American Women Artists Since the Vote

June 30–November 8, 2020

Alisa McCusker
Curator of European and American Art

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

—Amendment XIX, U.S. Constitution

Amendment XIX to the U.S. Constitution is terse, but its brevity stands in stark contrast to the arduously long route that was required for its ratification in 1920. Forty-two years after the first women’s suffrage amendment had been introduced in Congress, and 133 years after our nation’s Constitution had been ratified, half of the population was newly enfranchised. At long last in the so-called Land of the Free, women were permitted to voice their opinions on the governance of their nation, states, districts, counties, and cities.

This civic agency has parallels in the history of American art. The twentieth century witnessed a tremendous increase in the numbers of women creators, scholars, administrators, and business owners in the art world. This trend has continued in the first two decades of the current century, although women are still underrepresented in museum exhibitions, acquisitions, leadership roles, and boards. Much still remains to be done.

This exhibition celebrates the centenary of the Nineteenth Amendment and the achievements of American women artists from every decade since 1920. The selection, all drawn from the Museum’s collection, includes a variety of media and techniques and represents artists that have found national and international success, such as Louise Bourgeois, Helen Frankenthaler, and Lorna Simpson, along with artists that have tended to receive more local and regional recognition, such as Norma Bassett Hall, Daisy Cook, Brooke Cameron, Amy Worthen, and Jennifer McCurdy. Each of their visions matter—just like every vote counts.

Gwen Marcus (American, b. 1957)
Hatti, 1996
Bronze
Gift of Mark Landrum (2009.661)

Daisy Cook (American, 1902-1977)
Meeting All Day and Dinner on the Ground, 1968
Oil on canvas
Gift of Joseph O. Fischer in honor of Dr. Saul Weinberg (77.118)

Irene Rice Periera (American, 1902-1971)
Triangles, ca. 1948
Mixed media (gouache) on paper board
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Small (69.1009)

Jennifer McCurdy (American, b. 1955)
Wave Vessel, 2007
Porcelain
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur F. Furman (2008.174)

Daisy Cook (American, 1902-1977)
Meeting All Day and Dinner on the Ground, 1968
Oil on canvas
Gift of Joseph O. Fischer in honor of Dr. Saul Weinberg (77.118)