

*Soft
&
Wet*

Soft & Wet

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Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Works: Julie Tolentino, *...soft as a lion, wet as the night*, 2019; Zarina, *Corners*, 1980; Zarina, *I Whispered to the Earth*, 1979; Caroline Key, *Khôra*, 2019; Crystal Z Campbell, *Portrait of a Woman I & II*, 2013. Photograph by Matt Vicari



Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Works: Andy Rober, *After Prince*, 2019; Crystal Z Campbell, *Portrait of a Woman I & II*, 2013; *HeLa Project: Friends of Friends (Six Degrees of Separation)*, 2013; Beverly Buchanan, *City Walls sketchbook*, 1976-77. Photograph by Matt Vicari



Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Work: Beverly Buchanan, *City Walls sketchbook*, 1976-77.
Photograph by Matt Vicari



Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Works: Julie Tolentino, *...soft as a lion, wet as the night*, 2019; Ana Mendieta, *Burial Pyramid*, 1974; Arooj Aftab, *Soft and Wet*, 2019.
Photograph by Matt Vicari

Preface to an Exhibition

Sadia Shirazi

*We'd be so lost in our mouths, the best,
I feel it everyday (every way)*
—Prince, “Soft and Wet” (1978)

Thirty nine years separate us from the historical moment of the seminal exhibition, *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* (1980), co-curated by Ana Mendieta, Kazuko Miyamoto and Zarina at A.I.R. Gallery. This distance allows and demands that we reconsider the exhibition in a broader perspective than its reception and its utilization as a 1980s “multicultural” alibi. What is often lost in returning to *Dialectics of Isolation* is that it was institutional critique, not just that it was a rare show of and by Third World women.¹ Although the *Dialectics of Isolation* show, and Mendieta herself, are often used retrospectively as evidence to prove the organization’s multiculturalism, the show is in fact evidence of the inverse, of tokenization.² A.I.R. Gallery, like other feminist arts organizations, was willing to allow Third World to modify “woman” and “artist” in one show but not to modify the mission of the organization nor who was considered for membership or sat on its board.³ In this way

1 It bears mentioning that *Dialectics of Isolation* was not the only such show of institutional critique, precedents existed that were organized by African-American women, including the remarkable “Where We At” *Black Women Artists: 1971* at the Acts of Art Gallery and *11* (1975) curated by Faith Ringgold at the Women’s Interarts Center. The *Where We At* show was curated by Nigel Johnson in his West Village gallery and led to the subsequent formation of the collective “Where We At” Black Women Artists INC. (WWA). The artists in *Where We At* included Dindga McCannon, Kay Brown, Faith Ringgold, Carol Blank, Jerri Crooks, Charlotte Kâ (Richardson), and Gylbert Coker, amongst others. See: Valerie Smith, “Abundant Evidence: Black Women Artists of the 1960s and 1970s,” in Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, eds., *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 400-413; Kay Brown, “The Emergence of Black

Women Artists: The Founding of ‘Where We At,’” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Number 29, Fall 2011: 118-127; Faith Ringgold, “Bio & Chronology,” Faith Ringgold, News, Appearances, Exhibitions, Permissions and Projects, <http://faithringgold.blogspot.com/2007/03/bio-chronology.html> (accessed November 1, 2019).

2 This is akin to the *Heresies* issue “Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other.” The editorial collective for this special issue of the feminist publication *Heresies* included Lula Mae Blocton, Yvonne Flowers, Valerie Harris, Zarina Hashmi, Virginia Jaramillo, Dawn Russell, and Naeemah Shabazz. See “Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other,” *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, issue 8, vol. 2, no. 4 (1979).



Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Works: Zarina, *Corners*, 1980; Zarina, *I Whispered to the Earth*, 1979. Photograph by Matt Vicari

it is not very different from where we are today, despite the increasing prevalence of “decolonization” discourse and the foregrounding of Black/Indigenous/People of Color (BIPOC) in exhibitions. These shows are either lauded or abhorred by critics who are themselves stuck in a recursive white identitarian loop in which they only refer to Euro-American art history, and, along with many curators, can not hear decolonization’s call to dismantle hegemonic structures.⁴ New exhibitions are organized around ever more tightly articulated categories of subjectivity, stringing up the Third World and other radical leftist movements of the previous era in their identitarian noose. This disappearance of the previous era’s solidarity movements in artistic discourse and exhibition frameworks is particularly egregious as it is in tandem and complicit with the rise of American empire.

In the introductory text of the *Dialectics of Isolation* catalogue, after Mendieta unequivocally states that feminism in the United States was “basically a white middle class movement” that, to put it kindly, “failed to remember” Third World women. In doing so, Mendieta does something remarkable—she turns away from the white gaze. She and the other curators were not asking in any way for inclusion but insisting on a dialectical method for articulating a politics that would necessitate isolation from some but affiliation with others.⁵ “This exhibition,” writes Mendieta “points not necessarily to the injustice or incapacity of a society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being ‘other.’” The exhibition points to a third way.⁶ In the 1970s through the 80s “Third World” meant many things. The term emerged in the wake of World War II, out of the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference. It denoted a geographic territory as well as a temporality of capitalist development, in which the Third World was belated, in a teleological development narrative led by the “First World.” In the United States, it was used as a term to describe non-whites, akin to the term “Black” in Britain which was, in the 1970s and 80s, an identity which then referred broadly to postcolonial migrants. According to Ana Mendieta, in the introduction to the exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* (1980), the artists in the show shared the concerns of the Non-aligned nations,

3 Author in conversation with Howardena Pindell, New York, 31 October 2019. Pindell was also included in the *Heresies* “Third World Women” issue that Zarina was part of the editorial collective of, and recalls the challenges that were faced in completing it.

4 For more on Black and Third World feminist thought around global capitalism and decolonization, see Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva, “White Feminist Fatigue Syndrome,” *Critical Legal Thinking*, October 21, 2013. <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/10/21/white-feminist-fatigue->

syndrome/ (accessed November 1, 2019). Thanks to Constantina Zavitsanos for bringing this writing to my attention.

