Can art’s images contribute to a semantic and pragmatic understanding and conceptualization of the body from the 1960s to the present? My hypothesis is that the body subjugated by history (think of the West’s holy texts)—the body that is the other of the patriarchal body, the one that regulates power and configures correct social bodies—was precisely what unleashed a liberation movement during those years. I argue that representations of the body produced in this period provided tools that proved useful to a far-reaching liberation of bodies. With those tools, the symbolic field was reconfigured, and a process of emancipation and intense expansion that continues into the present began. This book discusses how some works of art produced in Latin America between the sixties and the twenty-first century forged a different understanding of the female body, understood as a space for the expression of a dissident subjectivity in relation to socially normalized places. Representations of art and of feminist activism interrogated the disciplining of the female body, a form of control whose counterpart is the disciplining of the male body. In light of a
history of highly regulated artistic representations—despite the occasional exceptions a
historian might point out—images erupted that questioned the social and institutional
naturalization of the feminine and the masculine.

Some chapters of this book were written between 2010 and 2016, while Cecilia Fajardo-
Hill and I were engaged in research as cocurators of Radical Women: Latin American Art,
1960–1985 on exhibit in 2017 and 2018 (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Brooklyn
Museum, New York; and the Pinacoteca de São Paulo). Preliminary versions were pub-
lished in peer-review journals and catalogs in Latin America, the United States, Italy, and
France. While the comprehensive sections of the Radical Women exhibition catalog were
organized by country, the essays here revolve around specific cases and issues. In that
sense, the two books are complementary. This one provides a situated analysis of works
that were addressed in the catalog in the more general framework of each country’s art
scene. Books comparable to this one might include Cherisse Smith’s or Kristen Frederikson
and Sara Webb’s books,1 where each chapter discusses a single artist. (I often deal with
small clusters of artists instead.)

The origin of this project lies in the annual seminars directed by Rita Eder that I had
the privilege of participating in from 1996 to 2003.2 It was the first seminar of its type that
the Getty Foundation supported, and many initiatives of the ongoing Connecting Art
Histories program were modeled after it. Intense debates in cities like Querétaro, Oaxaca,
Veracruz, Bahia, and Buenos Aires were central to a seminar that performed archival
research, posited hypotheses, and engaged specific problems rather than formulating
sweeping and essentialist notions of what Latin American art is. We did not attempt to
answer that question, which is generally formulated in central countries, but rather stud-
ied works, contexts, archives. Latin America as question and problem, rather than as pat
category, and the work of art itself as point of departure—that is the basis of this book.
While the texts in the Radical Women catalog offer more of a general overview by country,
in the articles I was writing at the same time I discussed more finite problems. This book’s
title in Spanish (Feminismo y arte latinoamericano: historias de artistas que emanciparon el
cuerpo) might have suggested that it was a history of the relationship between art and
feminism in Latin America. It is not a history, however, but rather a collection of stories,

1. Cherisse Smith, Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith
2. Rita Eder, Los estudios del arte desde América Latina. Temas y problemas (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones
Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México [UNAM], 1996–2003), accessed November 14, 2020,
Introduction

as well as studies/analysis of works made by artists who address the body as a political space and who generate knowledge tied to the agenda of emancipation.

What does the notion of political body mean in this book? It encompasses at least two ideas that arise from my research in recent years. First, it refers to the emancipation of bodies in symbolic terms. The artists addressed here undertook intense research on the body, proposing new approaches and new concepts. They generated the vision of a fragmented body, observed and experienced in the first person rather than from the external, fixed eye of patriarchal culture, a form of vision that Laura Mulvey analyzes. Historian and theorist Amelia Jones’s work makes a powerful contribution to how bodies are redefined through performance. These artists’ inner eye navigated the body and its affects. I am thinking of the beating heart in Teresa Burga’s self-portrait, of the angle and framing of Karen Lamassone’s drawings and videos, and of Dalila Puzzovio’s plaster casts. If in museums the world over we find normativized female nudes, these women artists’ works explored the body, produced new knowledge, and contributed resoundingly to eroding traditional forms of objectification while shaping forms of symbolic emancipation. The second meaning of political body is contextual. Many of the artists whose work I analyze were directly involved in political movements. They were part of the utopian moment in Latin America, when sweeping political and social change seemed possible in the region if one were willing to fight for it. Many were detained or exiled. We must not forget that the bodies of women were subject to specific forms of torture and torment during the Latin American dictatorships. They were raped, specific areas of their bodies violated even if they were pregnant; they were forced to give birth in captivity and then immediately had their children torn away from them. Many of those women were ultimately murdered. Political body, then, expresses a spectrum of relationships in which the bodies of women were specifically targeted. Those considerations, which are at the core of this book, were at stake in the formulation of the Radical Women show as well.

