

# Eighty Years of Women Artists Transforming Abstraction I

## National Museum of Women in the Arts

*About the Author*

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On view February 27 to July 26, 2026

### **Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection**

**WASHINGTON**—A groundbreaking exhibition showcasing the vital role of women artists in abstract art will be on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) from February 27 through July 26, 2026. [Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection](#) presents 80 works by 69 influential and boundary-pushing women artists of the 20th and 21st centuries, including Magdalena Abakanowicz, Cecily Brown, Sheila Hicks, Jenny Holzer, Julie Mehretu, Joan Mitchell, Wangechi Mutu, Faith Ringgold, Tschabalala Self, Amy Sillman, Lorna Simpson, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Pat Steir, Sarah Sze, Kara Walker and Zarina.

One of the largest exhibitions to survey women in abstraction, *Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection* is organized by the Making Their Mark Foundation. The exhibition is curated by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director and Chief Curator of High Line Arts in New York City, and the work is drawn entirely from the art collection built by Komal Shah and her husband, Gaurav Garg, dedicated to championing contemporary art by women.

Through paintings, prints, sculpture, ceramics, textiles and mixed-media works from 1946 to 2024, *Making Their Mark* illuminates the myriad ways women artists explore, expand and interrogate the boundaries of abstract art to foster vital discussion about representation, identity and power. The exhibition considers historical contributions, formal and material breakthroughs and intergenerational relationships among women artists, including many who pioneered abstraction over the last seven decades. In presenting a rich and interwoven picture of contemporary art history, the show also highlights the stories and voices of underrepresented artists.

“We are thrilled to present this outstanding exhibition, which shows how women artists were and are central to the development of abstract art,” said NMWA director Susan Fisher Sterling. “We greatly appreciate Komal Shah’s extraordinary vision, which dovetails with NMWA’s work to champion women artists.”

Previous versions of *Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection* were seen at the former Dia Foundation building in Chelsea, New York (2023–24); the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2024–25); and the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis (September 2025–January 2026). Following its presentation at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the exhibition will travel to Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, Arizona, with additional venues to be announced soon.

“We are excited to bring this powerful show to Washington, D.C. This will be the first time that the exhibition will be seen within the context of a women-focused institution,” noted NMWA assistant curator Hannah Shambroom. “Visitors will be able to explore connections between works in this show and across our collection. NMWA’s broader perspective of drawing connections across varied mediums and practices is a fitting lens through which

to consider these groundbreaking artists.”

## Exhibition Overview

The exhibition is informed by seven thematic sections: “Craft is Art,” “Disobedient Bodies,” “Gestural Abstraction,” “Luminous Abstraction,” “Of Selves and Spirits,” “The Power of Form,” and “Pixelated Abstraction.” The themes create a framework for visitors to understand abstract art across time periods, mediums and subject matter.

“Craft is Art” features ceramic, fiber and mixed-media works that interrogate the rigid distinctions between art and craft. Vibrant works by Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930–2017) and Sheila Hicks (b. 1934) explore abstraction via fabric and fiber. The eight vessels on view by renowned ceramicist Toshiko Takaezu (1922–2011) push the limits of the medium, blending the bravura of Abstract Expressionism with the contemplative quality of traditional Japanese pottery.

“Disobedient Bodies” considers form, body and gender. Artists such as Maria Lassnig (1919–2014) and Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972) complicate standards of portraiture by subverting conventional notions of beauty and taste. The painting *Horizons* (1981), by Joan Semmel (b. 1932), presents a new perspective on the nude, aligning abstraction and figuration.

The section “Gestural Abstraction” explores the visual vocabularies of postwar abstraction, including Abstract Expressionism, and looks at the response from contemporary artists such as Mary Weatherford (b. 1963) and Aria Dean (b. 1993). Among the highlights is an exuberant 12-foot-wide canvas by Joan Mitchell (1925–1992), one of her last diptychs, exemplifying the intensity and grand scale with which the artist approached her work in later years. A painting from 1946 by Janet Sobel (1893–1968), the earliest artwork in the exhibition, includes enamel paint and sand, creating a textural, granulated surface. The artist is known for her pioneering role in drip paintings and “allover” composition, innovations that inspired other artists of her generation, including Jackson Pollock (1912–1956).

“Luminous Abstraction” shows the work of painters inspired by Color Field painting, minimalism and California Light and Space, with work by practitioners such as Pat Steir (b. 1938) and Rosemarie Castoro (1939–2015). A work from 2022 by Howardena Pindell (b. 1943) displays what first appears to be a painted surface; a closer examination reveals hundreds of small, paper circles adhered to the canvas. Pindell, known for this application of unconventional materials, co-founded A.I.R., the first women’s cooperative art gallery in New York, in 1972, with fellow *Making Their Mark* artists Harmony Hammond (b. 1944) and Zarina (1937–2020), among others.