5 See Audre Lorde. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984): 110- 114.

6 This is not the “third way” as it would soon be articulated by neoliberalism, as a triangulation, during the Clinton years. Nor is it the centrism of Blair in Britain. A special thank you to Mezna Qato for this insight.

by which she meant the movement which was founded at the Belgrade Conference (1961).⁷ In the United States, Third World was a broad category used for a range of non-national identities and sexual orientations, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Latin American, Asian, Gay and Lesbian, amongst others. Beyond these definitions and usages, Third World also denoted a “third way”—of other futures and political imaginaries. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak bemoaned the fact that the third way “was not accompanied by a commensurate intellectual effort” in the “cultural field” beyond the simple binary of nationalism or anti-imperialism.⁸ The history of Third World women is largely ignored in analyses of the failure of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and it is here that *Dialectics of Isolation* should be situated, propelling us elsewhere, beyond the limits of these old binaries as well as newer forms of nationalism, towards the creation of “other” collectivities. The exhibition was a gesture of refusal, an experiment, following Édouard Glissant “to refuse to consent to be a single being.”⁹ How can we be minoritized, they seemed to ask, when we are in fact the entire world?

Mendieta and Miyamoto were the only “women of color”¹⁰ in A.I.R. Gallery at the time of *Dialectics of Isolation*. While both were members of the feminist cooperative (and had mounted shows there)¹¹ Zarina was not—her application had recently been rejected.¹² Zarina had just finished working on the *Heresies* special issue on “Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other” before joining Mendieta and Miyamoto to curate the show. The three artists shared frustrations with the feminist movement’s dismissal of Third

7 The nonaligned movement, though, emerged out of the previous Bandung (1955) and Cairo Conferences (1958) and the Belgrade Conference was when Latin America joined Africa and Asia, after the Cuban revolution.

8 Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and London: Routledge, 1995): xxv-xxvi. The quotations are taken from Spivak’s “Translator’s Preface.”

9 See Fred Moten, *Black and Blur: consent not to be a single being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), and Manthia Diawara, “One World In Relation: Édouard Glissant in conversation with Manthia Diawara,” *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28 (March 2011): 4-19. See also Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

10 The term “women of color” was coined by Black women from Washington D.C. who were participating in a National Women’s Conference held in Houston in 1977. This group wrote “The Black Women’s Agenda” (BWA)

in response to a scant three page “Minority Women’s Plank” that the organizers of the conference had put together in a 200 page document. At the conference, other groups of minority women asked to join the BWA and they agreed, through this alliance the term “women of color” was created, as a commitment of political solidarity to work with other minoritized women of color and not as a biological (ethnic or racial) claim. See Western States Center, “Loretta Ross: The origin of the phrase ‘women of color,’” YouTube video, 2:59, February 15, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82vl34mi4lw&feature=emb_title (accessed November 1, 2019).

11 Mendieta was a member of A.I.R. Gallery for four years, from 1979-1982. When she resigned from the gallery in October of 1982, Mendieta inquired about selling her membership. Ana Mendieta, “Resignation Letter,” 19 October 1982, the A.I.R. Gallery Archive, MSS 184, box 11, folder 440, New York University Libraries.

12 Author in conversation with Zarina, New York, 4 February 2018.

World women and their struggles, as well as an art world that invisibilized their histories—Mendieta was a refugee from Cuba and Miyamoto and Zarina were recent immigrants from Japan and India respectively. Working together, these three friends shared the labor of the exhibition and used the platform given them to share space and resources with other Third World women, who, like white women, would never have had the chance to exhibit their work in male dominated museums and galleries, but were also excluded from feminist art spaces, which white women dominated. Howardena Pindell, who was also included in the show, was a foundational figure in the history of A.I.R. gallery as one of the twenty artists who co-founded the cooperative in 1972 and the only non-white woman. Pindell recalled that every time she mentioned race in meetings, she was accused of bringing up something “political” and although she tired of this, it was the fees that ultimately led to her departure three years later.¹³ Mendieta, who joined the gallery in 1979, became frustrated with the meetings and began missing them within a year, and even tried to sell her membership outright to an artist whose application had been rejected.¹⁴ “The white voice was the dominant voice.” Pindell observed of that time “What the white male’s voice was to the white female’s voice, the white female’s voice was to the woman of color’s voice.”¹⁵ Ana Mendieta said it more succinctly: “They were cunts.”¹⁶

Howardena Pindell’s controversial video work *Free, White and 21* (1980) was first exhibited in *Dialectics of Isolation* and played a central role in articulating the show’s critique of white feminism.¹⁷ In it, Pindell plays two characters, herself, a black woman, flatly recounting stories of racial discrimination, and a white feminist who alternates between gaslighting and threatening to erase the black woman. The video is alternately horrifying and funny, with the artist wrapping her head in a white bandage and peeling

13 There was no sliding scale structure that could accommodate variable factors affecting artists’ ability to pay these fees: for instance, by considering the differing incomes of single versus married women. Pindell noted that most of its members were married women with dual household incomes who could afford them, whereas she supported herself through full-time work at the MoMA. Author in conversation with Howardena Pindell, New York, 31 October 2019.

14 The artist decided against the purchase while appreciating the humor of the situation and Mendieta’s frustration with the membership selection process at A.I.R. Gallery. Author in conversation with anonymous artist, New York, 6 September 2019.

15 Howardena Pindell, “Free, White and 21,” Issue 19: Autobiography, *Third Text*, Volume 6, 1992: 31. Pindell remains committed to an internationalism through her advocacy of Indigenous artists, Black women and other non-white artists to the present day.

16 Author in conversation with anonymous artist, 6 September 2019, New York.

17 The video work included a metronome atop the video monitor.

18. For a rich study of Beverly Buchanan’s works from 1978-1981 that engages with the works she exhibited in *Dialectics of Isolation*, see Park McArthur and Jennifer Burris Staton, *Beverly Buchanan, 1978-1981* (Mexico City: Athénée Press, 2015): 10-19.

a material off from her face, like a second skin. Zarina, who was then experimenting with making soft sculptures, exhibited *Corners* (1980), which brought together her previous work with collaged-wood, relief prints in Delhi with the influence of New York’s minimalist and post-minimalist movements. Although the grey sculpture looked as if it were hewn from stone, it was made from pulped paper mixed with water and tinted with graphite powder, then compressed. Its surface took on a metallic sheen while Buchanan’s sculptures were red tinged. This process of casting a material that bore traces of the process used to make it was also exhibited in Buchanan’s cast concrete installation *Wall Column* (undated). Four blocks of concrete were arranged directly on the ground, with grooves in them, the sculptures looked somewhere between architectural spolia and sedimented layers of geological strata. Nengudi’s *Swing Low* (1977) hung off of the ceiling and wall, the nylon mesh (pantyhose) stretching from being pulled, pinned and also weighted with sand, two pendulum like forms evoking the breasts of a human body. Portable segments of a large, social realist mural *Uprising of the Mujeres* (1979) was also exhibited and Baca’s catalogue text noted the importance of public art’s access to broader segments of the population. Whitefeather exhibited a black and white photograph of a shrub, *Webbed Nests at Branch Crotches* (undated), that was part of a larger series on plant and animal life and its relationship to the land. The exhibition also included an installation by Lydia Okumura and Janet Olivia Henry’s assortment of small objects (oars, clothing, baseball bat, briefcase) that made up *Juju Box for a White Protestant Male* (1979-80), in which “each item represents a word, a clump of things together to make a sentence.”

