

**Woman's Monthly
(WOMO)**
 1718 M St. NW #198
 Washington DC 20036
 T: 202/965-5399
 F: 301/270-5141
womo@womo.com



Woman's Monthly is a periodical calendar for the women's community

Feature Article - May 2000

[Feature Articles](#)
[Community News](#)
[National News](#)
[Eyes on the Right](#)
[Calendar](#)
[ArtsWatch](#)
[Best of the Web](#)
[Announcements](#)
[Links](#)

[About WOMO](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Site Map](#)
[Home](#)

Woman Made Gallery: Promoting Contemporary Art by Women by Suzanne Scott

If you are a visual artist, you need to know about Woman Made Gallery in Chicago. Even if you're not an artist, Woman Made Gallery exemplifies what we as women can do for ourselves with a bit of inspiration and a lot of hard work.

I had heard about Woman Made from calls for entries to some exciting art shows, so when I was in Chicago recently, I made it a point to pay Woman Made a visit. The gender inequities in the art world have long been disturbing to me. Museums are notorious for the dearth of female artists. But even contemporary art galleries and art magazines show significantly more male artists than female. I assumed Woman Made was a unique attempt to correct those inequities, and I was intrigued.

How is it possible to exclude men from exhibitions and staff positions in an era of feminist backlash? According to Beate Minkovski, co-founder of Woman Made, they do not exclude men from gallery membership. "But they cannot be in any decision-making positions," she says. "That would defeat the purpose, wouldn't it?"

Minkovski emphasizes that Woman Made was not created to overtake the art world. They simply hoped to increase the work exhibited, written about and collected by women. Woman Made began when Minkovski and a colleague rented a storefront for their senior project at Northeastern Illinois University. The student exhibition, "Man Made Women," was a phenomenal success. It included such items as a painted statue of the Virgin Mary, a sex blow-up doll from Taiwan, and a chastity belt.

Minkovski says they were energized for the creation of Woman Made, so they kept the storefront. To pay the rent, Minkovski sold bagels and coffee each morning. "I went out early and bought several dozen of the best bagels in Chicago, and I made coffee - not specialty coffee, just really good coffee," says Minkovski. "I probably didn't charge enough, but I managed to pay the rent, and that's all that mattered."

The same passion and drive that motivated Minkovski in 1992 is evident today. She serves as executive director, earning a small salary. There is a part-time administrative assistant, a gallery director and a host of volunteers who keep the gallery going. No longer in the storefront, Woman Made is currently housed in a beautiful mansion with several exhibition spaces, a gift shop and an office.

Woman Made Gallery's first exhibit was "Women Portray Women." Each year they host eight exhibits on specific themes along with five or six solo shows. In addition, they sponsor annual events such as the international and members' shows, and they host special exhibitions for lesbian artists, women of color and older women. The work exhibited at Woman Made includes paintings, drawings, sculptures and installation art.

This year, they have hosted "Fairytales," an all-media exhibit inspired by fairytales; the "Third International Open," an exhibit by women from around the world; and "Cleaning House," a show that incorporates objects or materials

found in the home. They have already planned all of the shows for 2001. The year will begin with "Prejudice," which will include submissions from women, men and children.

Minkovski says that if they didn't invite men to participate in a show on prejudice, they would be inviting trouble. She admits that one of the biggest problems Woman Made has faced is that of dealing with a few incensed men who do not understand that they cannot, under normal circumstances, exhibit their work at Woman Made. She points out that they try not to be rigid about their gender policies, however.

Hollis Sigler, a lesbian artist who juried a show on "Healing" for Woman Made, wanted men to be a part of that particular exhibit. Another time the gallery hosted an exhibit of works by male artists, entitled "Men Define the Feminine." Woman Made received its first bit of publicity for that show - no surprise.

I happened to be in Chicago while the "Third Annual International" exhibit was up, and I was impressed with work and the presentation. Minkovski emphasizes that to be considered for any of the exhibits, the most important aspect of the work is the professional presentation. "We offer workshops on presentations, because that is where women often need the most help," she says.

To be considered for an exhibit at Woman Made, an artist does not have to be a member of the organization or have an extensive resume, although many of the exhibiting artists do have impressive credits. The artists do not have to reside in Chicago, either; Woman Made exhibits works by artists from across the U.S and around the globe. Minkovski says that she and the gallery's guest curators look for work that is professionally presented and has been completed within the last three years.

One point that should give artists greater confidence to enter shows is that rejections need not be taken personally. "Jurors have different tastes and different goals," says Minkovski. Not being selected for a specific show may simply mean that the work did not work well with the other selections or did not fit with the goals of the curator. "I submitted work once, and I was even working the projector, but the juror didn't know it was my work," says Minkovski. "My work didn't get selected."

Minkovski is a woman of boundless energy and passion for art, although she credits the other women of Woman Made with its growing success and its reputation. I'm sure it could not enjoy the success it does today without countless women working together. But it's clear that Woman Made was her vision. She admits that the name probably works against them, however, when it comes to receiving grants - a point Judy Chicago, who is Executive Advisor, reinforces. Chicago points out that the name may well present a barrier for others as well. Minkovski says the name originated from a play on the words 'man made.' "I don't intend to change it now," she says.

Woman Made Gallery is now in its eighth year, and it serves as a model for what women can do if they have a vision for something they are passionate about. My visit to the gallery and my conversations with Minkovski set my brain in motion. Perhaps the women artists of Washington, DC, should have a space of our own. For more information on Woman Made Gallery: www.womanmade.org, gallery@womanmade.org.

Suzanne Scott is a writer and mixed media artist with a studio in Arlington, VA.

[back to Features](#)

Last updated April 27, 2000.