Works featured in the section “Of Selves and Spirits” deal with ancient mythologies and hidden histories as conveyed through abstraction. Firelei Báez (b. 1981) reclaims stories of marginalized Afro-Latina and Afro-Caribbean women. Her painting *For Améthyste and Athénaire (Exiled Muses Beyond Jean Luc Lancy’s Cannon)*, *Anacaonas* (2018) depicts the daughters of the first king and queen of Haiti. A monumental 1977 sculpture made of orange fishing rope by Françoise Grossen (b. 1943) twists, dangles and loops in otherworldly configurations, evoking a line of interconnected figures.

“The Power of Form” focuses on artists who utilize abstraction as a potent formal strategy to encode, conceal, or heighten critical messages, turning familiar visual languages into mechanisms for critique. Jenny Holzer (b. 1950) analyses the secrecy and obfuscation of institutional power in *TOP SECRET ENDGAME* (2019), referencing Modernist abstraction with large, opaque blocks of censored texts. Joyce J. Scott (b. 1938) confronts complex social narratives with complex, collaboratively realized beadwork. These works affirm that non-representational aesthetics are vital tools for confronting and rewriting socio-political history.

Finally, “Pixelated Abstraction” draws connections between the approaches often employed in fiber art and the data-driven and digital practices present in contemporary painting. The piecework quality of handmade quilts, textiles and woven collages by Faith Ringgold (1930–2024) echo in the surfaces of paintings by Anicka Yi (b. 1971) and Charline von Heyl (b.1960). Sarah Sze (b. 1969) evokes a shattered screen or kaleidoscopic computer glitch in her painting *Crisscross* (2021).

A series of artist talks and hands-on workshops will accompany the exhibition. Further details to be announced in the coming months. Parallel to the exhibition, The Making Their Mark Foundation will hold an invitation-only forum in Washington, D.C. on March 5-7, 2026. The forum is designed to celebrate the achievements of women artists, advance gender equity in the arts, and inspire action to effect lasting change.

## **Publication**

Scholars and curators Mark Godfrey and Katy Siegel collaborated with the Shah Garg Collection to create a 400-page catalogue that accompanies the exhibition. Godfrey and Siegel contributed essays as well as a wide-ranging interview with Komal Shah. Published in 2023 by Gregory R. Miller & Co., the publication also includes six scholarly essays by art historians, curators, and critics Daniel Belasco, Glenn Adamson, David J. Getsy, Kirsty Bell, Jessica Bell Brown and Gloria Sutton. Fifteen prominent artists reflect on other artists in the collection who inspire them.

## **The Making Their Mark Foundation**

The Making Their Mark Foundation supports scholarship and public engagement, highlighting the achievements and innovations of women artists. Through a wide range of projects and partnerships with educational institutions, arts organizations, and arts leaders, the Foundation works to bring greater recognition to art by women and to rectify the underrepresentation of women in public collections, exhibitions, and art historical narratives.

## **The Shah Garg Collection**

In 2008, Komal Shah left the tech industry to focus on philanthropic pursuits. She then began developing the Shah Garg Collection with her husband and fellow tech entrepreneur, Gaurav Garg, solidifying a vision for the collection’s emphasis on women artists in 2014.

## **Curator Cecilia Alemani**

An independent curator, Cecilia Alemani has served since 2011 as the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Director and Chief Curator of High Line Art, the public art program presented by the High Line in New York City. She is also the curator of the upcoming SITE Santa Fe International, scheduled to open in summer 2025. In 2022, she curated *The Milk of Dreams*, the 59th International Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale. In 2018, Alemani served as artistic director of the inaugural edition of Art Basel Cities: Buenos Aires. In 2017, she curated the Italian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

## **Supporters**

Presentation of the exhibition at NMWA is made possible by the Sue J. Henry and Carter G. Phillips Exhibition Fund and the Making Their Mark Foundation. Additional support is provided by Marcia Myers Carlucci, the Clara M. Lovett Emerging Artists Fund, San Francisco Advocacy for NMWA, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, and the Estate of Lisa Claudy Fleischman.

## National Museum of Women in the Arts

The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) is the first museum in the world solely dedicated to championing women through the arts. With its collections, exhibitions, programs and online content, the museum inspires dynamic exchanges about art and ideas. NMWA advocates for better representation of women and nonbinary artists and serves as a vital center for thought leadership, community engagement and social change. NMWA addresses the gender imbalance in the presentation of art by bringing to light important women artists of the past while promoting great women artists working today. The collection highlights a wide range of works in a variety of mediums by artists including Rosa Bonheur, Louise Bourgeois, Lalla Essaydi, Lavinia Fontana, Frida Kahlo, Hung Liu, Zanele Muholi, Faith Ringgold, Niki de Saint Phalle and Amy Sherald.

NMWA is located at 1250 New York Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. It is open Tues.–Sun., 10 a.m.–5 p.m. and closed on Mondays and select holidays. Admission is \$16 for adults, \$13 for D.C. residents and visitors 70 and over, and free for visitors 21 and under. Admission is free the first Sunday and second Wednesday of each month. For information, call 202-783-5000, visit [nmwa.org](http://nmwa.org), [Broad Strokes blog](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

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