The artists and works in *Dialectics of Isolation* revealed the multi-faceted nature of the experiences of Third World women as well as a range of aesthetic influences and formal strategies they employed in their practices. The formalism implicit in the artists’ works, such as those by Buchanan and Zarina, for example, are inflected by histories undergirding the artists’ lived experiences, which are not yet adequately theorized or historicized. These minoritarian histories are an inextricable part of the 1970s feminist art movement in New York largely left out of art historical narratives.¹⁸ It is the fleshiness and material accretion, a softness and wetness that I observed in the works of Beverly Buchanan and Zarina in *Dialectics of Isolation*, as well as the work of Ana Mendieta, that I then drew on as historical precedent for, or as antecedents of, the artists’ works in *Soft and Wet* (2019).¹⁹

19 The use of flesh in the exhibition draws from Hortense J. Spillers’ distinction between the “body” and the “flesh”: “I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is “flesh,” that zero degree of

social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.” See Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Culture and Countermemory: The “American” Connection (Summer, 1987): 64-81.

Dialectics of Isolation

An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States

Dialectics of Isolation
An Exhibition of Third World Women
Artists of the United States
Works by Judith F. Baca,
Beverly Buchanan, Janet Olivia Henry,
Senga Nengudi, Lyolia Okumura,
Howardena Pindell, Selena Whitefeather
and Zarina

September 2 through September 20, 1980

An Exhibition sponsored by
the A.I.R. Gallery under grant from
the New York State Council on the Arts.
This exhibition has been partially funded
by NEA Foundation, Inc.

A.I.R. Gallery
37 Wooster Street, New York City 10022

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain time in history when people take consciousness of themselves and ask questions about who they are. After World War II, the label Third World came into being in reference to the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The movement of Unaligned Nations was founded in 1961 with a meeting which took place in Belgrade. Their aims are to end colonialism, racism and exploitation.

We of the Third World in the United States have the same concerns as the people of the Unaligned Nations. The white population of the United States, diverse, but of basic European stock, exterminated the indigenous civilization and put aside the Black as well as the other non-white cultures to create a homogenous male-dominated culture above the internal divergency.

Do we exist? . . . To question our cultures is to question our own existence, our human reality. To confront this fact means to acquire an awareness of ourselves. This in turn becomes a search, a questioning of who we are and how we will realize ourselves.

During the mid to late sixties as women in the United States politicized themselves and came together in the Feminist Movement with the purpose to end the domination and exploitation by the white male culture, they failed to remember us. American Feminism as it stands is basically a white middle class movement.

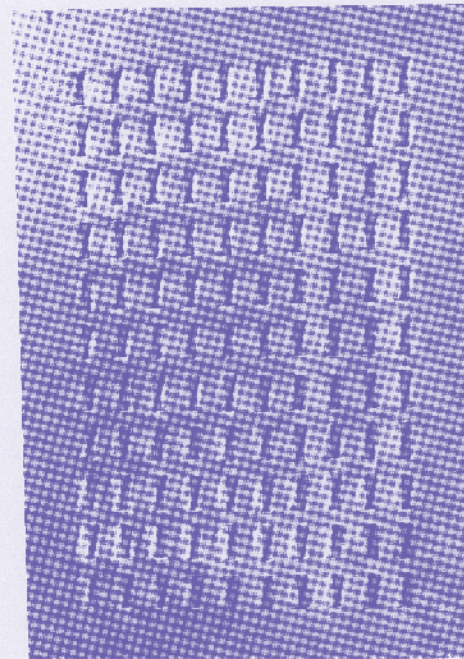
As non-white women our struggles are two-fold.

This exhibition points not necessarily to the injustice or incapacity of a society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being "other."

Ana Mendieta © 1980

Zarina

*I looked into Mt. Aso filled with burnt ashes
walked the corridors of temples with rows of niches
blackened by the smoke of oil lamps
lamps lighted for the dead
silently came to my corner*

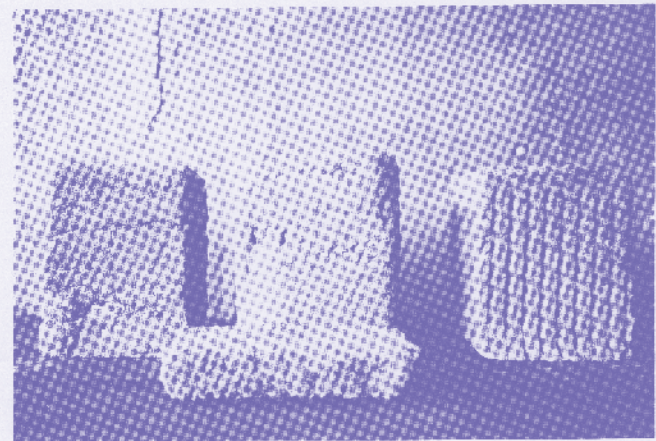


Corners. Cast paper, 32 1/2" x 22". 1980. Photo credit Pam Rehman

Beverly Buchanan

Notes on wall column

Each piece of the sculpture is cast separately and placed individually, one at a time. Placing each piece involves a long time of looking and moving— shifting— replacing and looking some more. The slight weight shift and emphasis on my right to left orientation continues in this piece. The small front half slab was placed first.



Wall Column. Cast Cement, 18" x 29" x 10"

Holding Space: Julie Tolentino between Ana Mendieta and Zarina Jeannine Tang

Upon entering the exhibition, the first place my eye lands is Julie Tolentino's sculpture, situated slightly off-center in the middle of the gallery—the latter an open plan arranged roughly in an 'E' shape, with presentation spaces running perpendicular to a row of windows. Tolentino's materials are a study of visual and tactile contrast: a plush faux fur swath of fabric is gathered up into a large fuzzy ball, while a partially-filled waterbed, of a muted black sheen, holds the floor in a dense black puddle. Titled *...soft as a lion, wet as the night* (2019), this work by Tolentino offer a mischievous rejoinder to the call of the exhibition's title, whose namesake is Prince's *Soft and Wet* (1978)—Tolentino's title cites the song's lyrics, to materially enact Prince's terms and tone.

