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The Kentucky Women Artists Timeline

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*Batik art created by local artist illustrating empowerment of women through touch and connection. Females of all ages are connected by hands touching in the branches of a tree, Frankfort, KY, USA
Credit: Getty Images*

The Kentucky Women Artists Timeline

THE UOFL MARGARET M. BRIDWELL ART LIBRARY
AND THE KENTUCKY FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN
COLLABORATE TO DOCUMENT FEMINIST
ARTS IN KENTUCKY

BY COURTNEY BARON ASSISTANT
PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE BRIDWELL ART
LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

AND OLIVIA ECKERT STUDENT, UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISVILLE

In Fall 2019, Sharon LaRue, the Executive Director of the Kentucky Foundation for Women (KFW), approached the University of Louisville Libraries¹ requesting help updating the organization's feminist timeline. The timeline was several years old and listed women's accomplishments in the arts in Kentucky as well as nationally. The timeline was originally in print form and regularly updated at the annual KFW Day. Sadly, the print version was unintentionally lost and only a few documents with limited information about the timeline content remained. To restore the timeline, KFW was seeking assistance from university librarians as well as student interns. This request was brought to the attention of Courtney Baron, the new director of the Margaret M. Bridwell Art Library, who jumped at the opportunity to partner with a community organization and learn more about the history of women artists in the region. After meeting with LaRue, Baron proposed a digital timeline to create a product that could be updated more easily and made accessible to anyone in the state of Kentucky. The digital format was also ideal for promoting the works of Kentucky women artists to a wider audience on the web.

THE KENTUCKY FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

The Kentucky Women Artists timeline² is integral to the mission of the Kentucky Foundation for Women. Created by Sallie Bingham in 1985, the KFW's mission is "to promote positive social change by supporting varied feminist expression in the arts. When women and girls advance, so does Kentucky." As a Foundation that provides artist grants, KFW supports women artists in Kentucky with attention on racial, ethnic, artistic, and geographical diversity. Founder Bingham herself is an artist who has written short story collections, poetry, novels, and a memoir. The Foundation has an award named in her honor that recognizes Kentucky women leaders who support feminist expression in the arts across the state. Award honorees are recognized at KFW Day which usually takes place at Hopscotch House, a farmhouse available for retreats and residencies to Kentucky women artists and groups with feminist connections. The KFW timeline originally lived at Hopscotch House and attendees were invited to make suggestions and additions to improve the timeline. The decision to highlight the achievements of feminist art in Kentucky was inspired by the Heritage Panels at the Brooklyn Museum of Art which accompa-

nies the installation of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Timeline categories included KFW organizational history, Kentucky women artists, literary achievements, national feminist art, and political feminist activities. The timeline was designed to situate activities of Kentucky women artists opposite national events and artistic milestones within the mainstream feminist movement.

DIGITAL TIMELINE

Just like the physical timeline, the new digital timeline is designed to be updated and improved on a continuous basis.

The process of creating the timeline began with researching digital platforms. Tiki-Toki was selected because of its online timeline maker that creates interactive timelines designed for the web.³ It markets this product as particularly suitable for company history timelines and school projects, ideal for creating a timeline tied to the history of the KFW. Although a free account option exists in Tiki-Toki, KFW chose to upgrade to a premium account so that the timeline could be embedded on the KFW website. Premium accounts also allow groups to edit timelines simultaneously, ideal for a collaborative project with multiple stakeholders. Tiki-Toki is browser-based, so no software downloads are required. The timeline tool is also notable for its 3D view which creates eye-catching displays of information with images that display in three dimensions. Images, video, and audio can be embedded from external websites to avoid copyright infringement. Features include zooming in and out, built-in search and filtering, panel size adjustments, date formatting, and creating color-coded categories to organize events. The timeline can be split into time periods with their own color and background image. As users scroll through the timeline, the rotating

colors and images make for a visually pleasing display. The timeline is a work in progress and adjustments are continuously being made to improve its usability and function.

Not only does the digital format make the timeline more accessible, but the content was designed to be approachable to a general audience. Many scholarly sources consulted in the research process are not readily available outside of academic libraries. This information was compiled in jargon-free summaries on the timeline. The timeline is not intended to be the sole resource for information on Kentucky women artists, but rather

ABSTRACT:

This article highlights a partnership between the Margaret M. Bridwell Art Library at the University of Louisville and the Kentucky Foundation for Women to document the accomplishments of Kentucky women artists through a digital timeline. The timeline was made possible through the Director of the Art Library's collaboration with a student intern on the research process and timeline design.

a discovery point for learning more about the history of feminist arts in Kentucky. Sources that are freely available on the internet were linked whenever possible to encourage timeline visitors to learn more information about each artist as well as the KFW organization and its role in nurturing feminist arts in Kentucky.