Since the publication of the first edition of this book in Argentina and in Mexico, by the publisher Siglo XXI Editores, a lot has happened. I was able to assess the Radical Women exhibition from various points of view and to work through my conclusions in new projects like the Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, of which I was chief curator. The title I proposed for that edition of the biennial was Feminine(s): Visualities, Action, and Affects. The biennial, unlike Radical Women, was not limited to a specific historical period;

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with that greater freedom, I set out to investigate and learn about the production of Afro-Latin American artists and artists with fluid and denormativized identities that, from an LGBTIQ+ perspective, break with biological binarisms.

To that end, and as part of the preparations for the event, the biennial organized the seminar “Art, Feminisms, and Emancipations.” I invited Rosana Paulino, an artist whose work was brought to my attention by Kanitra Fletcher, a student at the University of Texas at Austin when I taught there, to participate in the event. In addition to Paulino, I invited Igor Simões, a researcher and professor at the Universidade Estadual do Rio Grande do Sul. In an online search, I had stumbled upon his seminar Black Voices in the White Cube. Simões later became the education curator of the biennial. Afro-Latin American art was central to the biennial not because it had not been fully included in Radical Women, but because it has not been represented in Latin American art in general. Afro-Latin American artists are excluded almost wholesale from the history of Latin American modernism. A number of recent initiatives have evidenced that erasure and the need to reexamine those artists’ role not only in art of the past but also the present.

In my curatorial practices, I aspire to an ethics that entails inviting, when I am in a position to do so, specialists that represent assemblages of knowledges. In keeping with that perspective, I invited Fabiana Lopes, a specialist in Afro-Latin American and African art, and Dorota Biczel, a specialist in art from Peru and Eastern Europe, to be adjunct curators. The biennial transformed the common criteria for representation of Latin American art. Our joint curatorial decision was not to provide percentages; the curatorial team subscribes to Denise Ferreira da Silva’s notion of participation in society on the basis of difference understood as multiplicity, not as separation. One effect of numbers and statistics is classification, which separates us. But a visit to the biennial’s website offers a clear idea

5. At the Latin American art symposium called Decolonizing Third World Feminism: Latin American Women Artists (1960–1982), held at the Haus der Kunst, Munich, in July 2018, I delivered the paper “‘Race,’ ‘Ethnicity’ and ‘Empathy’ in Latin American Women Artists.” Using those terms, I addressed the different ways the issue of race and mestizaje were present in the Radical Women exhibition, namely in artists who, like Peruvian Victoria Santa Cruz in her performance ¡Me gritaron negra! (1974), express themselves in the first person; and in the work of Colombian artist Maria Evelia Marmolejo who, in one of the debate sessions held in conjunction with Radical Women, identified herself as mestiza and of Afro-Indigenous descent. We can also include Cecilia Vicuña, who identifies as mestiza, and Nelbia Romero, who was born in a region of Uruguay once inhabited by the Charrúa, a key point of reference in her work. Beyond those acts of self-identification were processes of empathy and identification through representation in, for instance, the work produced by Claudia Andujar and Anna Bella Geiger in Brazil.

of the turn in representation that we worked to implement. While we were selecting artists for the event, I was investigating Paulino’s art. My article on her work included in this book was first published, in abridged form, in the scientific journal Z put out by the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. I will later explain the specific problems I attempted to solve with that research.

My research draws on many books, all of them resulting from relatively recent projects on the contributions of women artists and of feminism to Latin American culture. Even though I cite many researchers in each chapter, I would like to give a shout-out to the many Latin American authors whose books, exhibitions, and catalogs from the last fifteen years have contributed to the knowledge of work by Latin American women artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their publications significantly expanded perspectives that questioned and broadened the canon of Latin American art. All the authors who wrote essays for the Radical Women catalog should also be acknowledged as part of the transcontinental task of reexamining art histories (Rodrigo Alonso, María Angélica Melendi, Marcela Guerrero, Rosalba Cazali, Carmen María Jaramillo, and Carla Stellweg, in addition to some of the authors mentioned in note 9). This colossal revision of the work of Latin American women artists has not only been taking place in Latin America, but in museums and curatorial circles worldwide, as well as in the media. The biennial migrated from a physical space to an online one when the pandemic set in and we began the global lockdown that continued the world over as I wrote these lines in February 2021. See www.fundacaobienal.art.br.


America. Colleagues in the United States have been a fundamental and active part of this historiographic movement. I am thinking of Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, Claudia Calirman, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Adriana Zavala, Gina McDaniel Tarver, Ana María Reyes, Connie Butler, Ingrid Elliot, Julia P. Herzberg, and many others.\(^{10}\) Equally important is the groundbreaking work of Rosa Olivares, Estrella de Diego, Xabier Arakistain, Lourdes Mendez Perez, Vicente Aliaga, Manuel J. Borja-Villel, and Patricia Mayayo in Spain.\(^{11}\) It is important to name these invaluable colleagues, even when I am undoubtedly forgetting some.

