

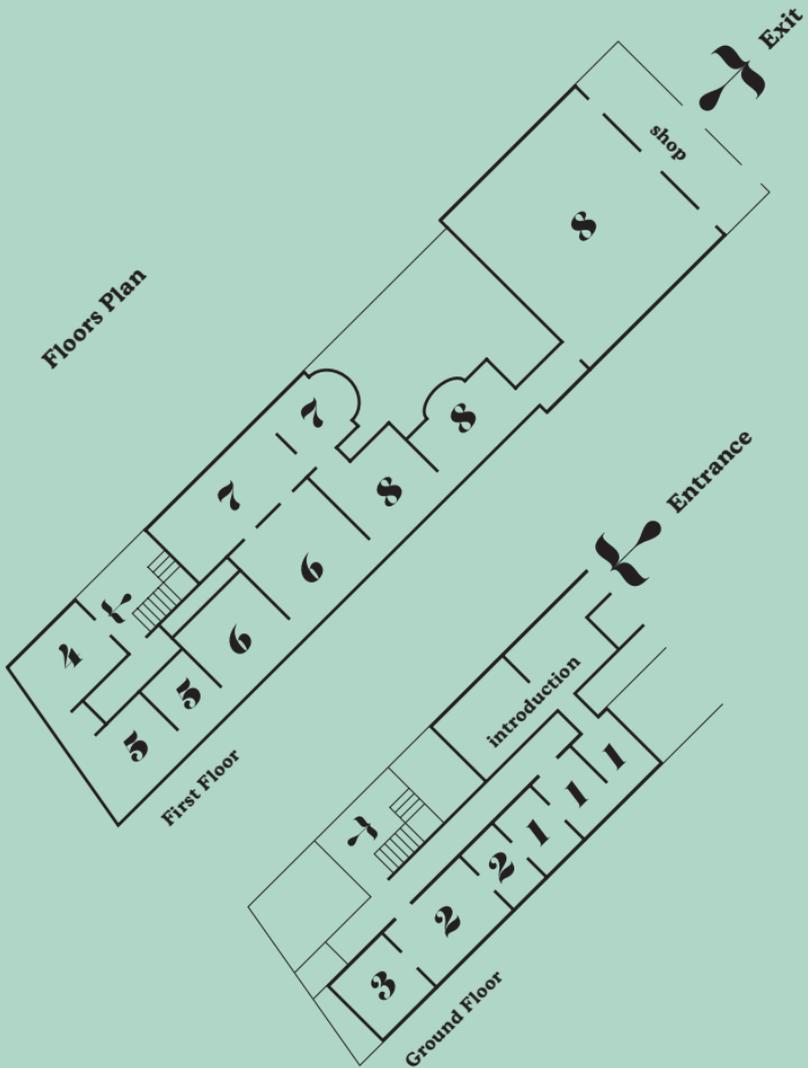
Women House

20.10.17

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Floors Plan



• *Women House* is the meeting of two notions: a gender - the female - and a space - the domestic one. Architecture and public space have historically been dominated by the masculine while the domestic space was the prison of women: this historical self-evidence is nevertheless not a destiny and the exhibition shows this. Is the house a shelter only—a jail, or can it become a space for creativity?

The artists this exhibition put forward have taken on this intricate subject matter. It places women in the focus of an Art and Architecture History from which they were absent, or even the victims thereof. Their work question foregone conclusions with precision, pinpointing their theoretical--and sometimes political nature: What if the domestic space, instead of being merely assigned to women, was geared toward the domination of the female body? To question stereotypes, or to perhaps break them, has been a task women artists have taken on, as they were the first to be concerned by these constraints.

All eight chapters making the show up, display a complexity of possible viewpoints on the matter: not only are they feminist approaches, they are poetical, political or nostalgic ones as well. As it were, women artists turn the house upside down: symbols of enclosure begin to represent the construction of an identity. The intimate becomes political, the private space becomes a public one, the body turns into architecture. Depending on the cultural contexts and generations of artists, the house branches into a body-house, a nation-house, or even a world-house.

The exhibition's title pays homage to *Womanhouse*, an exhibition set up in Los Angeles by Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago in 1972. That installation, composed of 17 «rooms» transformed by 25 female artists, was a seminal turning point in the History of feminist Art.