The faux fur fabric is tied up and suspended; the waterbed tied off and pulled up at one end, while its majority reclines directly on the concrete, as though having just oozed through air and onto the floor. An arrangement of black rope cradles the fabric and firmly secures the waterbed. Both the waterbed and fabric are separately tethered to the architectural interior's pipes, walls and ceiling. And so the relationship between materiality, suspension (its physics of tension relative to mass, weight and gravity) and gallery architecture is what supplies each object with its visual shape and dimensional form. Elaborating the process-based methods of post-formalist art by Lynda Benglis and others, in such exhibitions as *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966)—in which a work's composition would be determined by chance, physics and the properties of the materials used—the appearance of form in Tolentino's *...soft as a lion, wet as the night* is fundamentally relational, a conjunction of material process, the space of the gallery and the visitor's participation.

Both objects may be touched, and the terms of engagement are left open. I'm reminded of the longstanding histories of performative, Fluxus, conceptualist work that would entwine touch and sculpture: for instance, Ay-o's *Fingerbox* (1964) that required the viewer—or user—to insert their finger into the orifices of a cubic object, to probe its differently tactile interiors. But in *...soft as a lion, wet as the night*, the cubic interior of Tolentino's work



Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Works: Julie Tolentino, *...soft as a lion, wet as the night*, 2019; Zarina, *Corners*, 1980; Zarina, *I Whispered to the Earth*, 1979. Photograph by Matt Vicari

is the gallery. The evident suspension of Tolentino's objects foregrounds their material contingency and vulnerability; when coupled with the campy mound of lux fur and athletic, fetishistic rubber, the work entices—at least to this visitor—gentle, exploratory acts of stroking and caressing. Excess rope is retained and not trimmed, its deliberately casual spills accentuating the visceral pleasure of handling the work. In doing so, the spectator becomes a participant entering into intimate physical engagement with the sculpture.

During these encounters, one is also framed by Tolentino's work. The ropes suspending both objects conjunct one another—one object's attachment to the gallery directly crosses and pulls at the other—to produce the taut lines of an open parallelogram. Being inside Tolentino's work offers a different pleasure from my enjoyment of walking through Fred Sandback open planes, in which lengths of thin, colored acrylic yarn are secured to the walls, ceilings and floors of a gallery, vibrating gently with the movements of air, bodies and energies that touch them (these calm, shimmering voids for viewers have been described by Andrea Fraser as an “extraordinary generosity... By removing himself to the extent that he does, he makes a place for me.”¹)

If Sandback sought to make a sculpture that didn't have an inside, Tolentino's *...soft as a lion, wet as the night* produces an inside capacious enough to hold a visitor within it, and in relation to its parts. The space between her objects is wide enough for a body (or two) to pass between them: the visitor is located within the sculpture, oriented in relationship to its objects. The objects don't assert presence as much as they entice it, soliciting a viewer's tactile response to their materiality, as something charged by space—simultaneously suspending the viewer between the decisions of what this intimacy will be, as a space of encounter, play and transition.

When walking through the exhibition, I experience the curatorial placement of Tolentino's work between the art of Ana Mendieta and Zarina. At the time of their historic *Dialectics of Isolation* (1980) exhibition, Kazuko Miyamoto, Mendieta, and Zarina co-organized the exhibition and Zarina exhibited work within it; the 1970s art practices of both offered distinctive and disparate approaches to the body's relationship to materiality. *Soft and Wet* features the super-8 film *Burial Pyramid* (1974) by Mendieta, that directly and emphatically utilizes her body as material, breathing laboriously underneath a mound of rocks; while Zarina's *Corners* (1980) and *I Whispered to the Earth* (1979) evidence the persistent presence of handmade manipulation and pressure upon paper. In *Soft and Wet*, Mendieta and Zarina's work appear at alternate ends of the gallery's long passageway—

neither placed in juxtaposition or correlation, they are experienced as two distinct, available positions. However, one encounters Tolentino's work on the way to the other, potentially passing through the open planes of her work en route; or, at a distance, perceiving Mendieta and Zarina work through Tolentino's. The frame of her *...soft as a lion, wet as the night* simultaneously opens space for a viewer inside the sculpture, and holds space for a viewer to experience the exhibition's intergenerational collectivity, due to its location between those works that preceded it—that helped form its capacity and its difference.

Jeannine Tang is Assistant Professor in Art History and Visual Studies at The New School. An art historian of modern and contemporary art, visual culture, and exhibition history, she has published in such venues as *Artforum*, *Art Journal*, *GLQ, journal of visual culture*, and *Theory, Culture & Society*, in addition to numerous exhibition catalogues and anthologies. In 2018, with Lia Gangitano and Ann Butler, she co-curated the exhibition *The Conditions of Being Art: Pat Hearn Gallery and American Fine Arts, Co. (1983–2004)* at the Hessel Museum of Art, and is co-editor of the accompanying book.

1 My thanks to Julie Tolentino, Sadia Shirazi and Tara Hart for conversations that informed this writing. Also see: Andrea Fraser, “Why Does Fred Sandback's Work Make Me Cry?” *Grey Room* 22 (Winter 2005): 47.



