

WOMEN POWER PROTEST

***Women Power Protest*, the next exhibition in the Arts Council Collection National Partners Programme, opens in the Gas Hall on 10 November and will be on display until 31 March 2019.**

In 1918, The Representation of the People Act enabled women to vote for the first time in the UK. Through debate, protest and radical endeavours, women fought for their right to voice their opinions in a public realm that systematically silenced them. Marking 100 years since this monumental step in the history of democracy *Women Power Protest* traces the Suffragettes' legacy of activism, hope and dignity through a number of poignant and powerful pieces by artists including Susan Hiller, Lubaina Himid and Mona Hatoum. Modern and contemporary artworks, drawn from the Arts Council Collection, join pieces from Birmingham's collection to celebrate female artists who have explored protest, social commentary

and identity in their work, and to ask - just how much has changed for women?

The themes of Hope, Dignity and Activism are a nod to the meanings of the green, white and purple suffrage flag: 'Activism' explores how artists such as Sonia Boyce and The Hackney Flashers have used their creative platform to highlight injustices and inequalities experienced by women; 'Dignity' looks at artworks which explore and challenge the depiction of women's bodies and experiences, including Claudette Johnson's *Trilogy* and Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*; while 'Hope' draws attention to the increasing visibility of women within the art world.





In 1949, French philosopher, Simone De Beauvoir stated: 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. This exhibition looks at the experiences of becoming and thriving as a woman amongst the varying degrees of opportunity and oppression within the intersection of race, class, geography and sexuality which are all factors in a woman's individual experiences in contemporary society. In 2018, the fight for women's rights is as crucial as ever. From world-wide protests against sexual harassment with the founding of the Times Up movement and #MeToo campaign to gender-pay gap announcements, feminist activism is becoming more mainstream than ever as women across Britain strive, once again, to make their voices heard.

Over the last few years, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery has been attempting radical changes in its curatorial practice. *The Past is Now* and *Coming Out* were at the forefront of this, exploring themes of empire, sexuality and gender in a way that would not have been seen in the museum even ten years ago. Continuing our journey towards historically-responsible and socially-engaged approaches, this exhibition was developed in consultation with community groups including The Precious Trust,



Shelter and Birmingham LGBT as well as through open public consultation. We discussed the artworks, the ideas of hope, dignity and activism, and most interestingly, the word 'woman'. Responses were varied and often contradictory – a reminder of the varied nature of our experiences of womanhood.

The exhibition will be marked with a weekend of thought-provoking events and activities from Friday 16 until Sunday 18 November, including performances, spoken-word poetry, debates and talks. A companion publication or 'zine' will accompany the exhibition. It will be released on 17 November and will include essays, poetry and artworks by local creatives which explore their own feminist activism in Birmingham. ■

By Emalee Beddoes-Davis, Curator (Modern & Contemporary Art), Birmingham Museums Trust

The Friends are having a Curator's Tour of Women Power Protest on Friday 8 February 2019, and an Evening Event led by the Curator on Tuesday 12 February 2019. See pages eight and ten for more information.

LEFT: *Plotting Table*, 1998, Mona Hatoum

TOP LEFT: *Sentimental Representations - In Memory of My Grandmothers*, Susan Hiller

TOP RIGHT: *Climbing in My Room*, Lucy Gunning