

ART SPIEL

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On This Spot: Histories of Women Artists in NYC



On This Spot - Yoko Ono

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fpt8y0CP4sA&t=1s>

On The Spot is a terrific new web series that seeks to document the histories of women artists in NYC from the 1950s to the 2000s. The ambitious mission is to document and present in three-minute videos the history of later 20th-century artists who have often

been overlooked and underrepresented in the larger art world. They call themselves “a feminist art history nonprofit.” There are 40 videos so far produced, with plans for a great many more. The videos are a free public resource, accessible on the organization’s website.

According to an Artnet News and In Other Words study, as of 2008, less than 30,000 out of a total of over a quarter of a million artworks that entered U.S. museum permanent collections were works by women. Last week The Art Newspaper published a story about how underserved women artists remain in the U.S. “A new survey of 1,263 female artists, commissioned by the US grant-giving body Anonymous Was A Woman and written by the journalists Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin, disclosed that nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents say that a lack of museum or institutional backing hinders their career, while 59% feel the same about galleries. Access for female artists is an issue that has changed only incrementally over time.



On This Spot - Selma Burke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLpgAIUF0il&t=7s>

Numbers like these led gallerist Loretta Howard to found On The Spot. She, along with Producer Tony Ganz, had long wondered why NYC didn’t have some sort of public acknowledgment commemorating where women artists had lived and worked in the city. We are a city that prides itself on being an incubator of many seminal art movements in

many media. Women artists have always gotten short shrift throughout art history. Thus, the project was born. Partnering with non-profit organizations, the New York Public Library, The Public Art Fund, as well as foundations including Bloomberg Connects, has helped ensure the very high quality of both the group's research and its visual content. The organization's website lists the full complement of collaborators and funders. At three-minutes each, the first groups of videos are delectable bite-sized nuggets of art history.

Often this type of historic documentation is organized by time- year, decade, etc. On the Spot (OTS) takes a novel and New York-specific approach- it is organized by neighborhood. We are obsessed by neighborhoods in NYC, their naming (SoHo, TriBeCa, NoLita, NoMad), their boundaries (where the East Village ends and SoHo begins). their changing character. We all have these idiosyncratic maps of the city in our heads. We are a city of neighborhoods, so it's a perfect construct by which to organize the female history of late 20th Century New York art.



On This Spot - Judson Memorial Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCIB1PbYQI4&t=3s>

Flying under the radar, the OTS series had its debut in May of 2023 and continues with bimonthly events that celebrate the drop of new videos. Appropriately, the series started with the Village, then moved on to SoHo. This year's focus is the Lower East Side after which the series will progress through the map of the city. Tribeca will be the focus next

year. And then the series will travel uptown to Harlem, along the way highlighting artist collectives and significant locations as well as the lives of individual artists.

For me some of the most enlightening OTS videos are about artist-founded organizations like Herisies in Soho, led by artists and intellectuals such as Lucy Lippard, Joyce Kozloff, Mary Beth Eddleson, May Stevens, and Harmony Hammond. Kenkekeba House, in the West Village is featured, a pioneering arts space for women and underrepresented groups that has shown over 7,000 artists since its founding in the early 1980's, including notables such as Ana Mendiata, Augusta Savage, Athena LaTocha and Faith Ringold. The exhaustive research that has gone into ferreting out these important places in art history is truly impressive.



On This Spot - Kenkeleba House

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpNdBj4pUBw>

The portraits of individual artists are thoughtfully distilled into short-video format. They manage succinctly and accessibly to capture the essence of each artist. Fascinated by each, I would of course like them to be a little longer, but the format is designed for the social-media age where a three-minute video has been deemed the perfect length for our modern attention spans.



On This Spot - Pat Steir

<https://www.onthisspotnyc.org/#videos>

The series now turns to the Lower East Side. The beautifully designed interactive map on the organization's website shows the various spots that are/will be covered with color-coded dots. As each section of the city is posted, the dots will be activated so you hover over them and link to the corresponding address and video. Each historic era is a different color, and the Lower East Side is dominated by dots related to the 1990s. I look forward to revisiting the who, what, when, and where of this neighborhood.

On The Spot is an ambitious and thoughtful project. It fills a meaningful gap in our histories and should be applauded for undertaking its mission. The next tranche of videos premieres on May 6 at The Anthology Film Archives, appropriately in the East Village. The event is currently sold out, but there is a waitlist that one can join for admission. It should be an evening of enlightenment and fun— a blast from the past and an investment in the future.

ON THIS SPOT CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH THE WEB SITE—

<https://www.onthisspotnyc.org/#videos>

About the Writer: Melissa Stern lives in NYC and The Hudson Valley. Her mixed material sculpture and drawings are in corporate and museum collections throughout the US. Her multi-media project The Talking Cure has been touring the United States since 2012. She wrote about art and culture for The New York Press and CityArts for eight years and has been a contributing writer to Hyperallergic and Artcritical. Melissa has joined Art Spiel as a contributing writer.