

Jerry Saltz: My Final Word on MoMA's Woman Problem

By [Jerry Saltz](#)

Nine years ago this week, MoMA opened its brand-new shiny \$750 million building. Since this Garden of Modernism reopened, [I've been gibbering about the dearth of art by women](#) in the museum's all-important permanent collection of painting and sculpture, installed on the fourth and fifth floors. MoMA is modernism's mothership, so the way the story of modernism is told here is crucial. And the numbers are horrendous.

At the 2004 grand-opening show, there were 415 works on view on the museum's fourth and fifth floors. Of these, fewer than 20 were by women. Less than 5 percent. In 2006, 19 were by women. A year later, the number was 14.

Which brings us to the present. I guess we can say that things are better: Today, by my count, there are 367 works of art on view on these two floors, and 29 of them are by women. That's just short of 8 percent. Slightly less terrible. Still unforgivable.

It's entirely wrong to point fingers at MoMA's chief curator of painting and sculpture, Ann Temkin. Since she was appointed to the job in 2008, she has wrestled mightily against the museum's inadequate, unpleasant, cramped space — always trying to open up the story, wedge women in, place things other than the mega-masterpieces on view.

kin is obliged to show MoMA's many icons, lest audiences feel cheated out of their \$25 admission. Yet women artists are being cheated out of something far more insidious: their birthright.

Temkin continues to fight the terrible odds. I commend her and maybe even MoMA for trying to right this problem their lack of space has produced. Still, I sometimes wish MoMA would just chuck their master narrative for five years. It could keep Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Monet, Duchamp, and their other main men. But let's imagine if the curators could post a sign out front that that reads, "Pardon our appearance while we remove the stick from our asses, discard our atavistic linear idea of art, and lay out more of the whole story." Then Temkin could get her wish and install swaths of the collection with a far wider eye. Plenty of it made by women.

Of course, the problem isn't confined to the temple of modernism. It's systemic and at our doorsteps every day in the art world. *Frieze* assistant editor Paul Teasdale commented, "We're supposed to be over misogyny but it's becoming reinforced by a new generation." Berlin's great Neue Nationalgalerie recently mounted a huge survey on contemporary painting in Berlin, all guys. In one of Gagosian's large London spaces this fall, a 35-artist show included 34 men. Plenty of shows here are laced with testosterone, too. No intelligent person thinks that art should be seen exclusively through a binary gender lens or bracketed in a category of "women's art." So how does all this continue?

I've said this enough times, and I am done complaining about it. My own percentages stink too. I am a glass house throwing bricks. Curators, dealers, museums, editors: We all are part of the problem. I hope that other critics might take up this cluck-clucking, if only to notice and say something about what they see. MoMA will soon be building again, adding space for the permanent collection. Tempkin has done what she can in the space allotted and the strictures given. Maybe when the next building is done the gates will finally open. We all have to hope so. Till then: Happy birthday, MoMA.