INTERNSHIP

The timeline was made possible due to significant contributions from Olivia Eckert, a UofL student intern working towards a BA in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies (WGST) and a BFA in Graphic Design. After being hired as a student intern with KFW, Eckert began working with Baron on the creation of the timeline in the Spring of 2020. Thanks to the digital format, the timeline work could be done remotely and therefore continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. The partnership between the Bridwell Art Library and Eckert was a natural fit. Although KFW provided some documentation from the original timeline, sorting out the complexities of the KFW organization and the history of Kentucky women artists required extensive research. Baron provided guidance to Eckert on resources for researching Kentucky women artists. Notable works include *Kentucky Women Artists: 1850 to 2000*, based on an exhibition at Western Kentucky University's Kentucky Museum, and the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art in 2001, and *Louisville Modern: An Era in Art*, co-authored by Gail Gilbert, the former director of the Bridwell Art Library. An immensely helpful source was *Kentucky Women Artists*, a website created by Betty Lyn Parker and Susan Knoer. Funded by a KFW grant, this site features dozens of pages with biographies for Kentucky women artists. Though the primary resource on Kentucky women artists on the web, it does have limitations. The website only lists artists born before 1950, omitting contemporary artists. Many biographies are very brief, with just a sentence or two about the artist and mentions of specific artworks. Because Parker and Knoer created the resource several years ago, many links are broken, making it difficult to verify information from the site as well as to locate updated information on the featured artists. Since the site features a long list of Kentucky women artists, it is not apparent at first glance when these individuals lived, what they accomplished, or how they were in conversation with one another. Visitors to the page must click on each artist's name to see information about their

work. Although regularly updated for years, the resource's last edit occurred in 2017. The Kentucky Women Artists Timeline expands upon this resource by providing a visual representation of these artists in relationship to the history of feminist art in Kentucky, with images incorporated into the timeline and references provided for further research.

In Spring 2021, Eckert's internship with KFW expanded after enrolling in WGST 401, Community Internship, to receive class credit for the internship experience. Baron served as the faculty advisor for the course, in which students are expected to apply what they learned in the WGST program to an internship at a community organization dedicated to gender equity and inclusion. The student is required to meet with their faculty advisor for bimonthly meetings, complete weekly reflections, write a 10-15-page research paper about how they applied women's and gender studies theory to their internship, as well as give internship feedback to the community organization. All these requirements created a well-rounded course that kept the student on track and expanded their use and application of gender studies scholarship.

The pillars of women's and gender studies theory were woven into all aspects of the internship course, from the timeline's subject matter to how the faculty advisor and student communicated and worked with one another. The structure of the internship course demonstrated how to apply feminist theory from the classroom to a real-world problem; in this case, the lack of representation and information on women artists from Kentucky. As faculty advisor, Baron incorporated feminist pedagogy techniques into the internship course, applying it directly to the course content. Feminist pedagogy, based on the teaching of scholars like bell hooks and Paulo Freire, uses education as the basis for social change, disrupt-

ing the patriarchy and other systems of oppression, and empowering women and other marginalized groups. As outlined by Maria Accardi in *Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction*, a feminist classroom is democratic and collaborative.⁴ The teacher de-centers herself as the authority figure and encourages students to share their voices and take on an active role in the learning process. Baron and Eckert shared a mutual understanding that, while the faculty advisor served as a mentor, the student's opinions and thoughts also mattered. When researching, the student was encouraged to use their own judgement and perspective to shape the timeline. Eckert determined the scope of the weekly

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meetings. Some weeks, the focus was on testing a new template and going over the design of the timeline; other weeks were discussion-based and focused on the research process. Feminist pedagogy values personal stories and experiences and does not ignore what is happening outside of the classroom. The timeline was created during the COVID-19 pandemic amidst Black Lives Matter protests in memory of Louisville's own Breonna Taylor, sparking discussions about documenting protest and activist art and artists, and the importance of these works when compared to the "high" art typically found in galleries and museums. During Black History Month, biweekly meetings focused on Black women artists from Kentucky. Since these artists are underrepresented in the scholarship, Eckert was able to get guidance on how to do research beyond traditional sources such as books and journal articles.