The history of images of the female body is one of the longest in art history. It is also one of the most completely in the hands of artists that society classifies as male; images of women’s bodies have, historically, been regulated by powerful forces (the Church, the State, and their various institutions) that shaped female and male roles and established the bounds of correct sexualities as well as their representations. Starting in the Old Testament, woman has been temptation and sin: she is the supreme metaphor for that which must be controlled, regulated, tamed—a task undertaken by the most sophisticated social, political, and cultural mechanisms. In a sense, control of the female body replicates the social control of bodies in general. During the sixties, those artists that society classified as women developed a radically different repertoire of images of the female

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\(^{11}\) As editor-in-chief of the two versions of the Spanish Exit magazine, Rosa Olivares addressed the relationships among art, gender, and feminism (see Exit Book #9, 2008 and Exit Express #58, April 2011). Relevant works by the others include Estrella de Diego, El andrógeno sexuado. Nuevas estrategias de género (2018); Estrella de Diego, La mujer y la pintura del XIX español (2008); Estrella de Diego, Remedios Faro (2007); Xabier Arakistain, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, 45 años de arte y feminismo (2007); Juan Vicente Aliaga, La batalla de los géneros (2007); Juan Vicente Aliaga, Bajo vientre : representación de la sexualidad en la cultura y el arte contemporáneos (1997); Juan Vicente Aliaga, Arte y cuestiones de género. Una visita del siglo XX (2007); Juan Vicente Aliaga, Orden fálico. Androcentrismo y violencia de género en las prácticas artísticas del siglo XX (2008); Manuel J. Borja-Villel, Nuria Enguita Mayo, and Mariano Figueiredo, Lygia Clark (1997); Patricia Mayayo, Historias de mujeres, historias del arte (2001).
body. The body, its substances and affects, powerfully transformed iconographies of the body as a whole, making visible an abundance of experiences. New understandings of the body, and new experiences of affect, were represented in images.

In the sixties, new ways of experiencing and conceptualizing the body emerged; the body now mattered more and differently than ever before. Feminist art and women artists focused on and challenged the idea of the body’s biological and affective wholeness. A wide range of works—often marginalized works whose archives largely went unstudied—ushered in discussion of the political emancipation of bodies and subjectivities, a phenomenon that contributed to the imaginary of the broader emancipation of bodies currently underway. I argue, on that basis, that feminist art and adjacent fields of action constituted the greatest transformation to take place in art’s symbolic and political economy in the mid to late twentieth century.

This book brings together materials on cases of representation in the fine arts tied to the body and to experiences socially coded as feminine—images that take apart female stereotypes and, hence, question male stereotypes as well. That dismantling project is ongoing: the effort to free bodies that deactivate norms, assumptions, mandates, and laws, and that break biological, social, and psychological limits, continues to grow. It is a project that aspires to assemble alternatives that, in turn, enable many different ways of understanding the relationship between body and pleasure.

The cases analyzed here are fragments of an emancipating imagination. While complex approaches to a range of issues, they by no means encompass the wealth of productions that make studying this period and its dilemmas so riveting. But they do evidence zones of discourse that, though immersed in their historicity, in their specific contexts, can be generalized for the sake of comparative studies with other historical contexts. The

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12. In this book, I use the words woman and man—or like terms such as female and male, feminine and masculine, etc.—not from a biological or essentialist perspective, but from an administrative one. The State’s classification of us as male or female from the time of our birth does not imply social or sexual identification with the administrative category imposed. Hence, when I say “woman artist” or “male artist,” I am always referring to artists whom institutions have classified as female or male, as the case may be. As we will see later, that classification brings with it systemic discrimination towards those the State and its institutions identify as women. In 2011 the Gender Identity Law (16.741) was approved in Argentina. Its impact in the world of art has begun to be perceived since 2021 with the organization of the 8M award, dedicated to women, lesbians, trans, and nonbinary artists.

13. The period from 1960 to 1971 witnessed the bulk of the performances of what is known as “Viennese actionism,” even though the artists involved in that movement did not always identify as a group. Their often grotesque and violent works entailed animal sacrifice, orgiastic rituals, sexual actions with simulations of rape or genital mutilation. Persecuted by the law and by environmental and religious associations, some of the main players in that movement—artists like Günter Brus, Otto Mühli, and Hermann Nitsch—were imprisoned or institutionalized. Nitsch recently experienced similar censorship when, in January 2015, his exhibition at the Jumex Museum in Mexico was shut down.