Desperate Housewives

• The 1970s in Europe and America marked a turning point in the history of women's liberation thanks to the hard-won acquisition of certain basic rights. For the first time ever, issues such as motherhood, abortion, sexuality, raising children and the active role of women in the public arena began to take over the political debate. Women artists of that generation fiercely attacked the patriarchal system: for them, the house was a symbol of confinement and

submission to male power. With irony and humor, they parodied contemporary middle-class stereotypes of women confined to their homes. These "desperate housewives" were shown in carefully staged settings, and the repetitive details of their lives were critically inventoried and appropriated. They demonstrate the chasm of disappointment that lays between the promised bliss of married life and the drudgery of daily chores.

Home is where it hurts

• With growing intensity, the artists shown in this section highlighted and challenged the boundaries of the physical and psychological spaces to which they were confined. The Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen photographed herself in the 1970s as a model middle-class woman leaning on a window bearing the words: *Ich möchte hier raus!* ["I want to get out of here!"]. In another series, she appears as a woman who has turned into a tigress grasping the bars of her cage. In a performance from the same period, Lydia Schouten paced back and forth in a cage wearing a damp white bodysuit and rubbing herself against the bars, which

had watercolor pencils attached to them. She compared this process to the perceived need for women to wear makeup despite being isolated and confined within their homes. The Portuguese artist Helena Almeida expressed the same feeling of confinement by photographing her hands reaching through the bars of iron house gates, also an expression of Portugal's isolation under the dictatorship that lasted until 1974. We hear the rebellious cries of these women artists; all they need to achieve, the freedom of which they dream is the courage to pick up hammers and smash down the walls, as Monica Bonvicini did in a video from the late 1990s.

A Room of One's Own

• “Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time, the very walls are permeated by their creative force” wrote Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* in 1929. Although for some artists the house is a symbol of confinement and alienation, for others it is a source of inspiration and self-reinvention, a creative laboratory or a refuge. Claude Cahun and her double – an open closet – appear as one, in a striking echo of Virginia Woolf's statement. In 2013, Kirsten Justesen reproduced Claude Cahun's posture, giving it a powerful contemporary resonance. In the 1970s, the American artist Francesca Woodman saw the

human habitat as an extension of her body. In the same period, Lili Dujourie used the confinement of the bedroom not to camouflage herself but to exhibit herself. The camera acts as an instrument for measuring time, the only staged element being the artist's body. In a recent series, South African artist Zanele Muholi captures moments of intimacy shared by lesbian couples, whose mimetic postures express a sense of complementarity. These women are photographed inside their homes: here, the home seems to act as a refuge, a place of resistance against “the hate crimes taking place in South Africa or elsewhere against homosexuals.”



Doll's House

• “But our house has been nothing but a play-room. Here I have been your doll wife, just as at home I used to be papa’s doll child,” says Nora, the main character in Henrik Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House*. Written in 1879, this play had an unprecedented influence on early women’s liberation movements towards the end of the nineteenth century. Ibsen makes a child’s toy into a prison in which a woman moves from room to room, trapped in fantasies and representations of womanhood. A century on, several artists used miniaturized depictions of the domestic sphere as reflected in doll’s houses. Laurie

Simmons photographed one in which she placed a figurine of a housewife standing, sitting or kneeling in rooms where tasks are assigned to her. Rachel Whiteread designed a *Modern Chess Set* based on reproductions of objects from a doll’s house belonging to her. Instead of a king and queen, an ironing board and a stove are placed on a chessboard made of mismatched pieces of carpet: the artist replaces the codes of a game with day-to-day objects used by a housewife. Penny Slinger’s *Exorcism House* is a nightmare vision of scenes of abuse and domestic violence.



5 Marks

• The artworks in this section speak of absence: that of a body or that of a place. They show traces left behind – a mattress, a model – or fragments of buildings that are no longer there. The aim of these artists is to preserve the memory of places that would otherwise be forgotten. These nostalgic, poetic works were cast from actual objects and exhibited as historical records or private memories. The work by Iranian artist Nazgol Ansarinia recreates a wall of a demolished building in Teheran, while Isa Melsheimer's model evokes the roof

garden of the apartment designed by Le Corbusier for the art collector Charles de Beistegui in the 1920s: a space with walls 1.5 meters high (5 feet) providing glimpses of Paris monuments. A piece of embroidery completes the installation and shows these views. For Rachel Whiteread and Heidi Bucher, the house is no longer the result of construction, but of a process of subtraction: these are imprints of ghost spaces. The windows are filled in and the house has become a dark, impenetrable surface that resists our gaze.