It is rare for a librarian to have the opportunity to serve as a faculty advisor for an internship course. The most rewarding part of the process was seeing how Eckert was able to form connections between gender theory and research, and use that knowledge to make informed decisions about the timeline. As an example of feminist pedagogy, Baron asked Eckert to contribute to this paper as a co-author, to give credit to her extensive work on the timeline and provide a platform to share her voice. In Eckert's own words: "Being given this kind of confidence in oneself is rare in the traditional internship dynamic. It is typical that the mentor holds their position as an authoritative role, one that is much higher than the student or mentee's position. This was not the case with this internship, at all. There was a space that was given to everyone to share their thoughts regardless of position without fear of judgement or intimidation. This kind of collaboration is what feminist thought is built on and nurtured around."

SIGNIFICANCE

Women have long been undermined in the arts world, particularly in art historical scholarship. Linda Nochlin's breakthrough article, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", examines the systemic obstacles that prevent women from succeeding as artists. Published in 1971, it is considered one of the first major works of feminist art history. The significance of the timeline became clear throughout the research process, showing the limitations on resources when studying women artists, especially those from a specific region. Eckert was keenly observant, noticing that few resources include women artists, unless they are specifically classified as a feminist resource; within these texts, fewer include women artists of color and/or queer artists. Kentucky-born women were noticeably absent from sources that focused on women artists at the national or international level. These research challenges made the collaboration between Eckert as student intern and Baron as librarian even more vital.

The Kentucky Women Artists timeline aligns with national efforts to raise awareness of the artistic contributions of women. The National Museum for Women in the Arts' #5WomenArtists campaign was launched on social media in 2016 and asked individuals to name five women artists. The intention is to raise awareness about gender inequality in the arts since women have been and continue to be underrepresented and undervalued in

galleries and museums. Over 87,000 tweets tagged and 40,000 Instagram posts later, the campaign has successfully sparked conversations about the significance of women artists and the need for gender equity in the arts.

The nonprofit Art+Feminism has led the way in closing gaps on the digital coverage of topics related to feminism, gender, and the arts. Data analysis tools have shown that Wikipedia contains fewer and less extensive articles on women when compared to men.⁵ Artists who identify as trans, non-binary, Black, indigenous, or people of color are also underrepresented. To address these inequities, in the past seven years over 18,000 people have created or improved more than 84,000 articles on Wikipedia through events sponsored by Art+Feminism. There is still work to do to increase the coverage of feminist arts. When searching Wikipedia to find information about Kentucky women artists, the differences in geographical focus are apparent.

Not only does the Kentucky Women Artists timeline focus on feminist art, but it also draws attention to artists who are geographically underrepresented in the United States. Artists from middle states and smaller cities generally do not receive as much attention as those working on the coasts or in large urban cities. Women artists from rural areas are often regarded as hobbyists or makers and excluded from the scholarly conversation as well as the mainstream feminist movement. When working on the timeline, there was a constant push for underrepresented artists to be positioned alongside well-known individuals and events within feminist arts history. The Kentucky Women Artists timeline is one step towards improving the coverage of arts from Kentucky.

CONCLUSION

Though still a work in progress, the Kentucky Women Artists timeline is an important contribution to increasing the representation of feminist arts in Kentucky. The project is notable for the collaboration between the University of Louisville's Margaret M. Bridwell Art Library and the Kentucky Foundation for Women, as well as for the partnership between Baron as librarian and Eckert as student intern. This timeline is an example of applying feminist theory to a real-life project. A digital timeline is a productive way to learn and apply the research process. Eckert worked closely with Baron to digest the information found in academic sources, examine that information with a critical lens, and disseminate that information to a general audience. Baron and Eckert continue to improve the content and design of the timeline. The next steps involve applying the research discovered in the community internship course to the timeline, incorporating more women listed on the Kentucky Women Artists site, and working closely with the Kentucky Foundation for Women to record organizational milestones. The goal is to have an ongoing resource celebrating the accomplishments of the Kentucky Foundation for Women and Kentucky women artists.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ In addition to the Margaret Bridwell Art Library, the UofL University Libraries consist of the Dwight Anderson Music Library, Kornhauser Health Sciences Library, Archives and Special Collections, and William Ekstrom Library. Thank you to Heather Fox, Director of the Oral History Center, for bringing this request to Baron's attention.
- ² <https://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/1340140/Kentucky-Women-Artists/>
- ³ <https://www.tiki-toki.com>
- ⁴ Accardi 2014, pg. 40. The Feminist Pedagogy chapter is immensely helping for breaking down the basics of feminist theory as it applies to the classroom.
- ⁵ According to a 2011 survey, the Wikimedia Foundation found that less than 10% of its contributors identify as female. Art+Feminism, <https://artandfeminism.org/about/>.

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