. It really offers hope,” she said. She added that the pictures would likely be different, and have a different message, potentially raising questions about objectification if created by men.

In 2020, the Fourth Wave of feminism is in full bloom, Zises added. The first began around the turn of the century with the second suffragist movement; the second in the 1960s, the third in the ‘s’90s with Guerilla Girls, Gen X — “they were unapologetic about their womanhood and what it mean” — and the fourth began around 2010, she said. “I think we’re sort of hitting the

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apex right now with a few things. One is that we've got new genders on the scene. And so that really makes things interesting. And women have sort of been marginalized. This is sort of a natural segue into what's going on now with gender fluidity. And so I think between that sort of artistic renaissance of women with their craft and with their power, there's more women than ever in government."

Zises said this is a "fantastic time" for women artists: "it seems to me there is more freedom of expression now than ever before." In the past, women artists were restricted to some subjects: now they are not. "There are no taboo issues."



"Me Too" by Michelle Pred. IMAGE COURTESY HEATHER ZISES