Julie Tolentino, *...soft as a lion, wet as the night* (detail), 2019. Photograph by Matt Vicari



Crystal Z Campbell, *Portrait of a Woman I & II*, 2013; *HeLa Project: Friends of Friends (Six Degrees of Separation)*, 2013. Photograph by Matt Vicari



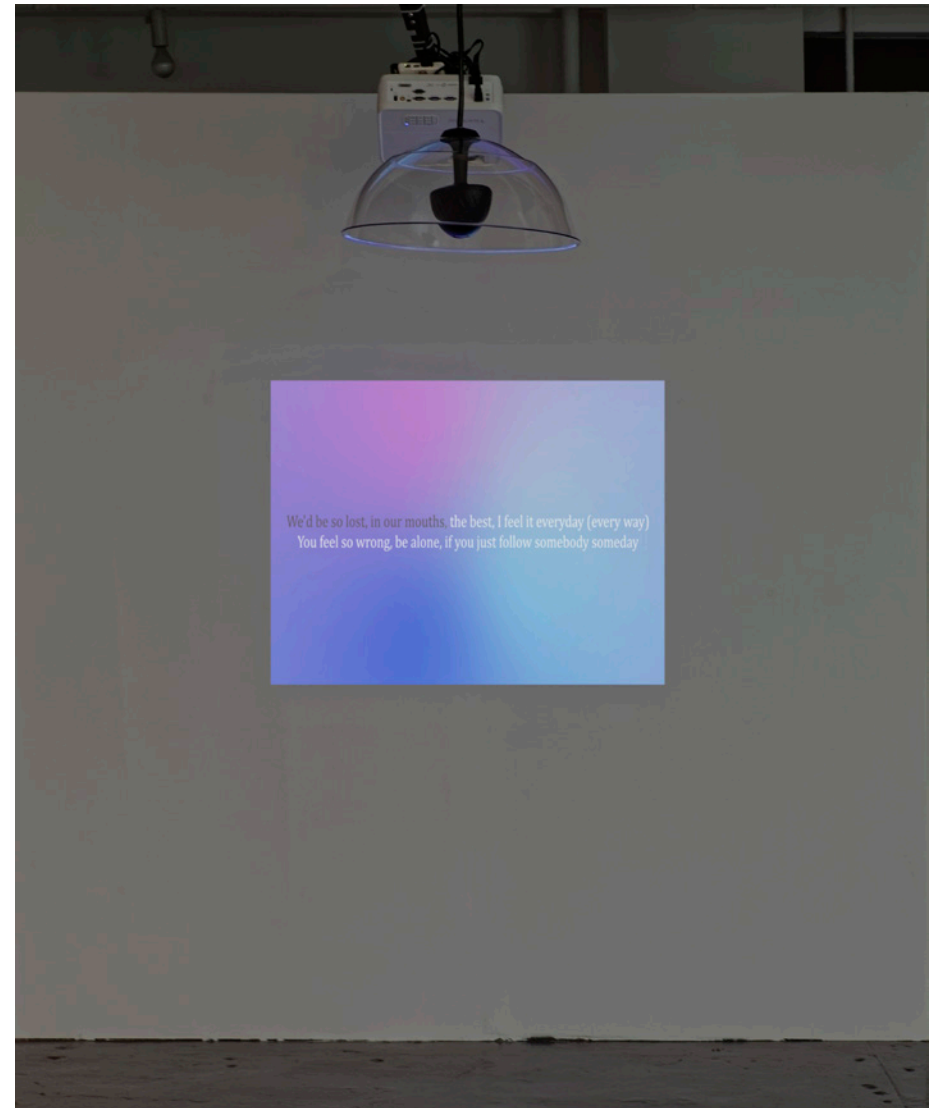
Constantina Zavitsanos, *glory* (detail), 2013. Photograph by Matt Vicari

*Soft and Wet: Film
Viewing, Lecture
Performance and Curator
Conversation*
Saturday, October 19, 2019
5:00–7:00pm

Join us for a viewing of Caroline Key's new video work, *Khôra* (2019), followed by a lecture performance by Crystal Z Campbell, and conversation with curator Sadia Shirazi. The conversation will touch upon questions of flesh, fugitivity, and consent in relation to the medical-industrial complex, focusing on Campbell's work on Henrietta Lacks' immortal cells and Key's work on the technological gaze.



Caroline Key, still from *Khôra*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist



Beverly Buchanan

City Walls sketchbook, 1976-77
Sewn bound sketchbook
25 x 19 in.
Courtesy of the Archives of American
Art, Smithsonian Institution



40

Crystal Z Campbell

*HeLa Project: Friends of Friends (Six
Degrees of Separation), 2013*
Vintage collection of bacteria slides
circa 1940's, steel, LED strips, car
paint, Plexiglass
4 x 6 x 72 in.



41

Portrait of a Woman I, 2013
Custom 3-D laser cut solid glass
cubes of HeLa cells (image of HeLa
cells made with Dr. C. Backendorf
and G. Lamers) and Henrietta Lacks,
upcycled wood, MDF
35 x 6 x 6 in.

Portrait of a Woman II, 2013
Custom 3-D laser cut solid glass
cubes of HeLa cells (image of HeLa
cells made with Dr. C. Backendorf
and G. Lamers) and Henrietta Lacks,
upcycled wood, MDF
35 x 6 x 6 in.



Caroline Key

Khôra, 2019
Video, flower bouquet, plinth
7:30 min.
Work is supported by the Foundation
for Contemporary Art and The Sarah
Jacobson Film Grant -- The Free
History Project



Ana Mendieta

Burial Pyramid, 1974

Super-8mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent
3:17 min.

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Rights Society (ARS), New York



Andy Robert

After Prince, 2019

Ink, water color, and oil on linen
8 x 7 ft.



Julie Tolentino

...soft as a lion, wet as the night, 2019
Water, plastic, 200 ft. cotton theater rope, faux fur
Dimensions variable

