



Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, oil on canvas, 66 1/8 x 47 3/4". From "The Woman Question 1550–2025."

conveys anticipation, uncertainty, and the slow formation of new lives, roles, and relationships. Sacha, a Polish folk artist, painting a pregnant woman laboring in the fields, depicts a life fixed within a predetermined role. The exhibition's architecture brings into focus some of the historical forces that have shaped women's artistic practices, with particular emphasis on their lack of or limited access to formal art education, as well as the strategies artists developed in response. While the juxtaposition of a Conceptualist with a folk artist suggests a broad stylistic spectrum, the pairing ultimately illustrates the curator's presupposition that body-oriented feminist art is equivalent to, or stands in for, art made by women as such.

Within a narrative rendered mostly in painting and sculpture and relying heavily on self-portraits—which appear throughout the exhibition, not only in the section dedicated to that genre, going as far back as Sofonisba Anguissola's *Self-Portrait (The Ashburnham Medallion)*, 1556 or 1558, and Lavinia Fontana's *Self-Portrait at the Spinet*, 1577—there are pieces that mark notable side themes. Jordan Casteel's painting *Aaron*, 2013, introduces a female gaze directed at the male nude. Malga Kubiak's compilation of photography, collage, Xerox, drawing, and poetry, *The Ego Trip of Miss Mess*, 1975–2025, touches on the use of pornographic imagery and the position of women artists within counterculture. Marie Tekla Bittnerová's embroidery *The Four Lands of the Holy Roman Empire and the Franciscan Order Pay Homage to the Holy Family*, 1710–30, serves as a reminder that, even when excluded from formal art academies, women found ways to influence visual culture, asserting their creativity through media traditionally associated with the domestic sphere. The insights these works offer, however, risk receding into the background amid the abundance of material. Given its scale, the exhibition has the potential to provide a more nuanced understanding of the multiple threads it seeks to explore. And here is where the pitfall of an iconographic approach reveals itself most clearly: A focus on images of women's bodies—even in contrasting registers, from erotic fantasies to depictions of war—inevitably bypasses certain dimensions of the proliferation of women's artistic activity, such as their work with abstract vocabularies and in the

of the two men observing her, and Miriam Cahn's *Must Strike Back*, 2024, where a naked mature woman thrusts one clenched fist toward a body whose masculinity is signaled by an erect phallus, while driving the other into her own genitals. Meanwhile, one hears the visceral cry of Gina Birch's sound piece *3 Minute Scream*, 1977. All of this explicitly lays out women's relegation to an inferior position from which they continually strive to break free.

This comparative approach displays the persistence of certain preoccupations across contexts shaped by different social conditions, historical periods, and geographic settings. Mary Kelly's *Antepartum*, 1973, and Anna Sacha's *Pregnant Woman Pulling a Spiked Iron Harrow in the Fields*, 1978, were created just five years apart, and both address the experience of pregnancy. Beyond that, they share almost nothing. Kelly, an American Conceptual artist, in her nearly hour-long video,

applied arts. As a consequence, this exhibition's argument risks diluting the very evidence of women's complex, multifaceted, and, above all, indisputable presence in art history.

—Marzena Jarczak

TOKYO

Chikako Yamashiro and Lieko Shiga Artizon Museum

"In the midst of" was a two-person show featuring works by photographer Lieko Shiga, perhaps best known for her documentation of recovery efforts in the wake of the Great Tōhoku Earthquake, and Okinawan performance and video artist Chikako Yamashiro. In a filmed performance and video artist Chikako Yamashiro. In a filmed performance, *I Like Okinawa Sweet*, 2004, Yamashiro leans on the fence of a US military base in Okinawa, Japan, eating what some viewers will recognize as a cone of Blue Seal ice cream. The brand's slogan, "Born in America, Raised in Okinawa," is a rhetorical triumph—using a parallel construction to mask one of the world's most asymmetrical power relations. Okinawa, at one time a Chinese tributary, then a Japanese vassal state, was in 1945 the site of the largest ground battle in the Pacific Theater of World War II, resulting in the deaths of a third of all Okinawan civilians. A three-decade American military occupation followed; its formal cessation, in 1972, is belied by the continued presence of thirty-two American bases, including the largest in the Pacific. Blue Seal was founded to service the military personnel on these bases. The sight of Yamashiro, beaming with exaggerated joy as she licks the ice cream from her fingers, is certainly meant to conjure up the history of impoverished Okinawan women turning to sex work to support their families during the US occupation. It's also a reminder that Okinawa relied on iceboxes, salt, drying, and fermentation to preserve food until refrigeration became more widespread during the US occupation.

In another one of Yamashiro's early filmed performances, *Trip to Japan*, 2004, the artist stands in front of the National Diet in Tokyo, blithely shouting the platitudes that one expects from a tour guide. But her voice is drowned out periodically by the deafening noise of airplane

Chikako Yamashiro, *Recalling(s)*, 2025, six-channel HD video projection, color, sound, 23 minutes 1 second. From "In the midst of." Photo: kugeyasuhide.

