

Spencer Museum to Debut Bold Women: Landmark Exhibition Celebrating Visionary Women Artists

: 10/9/2024



Above: Sophie-Ntombikayise by Mary Sibande

On February 18, 2025, the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas will unveil *Bold Women*, a landmark exhibition spotlighting the innovative yet often underappreciated work of women artists. The exhibit emphasizes the pivotal contributions of artists from diverse backgrounds, with a particular focus on women of color, LGBTQ+ creators, and those navigating intersecting identities. With roughly 75 works spanning multiple mediums, *Bold Women* explores how female artists have consistently pushed artistic boundaries and ignited cultural and social transformation across time and place. The show also features key historical pieces that highlight women's influence on art over the past century.

Running through July 6, 2025, *Bold Women* is curated by Susan Earle, the Spencer's Curator of European and American Art, alongside a team of collaborators, including Lawrence-based textile artist Marla A.

Jackson, Kansas City arts advocate Rose Bryant, Brooklyn Museum Curator Dr. Kimberli Gant, and Toronto-based Anishinaabe-kwe curator Wanda Nanibush, among others.

At its heart, the exhibition champions the concept of boldness, positioning it as a hallmark of the featured artists' work and their efforts to confront institutional structures and reshape historical narratives. The show spans an array of artistic forms, including paintings, sculptures, textiles, and videos, organized around themes that examine feminist movements and artistic experimentation. By placing women at the center of these conversations, *Bold Women* challenges traditional art-world paradigms.



A prominent theme within the exhibit is the use of portraiture as a form of resistance, reclaiming agency for both artist and subject. Sandra Brewster's *Blur 23*, a black-and-white photograph, reimagines the stories of the Caribbean diaspora, while Shelley Niro's *500 Year Itch* pushes back against Indigenous stereotypes. Hong Chun Zhang's *Twister #2*, a drawing of a tornado made of hair, symbolizes the tension of gender expectations while nodding to traditional Chinese art forms.

Another major theme focuses on community preservation, healing, and liberation. Mary Sibande's *Sophie-Ntombikayise* critiques the legacy of domestic servitude with a life-sized sculpture, while Andrea Chung's *Untitled* draws from the Afrofuturist myth of Drexciya, an underwater utopia born from the tragedies

of the Atlantic slave trade. Shellyne Rodriguez's *BX Third World Liberation Mixtape No. 4* explores survival within marginalized communities in the Bronx, connecting these experiences to global struggles.

The exhibit also examines the power of matriarchy and women as guardians of cultural knowledge. Faye HeavyShield's towering textile installation *blood* speaks to ancestral ties and memory, while Graciela Iturbide's photograph *Our Lady of the Iguanas* reflects on matriarchal economies in Mexican society. These works underscore the role of women in preserving cultural legacies and knowledge systems.

Finally, *Bold Women* grapples with the theme of erasure. Lida Abdul's *White House* contemplates the destruction of culture in war-torn Afghanistan, and Ingrid Pollard's *Emancipation Day* manipulates a colonial photograph to confront the ongoing impact of British colonialism in Jamaica.

"*Bold Women* not only celebrates the remarkable work of women artists from diverse cultural backgrounds but also brings long-overdue recognition to their contributions to the global art landscape," said Earle. "This exhibition underscores that women have long been at the forefront of both artistic innovation and societal change, even if their work has often been overlooked."

The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of public programs, with details to be announced closer to the opening.