

Gabriela Aceves-Sepúlveda. *Women made visible: Feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City*. Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, ISBN 978-1-4962-1385-3, 2019, 408 pages.

Women made visible: Feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City is a seminal work, encompassing outstanding and in-depth research, argumentation and theoretical frameworks. The debates the book advances are pertinent to our current era and they explore uncharted territory. This is a complex book, which discusses issues pertaining to embodiment, performance, and the dichotomy of public and private spaces, which are all part of my own research interests. I am also committed to the plight of feminism, inclusion, and to addressing gender inequalities in my work.

One of the questions that comes to mind upon reading this book is: what does this book make visible? Women's issues, of course, are made visible, but Aceves-Sepúlveda's detailed discussion of feminist art and the plight of women in Mexico City goes well beyond that struggle. The book accomplishes many tasks. It renders women's art history in Mexico and beyond visible, and it also renders the importance and the intricacies of the archive visible. It particularly examines power dynamics, women's struggle for equal rights—such as reproductive rights, protection and the criminalization of violence against women. In addition to engendering visibility the book also gives voice to women who had been silenced and censored in Mexican history, and who had been ignored or erased from art history, and even from the history of global feminisms. Aceves-Sepúlveda also refers to “the perils of inaccessibility,” investigating mechanisms

of accessing archives of a feminist art and media in post-1968 Mexico City. In that sense, issues on the importance of archival preservation, management, maintenance and access are prevalent. And it is worthwhile to mention that one of the chapters is a fascinating exploration of the official secret services police archives on women, which Aceves-Sepúlveda had the chance to study after the records were released.

The book is divided in three parts of three chapters each: Feminizing the City, Archival Practices, and Protesting the Archives. In the broader scope, these three parts trace the history of feminism in Mexico, and create links with transnational and international art networks. Specifically, the first part of the book addresses notions of urbanity within three aspects: urban planning regulations, media and embodiment. The chapters are “The Official City,” “The Media City,” and “The Embodied City.” The city is scrutinized here according to official records and legislation, as well as to media representations. The chapter shows how the city itself becomes a site of corporeality and embodiment.

The second part of the book probes the very notion of the archive as a location of contestation and as a political arena, dissecting the official battles behind the scenes of the art world. The chapters are “The Archival and Political Awakenings of Ana Victoria Jiménez,” “Secret Documents and Feminist Practices,” and “Performing Feminist Art.” In addition, in this section the author traces links between the political origins of legislation and the regulations of archives, and discusses the unexpected role of law officers in preserving artists’ archives. The section also discusses performance as an archive in itself. In addition, in this section the author traces links between the political origins of legislation and the regulations of archives, and discusses the

unexpected role of law officers in preserving artists' archives. The section also discusses performance as an archive in itself. The third part of the book is dedicated to protest and resistance, where art becomes political, willingly or accidentally. The chapters are "Interrupting Photographic Traditions," "Feminist Collaborations in 1970s Mexico," and "POLArizing the Archive." Different artistic expressions are discussed here, specifically photography and video, as well as collaborative efforts among the artists in question. Each part of the book engages with transnational and international art networks through the examination of international feminist artists beyond Mexico in other parts of the world. The author also demonstrates that the Mexican artists in question were not working isolated from a global art scene, but were completely inserted within international art circuits through art production and dialogue.

Aceves-Sepúlveda calls the women studied here "visual *letradas*," who are "self-identified women who, by the second half of the 20th century, became more openly concerned with performing and recording audiovisual information about how their bodies were visually construed and politicized" (p. 6). The term references the contrasting context developed by critic Ángel Rama who posed the notion of *letrados*, or urban lettered men, "who held power over written discourse and by the central role of the city in deploying and reproducing that power" (p. 6). The four artists whose art production and archives are discussed in the book are: Ana Victoria Jiménez, Rosa Martha Fernández, Pola Weiss, and Mónica Mayer. Aceves-Sepúlveda probes the complexities of each artist within well-discussed and very specific contexts, and within diverse artistic forms and manifestations, and she delineates and problematizes how these four artists defied the invisibility of women in Mexico City's arts and socio-

political contexts. In addition, many other feminist artists are discussed, in dialogue with the contexts established.

One of the elements investigated is the city. Aceves-Sepúlveda examines how the “feminization of the cultural geographies” (p. 290) takes place through the art work and activism of the artists in question. The book is about Mexico City, but its discussion resonates with international circuits of art and feminism. It indicates complex transnational and relational networks, and heterogeneous perspectives within global feminism. Aceves-Sepúlveda’s strong contextualization presents the processes through which Mexico City underwent modernization and expansion, sometimes with the high price of state violence, particularly in the case of the student protests that resulted in the massacre of innocent students.

In the works of the women in question, there are multiple reinterpretations and occupations of the public space of the city—space is explored in terms of visibility and invisibility. Along the lines of feminism, the visibility of private matters within public spheres is highly political. From this lens, the public actions of some of the artists under scrutiny defy old definitions of public and private, always in dialogue with a feminist struggle. This is evident in the multiple discussions of women’s urban interventions and public protests. The city as public space is also important in relation to photography and documentation of protests, and the representation of women in relation to, for example, ethnicity, as well as photos of women’s actions in public spaces, and in how “public performances are in and of themselves claims to citizenship” (p. 89). As Aceves-Sepúlveda defines it, “embodied citizenship refers to the ways in which public performances of dissent invite passerby and their audiences to imagine change and the terms through which

change can be articulated while enabling the negotiation of competing ideas of community” (p. 89).

Another essential aspect is an ongoing discussion of the body. Questions of embodiment pertain to the entire book, and the exploration of the body and women’s agency is crucial. These four artists question “the ways female bodies were construed and represented in public discourses,” and in urban spaces of the city (p. 6). Women’s bodies and embodiment are essential for understanding how feminism is at stake. The importance of the body to these artists cannot be stressed enough. The body is a site of experience, oppression, and violence, but also for more nuanced ways in which visibility relates to acts of recognition depended on the gaze, the gestural and spaces (physical, conceptual, ideological and political) occupied by women’s bodies, especially when considering the obvious (but elusive) idea that performance is an embodied artistic practice, and that it requires presence. Finally, the book provides an overview of how these women artists used humor in their art work, humor being a form of embodiment.

In examining the city and the body and their interrelatedness, the book scrutinizes tensions between two structuring forces: the social body and the individual body. To stress the importance of this relationship, I refer to Marcel Mauss’ term on the notion of the habitus, (which Pierre Bourdieu later developed) to refer to tacit and structuring social dispositions embodied in human action. Aceves-Sepúlveda’s book in many ways examines how these feminist artists break and subvert the habitus through their artistic and media actions, in social and subjective transformations, and in the “feminization of the cultural geographies of Mexico City and the concomitant emergence of new regimes of media and visibility” (p. 290).

This book is a tour de force that creates and holds an archive in itself; the book functions as an archive in form and content in order to remediate historical erasure and invisibilities. Aceves-Sepúlveda's book creates possibilities for presence, for acknowledging the contribution and possibilities these women generated in their art and activism. This book makes an invaluable contribution to multiple fields, and it would be of interest to scholars, students and artists interested in Feminism, Media Studies, Art History, and Latin American Studies. This book is a tremendous asset to teachers, educators, and adult education community leaders, as well as to community organizers and activists. The history the book traces can help educators who are teaching the history of feminism, or who are promoting the main tenets of equality and equity, and are fighting against gender oppression. The book can help highlight and elucidate the crucial role educators play in social justice and human rights.

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