Creating Dangerously: Women (Re)Making the Modern World

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Creating Dangerously: Women (Re)Making the Modern World considers practices of worldmaking by Indigenous and Global South women in the 20th century to imagine the world as more free, just, and equitable. While conventional histories of 20th century art champion a Modernism primarily concerned with formal innovation and avant-garde experiments, be it in Europe or increasingly beyond it, we take a critical approach to Modernism/s. As such, we understand Modernism/s as the contested cultural dimensions of Modernity, through which competing visions of aesthetic, social, and political life were articulated. Taking into account the Indigenous and decolonial critique of Modernity's symbiotic relationship with coloniality and the devastating epistemic and ontological effects of the colonial project on colonised worlds (Quijano 2000, Escobar 2003, Mignolo 2007), this project focuses on the ways in which Global South women and female-identified artists nevertheless contributed to bringing otherwise worlds into being. It examines how in the face of impossibility, these women created material and cultural forms that challenged the structures of patriarchy, racism, Fascism, and other forms of oppression that shaped the lived realities of the majority of the world, without repeating the universalist assumptions of White Feminism. Theirs was the hope that another world was possible.

Creating Dangerously asks: what do Modernism/s look like when we shift focus away from conventional protagonists, concerns, and definitions of art, to focus on women's work that "revolt(ed) against silence" (Camus and Danticat), against the taken for granted, the unsaid/unheard? If Modernism/s hold out a certain set of ambitions for what it means to inhabit and make the world, and if its promises were about the question of freedom (freedom from the church, from conventional morality, from societal structures, from figuration etc), how might Modernism/s look differently if we explore it through the lens of women and of feminism, through the geographies and artistic practices of the Global South? Ours is not a project of recuperating Modernism/s, but of shedding light upon the many ways in which women have made spaces of freedom, aesthetically, materially, and imaginatively. Here then, we open the possibility of taking Modernism/s as practices of emancipation, in form, in politics and in life in order to transform "silence into language and action" (Lorde, 1977).

In support of the exhibition and in preparation for a catalogue, the symposium addresses the following questions:

- What role did women from the global south play in making and unmaking the modern and its aesthetic registers?
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- How does looking at women's making and artistic practices from the global south alter our understandings of Modernism/s, and what forms did they take?

- How are discourses of gender and other rights politics articulated through making in different geographic contexts?

- Does an attentiveness to artistic practices from a global south perspective help to articulate a longer and broader history of gender and other rights politics?

- What role did female-identified artists play in articulating a political modern, through making, arts activism, and institution building?

- How does an attentiveness to relational approaches to the gendered subject such as the matrilineal push us to think about Modernism/s and authorship beyond the individual genius?