
Kate Millett

Kate Millett was active in the Judson Gallery in 1967–1968. _____

Like a number of more distinguished artists, I had my first show at Judson—my first show in New York, my first show in America. It had been damn hard to get and a very long time in coming. When it happened, in 1967, I had been back from Japan for four years, hoping for a break.

The two years in Japan had been a series of miraculous breaks and opportunities: introductions to a few friends who found me a studio, fed me when I was out of pocket, showed me the town, even distinguished artists who cheered me on. A wonderful dealer gave me a show in the same gallery where Jean Tinguely and Jasper Johns had just exhibited. I was not only lucky but also a rarity, a “geigin no onna,” or white female, a thing hardly ever experienced by the Japanese and a relief from the American GI male. I was courted and photographed and published in a way my Japanese women artist friends were not. I realized the spurious character of this attention but could not fail to enjoy it.

Back in my own country in 1963, I seemed to be getting nowhere. There were no opportunities to exhibit. It was hard even to earn a living. In America, my Oxford First Class Honours degree qualified me only for a job as temporary file clerk since I did not type sixty words a minute—the only job open to women generally. Of course, I became a feminist, but this hardly advanced my art career.

Then came the Vietnam War and the Angry Artists Against the War, and suddenly there was opportunity to meet other artists and to exhibit without a jury or pull or connections. At New York University in 1966, I showed an installation with a plastic human head lit from behind by an electric bulb. However, the boss of the event was a fellow who disliked this piece a great deal and continuously unplugged it, rendering it pointless.

Jon Hendricks, who was fulfilling his conscientious objector duties by running the Judson Gallery at the time, noticed my dismay. He intervened on my behalf a few times, was generally sympathetic,

and turned out to be immune to the usual male chauvinism of the art world then. Jon was the first person to visit my studio and see the four years of sculpture I had produced since my return. He offered me a show. I was thrilled.

Judson was Mecca to us then, a haven for artists. I would show in the same venue as Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg. I have always been grateful to Judson and to Jon Hendricks.

In October 1967 I was part of a group show called *Manipulations*. Over a period of three weekends, each of a group of artists took over the gallery space for one day. I called my piece "No." The performance happened to fall on the day of a demonstration against the Pentagon. The event consisted of ushering the audience down the stairs of the gallery in the dark and closing them into a big cage. When the lights went on, the people in the cage at first were amused but then became restive. They finally realized that they would have to find their own way out. They did, in various ways.

In early 1967 I had a solo show at the gallery, which was called *Furniture*, consisting of a suite of fantasy furniture. A television station interviewed me for it.

I have loved and admired Judson for some thirty years now and I hate to see the place that was such a unique exhibition space destroyed. May it live forever as an idea.

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author of *Sexual Politics* and other works, lives in New York City.