

# 2023 MIDWEST WOMEN ARTISTS SYMPOSIUM

## WOMEN'S WORK FEMINIST WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE MIDWEST

**Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois  
October 19 – 21, 2023**

This symposium aims to explore the experiences and achievements of women artists in the Midwest who addressed feminist themes from the 1960s to the present, and also to look at women artists active in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries who addressed issues of society's marginalization of women, their exclusion from mainstream society, and their absence in most narratives of history and culture, whether doing so was their direct intent or not.

Bradley University's Department of Art and Design will hold its sixth biennial Midwest Women Artists Symposium in Peoria, Illinois on October 19-21, 2023. Catherine J. Morris, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, will give the Keynote Address in person on October 19, examining feminist art through the lens of the career of artist Elizabeth Catlett.



Sessions on October 19 and 20 are expected to be hybrid; all sessions on October 21 to be virtual. Registration will start in late June 2023, and is open to all.

### Background

Women artists who embraced the Women's Rights Movement that coalesced during the late 1960s and early 1970s understood that their work could be a powerful medium to introduce the world to a woman's point of view, their socio-political status, to describe their personal experiences, and to show a woman's body from the perspective of its owner. Many feminist artists sought to resurrect women's craft and decorative art traditions as a viable artistic means to express female experience, thereby pointing to its political and subversive potential.

In the quest for a female aesthetic or artistic style specific to women, many 1970s feminist artists sought to elevate "women's craft" to the level of "high art" and away from its derogatory designation as "low art" or "kitsch." As Lucy Lippard explained in her 1973 essay, "Household Images in Art," women artists previously had avoided "Female techniques like sewing, weaving, knitting, ceramics, even the use of pastel colors and

delicate lines—all natural elements of art-making,” for fear of being labeled “feminine artists.” The Women’s Movement changed that, she argued, and gave women the confidence to begin “shedding their shackles, proudly untying the apron strings—and, in some cases, keeping the apron on, flaunting it, turning it into art.”

Around the same time that feminist artists were beginning to study mediums and materials associated with “women’s work”—china painting, quilts, sewing, embroidery—they were also searching for a clearly readable means of expressing female subjectivity in abstract forms, which often resembled eggs, spheres, caves, or other round forms. This vaginal or “central core” imagery, as it came to be called, was another important development in 1970s feminist art.

### Call for Proposals Open April 1 to June 2, 2023

The Department of Art and Design invites proposals for papers or panel discussions from curators, scholars, artists, and students to present completed research, work in-progress, or personal accounts on feminist women artists active in the American Midwest and their artworks in all media. Paper presentations can be 45 or 20 minutes in length; panels should be limited to 3 participants.

Proposals must include:

- a complete mailing address, email address, phone number, and any professional affiliation(s) of applicant;
- paper or panel title and abstract of no more than 300 words, with a list of three to five keywords;
- biography of no more than 100 words; and,
- indication of preference for presenting in-person or via Zoom.

Submissions will be accepted by Kristan H. McKinsey, Director of Illinois Women Artists Project, at [kmckinsey@fsmail.bradley.edu](mailto:kmckinsey@fsmail.bradley.edu) until 5:00 PM on June 2, 2023 for peer-review. Applicants will be notified by June 15, 2023.

### Organizers

The Symposium is organized by the Department of Art and Design of Bradley University and Illinois Women Artists Project, with support from the Women’s and Gender Studies Department of Bradley University.