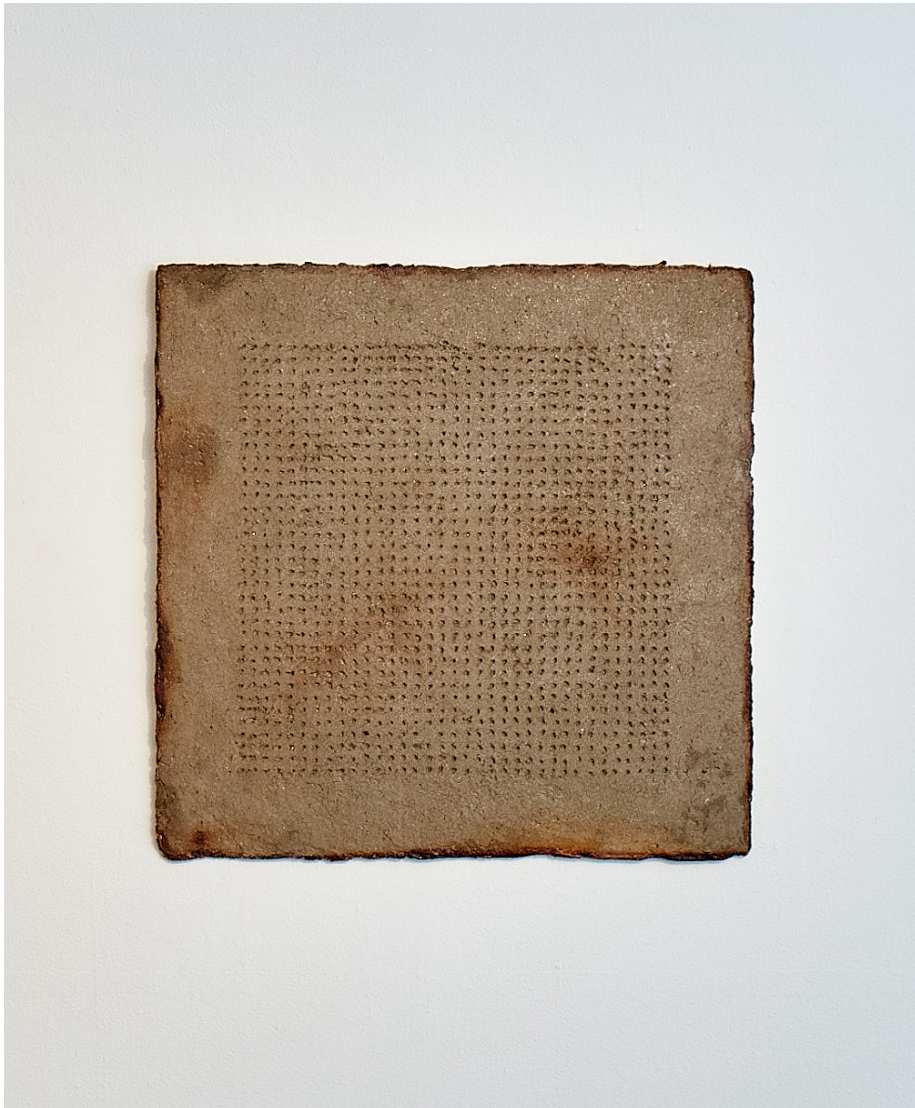


Zarina

Corners, 1980
Cast paper
31.5 x 21.5 x 1 in.



I Whispered to the Earth, 1979
Cast paper
23 x 23 x .25 in.
Courtesy of the artist



Constantina Zavitsanos

glory, 2013
Soft sleeved hole in drywall, with
vibration and sound
Dimensions variable





Installation view of *Soft and Wet*. Works: Zarina, *Corners*, 1980; Zarina, *I Whispered to the Earth*, 1979; Constantina Zavitsanos, *glory*, 2013. Photograph by Matt Vicari

Contributors

Soft and Wet Publication
Launch & Conversation
featuring Kazuko Miyamoto,
Howardena Pindell,
Judy Blum Reddy, and
Sadia Shirazi
Saturday, November 16, 2019
5:30–7:00pm

Please join us at EFA for the closing event and launch of *Soft and Wet*, a publication reflecting on the exhibition of the same title curated by Sadia Shirazi. The evening will feature readings of excerpts from the *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* (1980) catalog by Kazuko Miyamoto, Howardena Pindell, and Judy Blum Reddy. The curator will read excerpts from the newly commissioned texts for the publication it accompanies, followed by a conversation with the speakers about “Third World Women Artists” in the 1970s and 80s and the linkages with *Soft and Wet*.

Sadia Shirazi is a writer, art historian, curator and sometimes architect based in New York. Her reviews, essays, and interviews have appeared in *Artforum*, *Bidoun*, *MoMA post*, *C Magazine*, *The Funambulist*, and *MRPJ* in addition to exhibition catalogues. Shirazi has curated exhibitions internationally including *welcome to what we took from is the state* at the Queens Museum (2016), and *230 MB/ Exhibition Without Objects* at Khoj Artists’s Association in Delhi (2013). Her work has been shown at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale, Performance Space New York and the Devi Art Foundation. Shirazi holds a MArch from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a BA from the University of Chicago. She is the Instructor for Curatorial Studies at the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program (ISP), teaches at The New School and Cooper Union, and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies at Cornell University.

Arooj Aftab is a composer, singer and sound artist. Her minimalist work draws from varied influences, the South Asian forms of the ghazal, khayal and qawwali, jazz, soul and electronic music. Aftab is also the curator of “Suave” a showcase of sound artists working with analog and modular synthesizer music. In 2018, she was named among NPR’s 200 Greatest Songs by 21st Century Women, and *The New York Time’s* 25 Best Classical Songs of 2018. Aftab has opened for Mitski at the Brooklyn Steel, has performed at MoMa’s Summer Series, Brooklyn Museum’s First Saturday, and Lincoln Center Out of Doors. She is a graduate of Berklee College of Music.

Beverly Buchanan is noted for her exploration of Southern vernacular through

her art. Buchanan grew up in Orangeburg, SC where her father was dean of the School of Agriculture at South Carolina State College, which was the only state school for African-Americans in South Carolina. In 1962, Buchanan graduated from Bennett College in Greensboro, NC with a degree in medical technology. She attended Columbia University where she received an M.A. in Parasitology in 1968 and an M.A. in Public Health in 1969. In 1971, she enrolled in a class taught by Norman Lewis at the Art Students League in New York City, where Romare Bearden became her friend and mentor throughout the 1970’s. Buchanan decided to pursue her art exclusively in 1977 and moved to Macon, GA. In 1980, Buchanan was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (NEA). In 1990, she received another NEA Fellowship in sculpture. She was chosen as a Georgia Visual Arts honoree in 1997. In 2002, she received an Anonymous Was a Woman Award. In 2005, she was a distinguished honoree of the College Art Association Committee for Women in the Arts. Buchanan was also featured as one of 27 artists in the recent Georgia Council for the Arts publication: “Georgia Masterpieces: Selected Works from Georgia Museums” and the MOCA GA exhibition, *Twenty Georgia Masters*.