Construction as Self-Construction

• In the 1970s, women artists rebelled against the lack of access to space – to work or to exhibit – and against the consequent lack of a symbolic space – the one of recognition. The two artists in these rooms built works that were seen as statements of their time, although art historians took a long time to acknowledge them. Portuguese artist Ana Vieira's *Environment/Dining Room* seems both familiar and strange. It is constructed from gauze panels reproducing the clichés of a bourgeois interior in which the strict orderliness of the objects is matched only by their oppressive

ordinariness. *Triplice Tenda* [Triple Tent] by Carla Accardi, one of the few women on the post-war Italian art scene, consists of three many-sided tents nested inside one another. Their arabesque motifs are evocative of Byzantine monuments, while their pink color references the intimacy of the body. For Accardi, the tent symbolizes “a life of freedom outside of the structured framework of civilization.” Its large scale and circular shape, far from suggesting a precarious, makeshift dwelling, are evocative of a house that is also a monument, or a place for meditation.



Mobile ~ homes

• After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a new generation of women artists began to explore “alternative lifestyles” via shelters that explored themes such as nomadism and exile, the individual versus the collective, and mobility and escape. Lucy Orta investigated the virtues of a collective dwelling where the heat produced by one person might be used to warm the home of another, symbolizing the links between the collective and the individual. Andrea Zittel made

mobile homes that could be towed behind cars and be used to travel around the world. Laure Tixier’s textile creations reference the theme of primitive dwellings in two ways: the hut is one of the earliest types of nomadic habitat, and a “cabin” made from a blanket is one of the first shelters a child creates. The series of photographs by South African artist Sue Williamson deals with the notion of expulsion and power.

Femmes ~ maisons

• The formal association between the female body and the architecture of the house was first made in a series of paintings by Louise Bourgeois in 1945-1947. Her “Femmes-maisons” [«Women-houses»] show the extent to which women were still being absorbed or devoured by the home, which it was their role to nourish and support. Fifty years later, Bourgeois explored the same theme in a different way in her “Spiders” series. The spider represents the protective mother, and her egg-filled belly is a lair: an architectural structure that also affords protection. From the 1960s on, Niki de Saint Phalle created her series of “Nanas-maisons”: as they grew, her nanas took on an architectural dimension, their generously

proportioned bodies opening up so that visitors may enter, take refuge and allow their imaginations to run free. Today, ceramic artist Elsa Sahal shares the same heritage of Louise Bourgeois and Niki de Saint Phalle, designing self-portraits in the form of caves that become symbols of the maternal womb: the life-giving, sheltering belly. Like Plato’s cave, which people with a thirst for knowledge are able to leave, Sahal’s self-portraits speak of a powerful body that is able to create and give birth. We also find fragmented body imagery in Anne-Marie Schneider’s drawings. Her “body-houses,” which stand somewhere between caricature and satirical rage, have a kind of humor that is as dark as her pencil strokes.

• Visits

A closer look for kids, in partnership with Paris Mômes. Free booklet in French available at box office upon request, or to download.

Thursday, November 16 - 7pm and Thursday, December 14 - 7pm

Round table as part of the «Art: feminine gender» cycle, organized by the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, Master 2 «Sciences and Techniques of Exhibitions» program, together with AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions. Duration: 1h30. Free admission, registration required with: resat.artgenrefeminin@gmail.com

Thursday, November 30 - 8pm

Screening of Johanna Demetrakas' film *Womanhouse* at Reflet Médicis, 3 Rue Champollion, 75005 Paris
A documentary film on one of the most important feminist cultural events of the 1970s
Admission: 9,30 € / 6,90 € UGC Illimité and CIP cards.

Thursday, December 7 - 7pm

Tour of the *Women House* exhibition given by its curators.

Thursday, January 11, 2018 - 7pm

Talk by Géraldine Gourbe: *Judy Chicago and the Californian Sixties: between minimalism and the sexual revolution.*

For individual visitors:

Visits: all ages (from 12 years), 90 min, Thursdays at 7 pm, Saturday and Sunday at 3 pm

Family Visits Expo: from 5 years, 60 min, Wednesday at 3 pm, Saturday and Sunday at 11 am

For groups: guided tours or free visits, by reservation. Find all the programming on monnaieedeparis.fr

All the visits and talks are in French.

Information,

fares and reservations:

01 40 46 57 57 and billetterie@monnaieedeparis.fr or on site at the ticket office, subject to availability.

11, quai de Conti 75006 Paris

Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 11 am to 7 pm. Thursdays until 9pm.
Closure of the ticket office 30 minutes before the closing of the exhibitions.

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• Exhibition

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Installation of artworks