

## Women Collecting Art Brut Introduction: Hannah Rieger

Ladies and Gentlemen,

An evening like this is an expression of my deep respect for Art Brut, which has been part of my life for decades. So above all I would like to thank all the artists, both female and male, the late and the living, whose work is brought together here in Paris at this inspiring OAF.

Art Brut is created by artists who live near the margins of our society. It is not constrained by the expectations of the mainstream cultural and art world. It does not care about the competition in the academic world. In addition to its undeniable aesthetic impact, Art Brut must always be understood in terms of its extreme individuality. It immediately and directly touches the soul.

I am delighted to be here as the curator for this year's Art Absolut Prize. It is a great honour for me – many thanks to Becca Hoffmann and Teddy Tibi.

The focus this time is on women – specifically, female living artists in the field of Art Brut/Outsider Art who have works exhibited at this year's OAF in Paris. It was my job to select a shortlist of ten out of those nominated.

This is a wonderful recognition of my expertise as a specialised Art Brut collector with a focus on women, and as an Art Brut activist, as Raw Vision describes me in their latest issue.

How did this focus on women begin? What is the story behind the female artists in my collection? My former working environments in a European banking group and as a consultant were always very male. And for many years my Art Brut collection almost exclusively featured male artists from Gugging. As you probably know, Gugging, this world-famous Austrian Art Brut model began as a men's section in a psychiatric clinic just outside Vienna.

It was my mother, a committed feminist, who particularly insisted that I should also include female artists in my collection. And this I did.

I have been collecting Art Brut since the 1990s and for me, collecting has become a project of passion. Now this extraordinary art shapes my whole identity and life: Living in Art Brut. *Vivre dans l'art brut*.

This year, as an Art Brut activist for female positions I found myself, quite unexpectedly, playing a formative part in the emancipation story of women in Art Brut. I was invited to co-curate "Flying High", an exhibition in a contemporary museum in the centre of Vienna, which was actually the first exhibition in the world with a comprehensive focus on female Art Brut artists.

So I am particularly pleased that the OAF has taken up the theme of women again.

My main interest is in the way female Art Brut artists express their regained identities – through art as an action and in the art as symbolisation.

Every story of female Art Brut artists is of course closely related to the history of women's emancipation in general. But discrimination often manifests itself even more dramatically in the field of Art Brut. These female artists are often "outsiders within the outsiders", since Art Brut still has to fight for equal status alongside the academically recognised "high art".

I was overwhelmed to see how many excellent female artists are presented here. Far more than the ten I was asked to nominate. That certainly cost me a sleepless night. And at this point I would like to thank Antoine Frérot, the president of the jury, that I did not have to choose the winner amongst these ten fabulous artists you can see at this OAF.

The field of living female Art Brut artists turns out to be much more extensive than expected.

And that was a new insight for me, which is really great.

So my conclusion is: The least we can do is to raise the curtain on the wonderful female Art Brut artists in the most diverse ways. Because only what can be perceived exists. Let me thank Samaneh Atef, Carol Bailly, Caroline Demangel, Annemarie Gbindoun, Vera Girivi, Susan Te Kahurangi King, Momoko Nakagawa, Latefa Noorzai, Misaki Oya and Elisabetta Zagranti for this evening.

Thank you.

Hannah Rieger  
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