Crystal Z Campbell is a multidisciplinary artist and writer of African-American, Filipino & Chinese descents who excavates public secrets through performance, sound, and film. An Oklahoma native, Campbell has exhibited internationally at The Drawing Center (US), Nest (Netherlands), ICA-Philadelphia (US), Artissima (IT), Studio Museum of Harlem (US), Project Row Houses (US), and SculptureCenter (US),

amongst others. Selected honors include: Pollock-Krasner Award, MacDowell Colony, Skowhegan, Rijksakademie, Whitney ISP, Sommerakademie, Smithsonian Fellowship, MAP Fund, M-AAA Interchange Grant, and Flaherty Film Seminar Fellow. Campbell is a concurrent Drawing Center Open Sessions Fellow and fourth-year Tulsa Artist Fellow, who lives and works in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Caroline Key is a Korean-American filmmaker and artist currently based in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA in Film/Video from the California Institute of the Arts and her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Caroline was a Fulbright Research Fellow in South Korea in 2010 and a fellow at the Whitney Independent Study Program in 2012. Her works have shown internationally, including the Arsenal Cinema in Berlin, the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum, the Seoul Independent Film Festival, and the Margaret Mead Film & Video Festival. Her feature film, *Grace Period*, premiered at the New Museum in May 2015.

In a brief yet prolific career, the Cuban-born artist **Ana Mendieta** created groundbreaking work in photography, film, video, drawing, sculpture, and site-specific installations. Amongst the major themes in her work are exile, displacement, and a return to the landscape, which remain profoundly relevant today. Her unique hybrid of form and documentation, works that she titled “siluetas,” are fugitive and potent traces of the artist’s inscription of her body in the landscape, often transformed by natural elements such as fire and water. The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, in collaboration with Galerie Lelong & Co., recently catalogued and digitized the entirety of Mendieta’s moving image works, discovering that the artist remarkably made more than 100 in the ten-year period in which she worked in the medium. The groundbreaking exhibition of her moving image works, *Covered in Time and History: The Films of Ana Mendieta*, was organized by the Katherine E. Nash

Gallery, University of Minnesota in 2014, and has since travelled to several institutions worldwide, including NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Florida; University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden; Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin; and the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris. Mendieta’s work has been the subject of six major museum retrospectives, the most recent of which, *Ana Mendieta: Traces*, was organized by the Hayward Gallery, England, in 2013, and travelled to the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria, and the Galerie Rudolfinum, Czech Republic. *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body, Sculpture and Performance 1972–1985* was organized by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., in 2005 and travelled to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; and Miami Art Museum, Florida. Mendieta was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1948, and died in New York City in 1985.

Andy Robert is a painter who balances abstraction with recognizable imagery, and enjoys the experimentation and tinkering that comes with painting pictures. Robert views the world critically as a contradiction of mass-communication and increased voicelessness. His work relies on the idea that images are to be bent and folded, taken apart and put back together again; a belief that art is a philosophical means to look at and examine things—to question, test ideas, and engage with the world. And that in painting a picture something is being taken apart to put back together; there is an inherent risk in breaking it.

Julie Tolentino is an Filipina-Salvadoran artist whose practice explores durational performance, movement, video, object- and scent-making, soundscapes, and sensual practices within installation environments. Her work and collaborations with Stosh Fila explore the interstitial spaces of memory, race, gender. Working closely with the archive, she draws from the rich spaces of

activism, advocacy, loss, and caregiving. Her work has been presented across the globe in gallery, museum, theater, and site-specific locations.

Tolentino hosted queer club spaces such as Clit Club, Tattooed Love Child, and Dagger in New York City and was a member of ACTUP NY, Art Positive and House of Color Video Collective, and with Cynthia Madansky, co-created the Safer Sex Handbook for Women for Lesbian AIDS Project/GMHHC. Visual AIDS Duet book series (2019) highlights the work of Kia Labeija and Tolentino. She re-staged Ellen Cantor’s *1993 Coming To Power: Twenty Five Years of Sexually X-plicit Art By Women with Pati Hertling* and contributed to a group-penned essay: *The Sum of All Questions: Clit Club* (GLQ Winter ’18) to anticipate a forthcoming book with Josh Lubin-Levy, entitled: *Guard Your Daughters - Clit Club 1990-2002*. Tolentino is the co-editor of *Provocations in The Drama Review*.

Selected awards include the Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grant To Artists Award-Performance (2019), Pieter Dancemakers Grant (2018), Boffo Fire Island (2018), PACT Zollverein, Essen, Germany (2012), Art Matters (2010 and 2015), CHIME with Doran George (2010) and Jmy Kidd (2012).

The work of **Zarina** is defined by her adherence to the personal and the essential. An early interest in architecture and mathematics is reflected in her use of geometry and her emphasis on structural purity. While her work tends towards minimalism, its starkness is tempered by its texture and materiality. Her art poignantly chronicles her life and recurring themes include home, displacement, borders, journey and memory.

Best known as a printmaker, Zarina prefers to carve instead of draw the line, to gouge the surface rather than build it up. She uses various mediums of printmaking including intaglio, woodblocks, lithography, and silkscreen, and she frequently creates series of several prints in order to reference

a multiplicity of locales or concepts. For example, her seminal work *Home is a Foreign Place* consists of 36 woodblock prints, each of which represents a particular memory of home. Each subject is inscribed in Urdu beneath the print to signify the vital role language plays in her work, as well as to pay homage to a mother tongue in decline. Other works such as *These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness* (*Adrienne Rich after Ghalib*), *Countries*, and *Dividing Line* explore geographical borders and contested terrains, particularly those areas which are scarred from political conflict. She has long been interested in the material possibilities of paper and in addition to printing on it, she creates works which entail puncturing, scratching, weaving and sewing on paper. Zarina also creates sculpture using a variety of media such as bronze, aluminum, steel, wood, tin, and paper pulp.

Zarina (b. 1937) was born in Aligarh, India and currently lives and works in New York. After receiving a degree in mathematics, she went on to study woodblock printing in Bangkok and Tokyo, and intaglio with S. W. Hayter at Atelier-17 in Paris. She has exhibited at numerous venues internationally including representing India at the 2011 Venice Biennale, and her retrospective exhibition entitled *Zarina: Paper Like Skin* was presented at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles in 2012, and at the Guggenheim, New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago in 2013. Her work is in the permanent collections of Tate Modern, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and The Menil Collection, Houston. Upcoming projects include a solo exhibition at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis, MO in fall 2019.

Constantina Zavitsanos works in sculpture, performance, text, and sound. Zavitsanos's work deals in the material re/production of debt, dependency, and means beyond measure. Zavitsanos has exhibited at the New Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, The Kitchen, and Artists Space in New York; at Arika Episode 7 in Glasgow, Scotland; and at Fri Art Kunsthalle in Fribourg, Switzerland. With Park McArthur, they co-authored the texts "Other Forms of Conviviality" in the journal *Women and Performance* (Routledge, 2013), and "The Guild of the Brave Poor Things" in *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* (MIT Press, 2017). Zavitsanos lives in New York and teaches at The New School.

Kazuko Miyamoto is a preeminent feminist figure of minimalism, and a pioneer of a new and radically warm brand of rigorous abstraction, introducing handmade, irregular, and intimate elements that both modulated the movement's unforgiving visual language and advanced it, by critique. Born in Tokyo, Japan, Miyamoto moved to New York in 1964, studied at the Arts Student League, and assisted Sol LeWitt, she helped produce and execute his open cube sculptures and early wall drawings. Miyamoto's work has shown in numerous institutions and galleries, both domestically and internationally, including Paula Cooper Gallery, New York; Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Lentos Museum, Linz, Austria; Storefront Gallery for Art and Architecture, New York; A.I.R. Gallery, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; P.S.1 Contemporary, New York; among many others, and is represented by Exile Gallery, Berlin.

Born in Philadelphia in 1943, **Howardena Pindell** studied painting at Boston University and Yale University. After graduating, she accepted a job at the Museum of Modern Art, where she worked for 12 years (1967–1979), first as Exhibition Assistant in the Department of National and International Traveling Exhibitions, then as Curatorial Assistant, Assistant Curator, Associate

Curator, and finally as an Acting Director in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. In 1979, she began teaching at the State University of New York, Stony Brook where she is now a full professor. Throughout her career, Pindell has exhibited extensively.

Pindell often employs lengthy, metaphorical processes of destruction/reconstruction. She cuts canvases in strips and sews them back together, building up surfaces in elaborate stages. She paints or draws on sheets of paper, punches out dots from the paper using a paper hole punch, drops the dots onto her canvas, and finally squeegees paint through the "stencil" left in the paper from which she had punched the dots. Almost invariably, her paintings are installed unstretched, held to the wall merely by the strength of a few finishing nails. The artist's fascination with gridded, serialized imagery, along with surface texture appears throughout her oeuvre. Even in her later, more politically charged work, Pindell reverts to these thematic focuses in order to address social issues of homelessness, AIDs, war, genocide, sexism, xenophobia, and apartheid.

Judy Blum Reddy lives and works in New York. Blum received her BFA from Cooper Union, New York and has exhibited internationally since the 1970s. Most recently she has exhibited at CCS Bard, 2019; the Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam, 2015; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2016; Villa Vassilief, Paris, 2016; Dak'Art Biennale of African Contemporary Art, Senegal, 2016; Station Independent Project, New York, 2015; 33 Orchard, New York, 2016; FIAC, Paris, 2016; Clark House Initiative, Bombay, 2014–16; Asian Cultural Centre, Gwangju Biennale, 2016; and Art Dubai, 2015. Reddy's work is included in public collections at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Fond National d'Art Contemporain and Centre National d'Art de Grenoble, France.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Director of EFA Project Space, Dylan Gauthier and Program Manager, JP-Anne Giera, as well as the staff and interns, for their organizational support and tireless labor in the exhibition planning process, installation and maintenance. Thanks to installer Rob Nelson, photographer Matt Vicari, and editor Cat Tyc. Thanks to Michelle Levy and Meghana Karnik for their support of the exhibition when it was originally selected.

I am grateful to the artists for sharing their work and for the long conversations we have had over the years that have informed my thinking, practice and process. Many of the works in this exhibition were made or modified particularly for it. Thank you for your friendship and vision: Arooj Aftab, Crystal Z Campbell, Caroline Key, Andy Robert, Julie Tolentino, Constantina Zavitsanos. Thanks to Jeannine Tang, for her incisive writing for the publication and encouragement of this show, years ago. The original proposal also benefited immensely from conversations with Amalle Dublon and Constantina Zavitsanos. My thanks to Park McArthur and Jennifer Burris Staton, who generously shared contacts and material on Beverly Buchanan. For providing feedback on my essay, a debt of gratitude to Caroline Key, Jeannine Tang and Constantina Zavitsanos, any remaining faults are my own.

Thank you to Will Lee, my assistant, for his patience, diligence and good humor, in both New York and "Peru"/Beirut. Special thanks go to Bo-Won Keum, for her deft design of this beautiful catalogue. For their generous loans to the exhibition, thank you to Saima Chishti, Imran Chishti and Zarina. For their time and generosity in sharing their recollections of the past, thank you to Howardena Pindell, Judy Blum Reddy, Kazuko Miyamoto and Zarina.

Thank you to the "Third World" artists brought together by, and in, *Dialectics of Isolation*: Ana Mendieta, Kazuko Miyamoto, Zarina, Judith F. Baca, Beverly Buchanan, Janet Olivia Henry, Lydia Okumura, Senga Nengudi, Selena (Whitefeather) Persico and Howardena Pindell.

The sensuality of the show and its title is drawn from the song of the same name by Prince: Eye thank U & we miss U.

A special thanks to Hortense J. Spillers. The framework of "flesh" in this exhibition is indebted to her foundational work. Thank you to Saidiya Hartman and Neferti Tadiar for introducing me to the possibility of thinking slavery and colonialism together.

Soft and Wet would not have been possible without its elders, named and unnameable, and the youth around the world, who lead the way.

It is dedicated to them.

In memory of
Beverly Buchanan
(1940-2015)

Ana Mendieta
(1948-1985)

Prince Rogers Nelson
(1958-2016)

Soft and Wet
18 September - 16 November 2019

Artists: Arooj Aftab, Beverly Buchanan,
Crystal Z Campbell, Caroline Key, Ana
Mendieta, Andy Robert, Julie Tolentino,
Zarina, and Constantina Zavitsanos

Curated by Sadia Shirazi
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EFA Project Space, launched in September 2008 as a program of The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, is a collaborative, cross-disciplinary arts venue founded on the belief that art is directly connected to the individuals who produce it, the communities that arise because of it, and to everyday life; and that by providing an arena for exploring these connections, we empower artists to forge new partnerships and encourage the expansion of ideas.

The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA) is a 501 (c) (3) public charity. Through its three core programs, EFA Studios, EFA Project Space, and the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop, EFA is dedicated to providing artists across all disciplines with space, tools and a cooperative forum for the development of individual practice. EFA Project Space is supported by public funding from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in Partnership with the City Council, and by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

This pamphlet is the third in the *end_notes* publication series, timed to coincide with the closing of EFA Project Space exhibitions, which presents critical and reflective texts that trail an exhibition as it leaves the gallery and enters the world.

